

## **Statement on Ban Conversion Therapy in Northern Ireland Coalition**

The 'Northern Ireland Ban Conversion Therapy Coalition' seeks support for a motion tabled by MLAs Douglas Beattie and John Stewart. Documentation accompanying the motion to be debated Monday 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2021, seeks a ban for all healthcare, religious, cultural and traditional interventions whether coercive or consensual, for both minors and adults.

But the evidence-base the motion appeals to is suspect. The National LGBT (2018) Survey referred to was open to LGBT-identified persons only, thus eliminating any person formerly LGBT or any individual who had experienced interventions effective in reducing or eliminating their unwanted same-sex attractions. This research is flawed - why else did the UK government call for further research in 2019, repeated again in 2020, which remains unpublished for scrutiny?

The motion once again presents a strawman argument for practices either long abandoned or renounced by current mental health bodies' *de facto* ban on therapeutic choice for persons unwilling to accept homosexual or gender confusion feelings as genetic or unchangeable.

The Coalition further calls for "intelligence gathering and tracking systems to identify individual and groups that are continuing to carry out conversion therapy...". The Northern Irish public should then expect a mole in every church and classroom. The Coalition does correctly distinguish between so called "conversion therapy" and "practices that assist people to explore and better understand their sexuality, gender identity and/or gender expression." This practice is known as sexual attraction fluidity exploration in therapy, or SAFE-T and is already promoted by the UK's International Federation for Therapeutic and Counselling Choice (IFTCC) and others. However, the Coalition insists that such practices may only be delivered by "suitable qualified and regulated professionals". That is why therapeutic support that mutilates and amputates body parts in support of "transitioning" is not considered to be 'conversion therapy' by the Coalition, but talking therapy – the real aim of the ban – is considered to be 'conversion therapy'

For many years we have seen sexual politics in the United Kingdom captured by a perspective that will not allow any ideological or cultural diversity in debate, research or in practice or ethical guidelines. This is why the motion they present is untenable in societies that value diversity and esteem equality. Inclusiveness cannot refuse to acknowledge those formerly LGBT identified persons who seek professional and/or pastoral support and guidance to achieve their life goals.

Core Issues Trust urges the Stormont Assembly to recognise the flawed, and controversial basis of this motion and to consider the rights and freedoms of the former LGBT minority it targets. The motion is a fundamental denial of basic freedoms of speech, belief, conscience and association for all persons in Northern Ireland. An assembly that supports such a motion has lost sight of the people it serves.

At the very least, the statements of mental health bodies, not all of which are signatory to the Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK (for example the Royal College of Psychiatrists,) are not equivalent to the findings of hard science that consistently reject the "born gay" myth. That the Coalition supporting this motion presents no credible research base to support their claims should alert politicians that supporting such an unbalanced, extreme motion is not in their interests nor in the interests of LGBT or of former LGBT persons who experience their sexuality as fluid.

As a registered charity in Northern Ireland, Core Issues Trust will continue to offer counselling and pastoral guidance to any adult individuals unwilling to be forced to accept an identity that no longer serves their purposes.

**Core Issues Trust**  
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