

Speech: Launch Event: LGBT Action Plan 2018

I have been in the House of Commons for 8 years and a minister for 4.

I have worked in local government and with communities and amazing grassroots organisations that deliver amazing support and services for those in their neighbourhood.

I have worked with disability activists and advocates with incredible talents and compassion for others.

I have worked with the finest armed forces in the world and with the most amazing people, working to save others, to rescue them, to protect them from harm, to make their lives better.

It has been my privilege to witness those heroic acts – for that is what they are. And I have learnt that the motivation in all these good deeds is the same thing.

And is the same thing that I see in all of you in this room today that drives all of you. Whether it is the work you do in the media to tell stories and get the truth for your listeners and your viewers. Whether it is the support you provide through groups or campaigns. Or the protections you bring for people's rights. Or the services you provide to keep people healthy and resilient and enable them to reach their full potential.

Or whether it is the calling you have answered to serve as elected representatives and do your best for those who put you there.

The common thread in all these heroic acts is love.

I want to thank you for all you do for others. All that I have learnt is that everything is driven by love. What supports love, what promotes love is a good thing. And what hinders love, what fails to appreciate it, fails to recognise it for the heroic act it is, fails to understand how love fosters caring for one another and build strong and lasting relationships, well, that is an evil thing.

Love deserves to be protected. It deserves to be celebrated. And it should never ever have to hide.

Everyone in this country should feel safe and happy to be who they are and to love who they love without judgement or fear.

Thanks to our LGBT charities and campaigners the UK has come a long way. Together we have challenged attitudes and changed society.

Let us not forget that it was only 5 years ago that same-sex couples were allowed to marry, how prehistoric that already seems, let alone the bigotry

that was so prevalent against gay men and women in the 1980s.

It is commonplace, but we should appreciate the courage and love of LGBT people who go out into the world each day and refuse to be anything other than themselves despite the backdrop that they experience. And, which now the rest of us can fully appreciate when we look at the results of the LGBT survey.

The progress we have made must be consolidated and it must be advanced. And as your new minister I will do everything in my power to ensure that our country, all four nations of it, is a place where everyone, whatever their gender identity or sexual orientation, can be themselves and live their lives with dignity and respect.

That is why today alongside the survey results we are launching a new action plan. One that will build on the pioneering work that our government has done already.

It is a plan with 75 commitments tackling issues in health, safety, education and employment and more, to improve the lives of LGBT people in our schools and on our streets, in our workplaces and in our homes.

This plan is directly responding to what you have told us are the biggest problems and prejudices you face through our survey. The plan's commitments range from a national lead on healthcare, to banning the abhorrent practice of conversion therapy, to action on hate crime and combating bullying in our schools.

But in the time I have to speak to you today I want to focus on some other issues, which have perhaps for too long, been in the too tough in-tray for our society.

The survey highlighted the dissatisfaction with gender identity services in particular. Waiting times were too long. Access to care was difficult. The result was suffering and damage to mental health and wellbeing. We want to fix this.

Next year NHS England will be deciding how gender identity services for adults can be modernised, to allow higher quality outcomes and greater flexibility.

The Care Quality Commission will also begin inspecting all gender identity clinics in England, ensuring that they are providing the best service possible to trans-people.

Better safeguards and improved access to health services will make a significant impact on the lives of LGBT people, but if we want lasting and fundamental change then we need to start in our schools.

You told us that our education system currently isn't preparing many young LGBT people for adulthood. This government has already started to introduce new subjects on relationships education in primary schools and relationships and sex education in secondary schools.

We will ensure that these new subjects support all pupils whatever their sexual orientation or gender identity.

They also showed that homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying is an issue that we need to tackle. By the end of this year we will have invested £5 million in programmes aimed at reducing these kinds of bullying.

And we will continue our investment of such schemes for a further 12 months as we consider how best to tackle prejudice-based bullying in all our schools as part of the forthcoming spending review. Safety, health and education are just some of the areas that are being tackled by the action plan, but we will be making one more announcement today.

Last year we said we would consult on reforms to the gender recognition process and that is what we are going to do. The consultation will be published later today and the Prime Minister will be saying more about this this afternoon.

This consultation is about reforming an important public service. We have heard your feedback that this process isn't working for you and we want to improve it.

We want to also ensure that any changes we do make are made carefully and maintain existing protections in law.

The consultation will run for 16 weeks and we want as many people to participate as possible, as it is important we hear everyone's voice. Only when the consultation is concluded and we have analysed the findings will we publish our decision and our response. It is vital that this consultation is conducted in an environment of respect, empathy and pragmatism.

There has been much misinformation about the GRA consultation.

We already require people to live in their new gender two years prior to changing their gender identity. I would ask those who have not had to consider what that means, to do so for a moment:

The courage that it takes just to go about daily life.

The inadequacies of the existing process, meaning you have some identification documents in one gender and some other documents in another.

Imagine socially navigating and having to plan a strategy about which bathroom you're going to use or how you're going to get changed to go to the gym.

The additional stresses you face meeting new people, forming friendships, forming relationships

Imagine the courage, the determination, the resolve required. Imagine at the end of all of that the hurt you would feel to be excluded after all you've been through.

In the run-up to today much has been said about our pragmatic approach and that we have no intention of reforming the Equality Act or the rules around women's spaces. That is correct, but I think it is also important to say what the starting point for this national conversation and this consultation:

Trans-women are women. Trans-men are men.

And we want the process to change your gender identity, and we want your community and wider society, to support you too. And we want others to be reassured.

That is our goal.

On these challenging issues for society I think sometimes it is always good to remember that occasionally the best way to protect your rights is to protect someone else's.

We will be working across government and with LGBT sector organisations to deliver on the action plan and the cultural change in our society that the survey results demand. We will be supporting this work with new funding from the Government Equalities Office which we will distribute to LGBT partner organisations – more details on that later.

We are also establishing an LGBT advisory panel for government. This group will advise us on LGBT equality issues we need to better understand and help us inform the delivery of this plan.

Once again thank you for your commitment to this agenda.

Together we can bring about much-needed change and make our society all the stronger for it. We all know what needs to be done, so let's get to work. Thank you.