

# NSS welcomes plan to restrict LGBT 'conversion therapy'

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The National Secular Society has welcomed a government announcement that it will bring forward proposals to end the practice of LGBT 'conversion therapy' in the UK.

But the NSS criticised the government's failure to mention anti-LGBT sex education in faith schools in its [LGBT action plan](#), which was published on Tuesday.

In the plan the equalities office said it would "fully consider all legislative and non-legislative options to prohibit promoting, offering or conducting conversion therapy".

The government said its intent was to "protect people who are vulnerable to harm or violence, whether that occurs in a medical, commercial or faith-based context".

"We are not prepared to stand idly by as harmful practices such as conversion therapy happen in our country... These activities are wrong, and we are not willing to let them continue."

It added that it was "not trying to prevent LGBT people from seeking legitimate medical support or spiritual support from their faith leader in the exploration of their sexual orientation or gender identity".

Religious groups often advertise gay 'conversion therapy' online using phrases such as "reparative therapy" or "homosexual deliverance". Attempts to reverse LGBT+ sexual orientation are often founded in prayer.

The government's action plan comes in response to a national survey of LGBT+ people which it conducted. Two per cent of respondents to the survey had undergone 'conversion therapy', while a further 5% had been offered and refused types of 'conversion therapy'.

NSS chief executive Stephen Evans said the government would be right to introduce legislation to restrict conversion therapy.

"These practices are often dressed up with a veneer of scientific evidence, but the evidence clearly shows that they do not work and cause great suffering. If people feel shame or confusion about their sexuality they should be free to consult the religious authorities, but nobody should be given 'therapy' which tells them their identity can be cured."

Attempts to convert LGBT+ people are unsupported by medical evidence. In a [consensus statement](#) the UK Council on Psychotherapy says: "There is no good evidence this works and we believe it has the potential to cause harm. Often these approaches are based on religious interpretations about sexuality rather than on a researched and informed understanding of sexual orientation."

In 2009 the American Psychological Association [said](#) gay 'conversion therapy' was thought to increase people's suicidal thoughts almost ninefold.

Last year the NSS [called](#) on the government to consider banning so-called gay conversion 'therapies' after a Liverpool church encouraged LGBT+ people to starve themselves for long periods.

The government said it would update Sex and Relationships Education guidance to ensure it "supports teaching that is age appropriate and relevant to all pupils, whatever their developing sexual orientation or gender identity". But it made no reference to faith schools teaching sex education through the tenets of their faith.

In May the NSS's [Unsafe Sex Education](#) report [revealed](#) that more than three-quarters of state-funded secondary faith schools in England were failing to teach Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) impartially. Several schools had policies which said homosexual acts were wrong or homosexuality was "disordered".

The NSS wrote to Damian Hinds, the education secretary, to highlight the findings and to urge him to resist pressure from religious groups for leeway on the teaching of the subject.

NSS research also [revealed](#) that all 12 secondary faith schools in Wales which have an SRE policy were teaching the subject within the tenets of Catholicism or the Church in Wales. The revelation came shortly after the Welsh government announced that faith schools would be allowed to continue to deliver the subject in a manner "consistent with their ethos".

Mr Evans called on the government to address this.

"The homophobia promoted by religious authorities appears to be the elephant in the room here. The government says it is committed to improving the lives of LGBT people. That commitment mustn't be undermined for fear of offending religious groups.

"It's crucial that children are given comprehensive sex education which addresses LGBT issues in accordance with scientific evidence rather than religious dogma."

The action plan said the Department for Education would update the statutory guidance on Relationships and Sex Education to support "teaching that is age appropriate and relevant to all pupils, whatever their developing sexual orientation or gender identity".

It said the government would extend "the anti-homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying programme in schools". It added that the Department for Education would "work with the government equalities office to understand how best to support schools" on anti-LGBT bullying. The Crown Prosecution Service will update a pack for schools relating to anti-LGBT hate crime.

The government's survey received 108,000 responses. It was open to anyone who identified as having a minority sexual orientation, gender identity or had variations in sex characteristics.

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