

Tackle charities promoting 'conversion therapy', NSS urges minister

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The National Secular Society has urged the government to consider the role of charities promoting anti-gay 'conversion therapy' as it looks into ways to end the practice.

Last week it was [revealed](#) that more than 100,000 people had signed a petition calling for the end of 'conversion therapy' – enough to trigger a debate in parliament.

And in response the government said it would "consider all options for ending the practice".

In a letter to the equalities minister Kemi Badenoch, the NSS expressed support for government efforts to end 'conversion therapy' and urged it to consider charity law's role in perpetuating the practice.

Charities of concern

Examples of charities which have promoted anti-gay 'therapies' include:

- **Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries**, which was [revealed](#) to be practising a form of 'conversion therapy' involving a three-day starvation programme by a *Liverpool Echo* investigation in 2017.
- **Winners Chapel International**, where a pastor was [found](#) offering "complete mind reorientation" for gay people during a 2018 investigation by ITV News.
- **Core Issues Trust**, which advocates "change orientated therapy" for people "seeking to leave homosexual behaviours and feelings". The NSS recently [raised](#) the trust's charitable status with Northern Ireland's charity regulator and executive.

All these organisations have a Christian ethos and are registered as charities on the basis that they advance religion.

NSS letter

The NSS's letter said ensuring no organisation promoting 'conversion therapy' is granted charitable status would be "a positive and tangible step" towards ending the practice.

The society also expressed concern that the legal provision enabling organisations to register as charities because they advance religion enabled some organisations which promote harmful practices to escape scrutiny.

NSS chief executive Stephen Evans wrote: "It is somewhat absurd that our nation should continue giving organisations promoting conversion therapy the benefits of charitable status on the one hand, while seeking to end conversion therapy on the other."

NSS comment

Explaining the letter, Mr Evans said: "Reviewing the charitable status of organisations that promote conversion therapy would be an obvious place to start the work of tackling the harms it causes.

"Charitable status brings tax breaks and recognition that an organisation is serving a public benefit. Those promoting harmful and widely discredited therapies which encourage people to change or suppress their sexuality should have that status revoked.

"And the law should change so charities promoting harmful practices can no longer hide behind the argument that they are advancing religion."

Charities and public benefit

- Organisations which register as charities are required to serve a public benefit. The Charities Act of 2011 outlines a series 'charitable purposes' which charities can register under, one of which is 'the advancement of religion'.
- In a 2018 [report](#) the NSS [argued](#) that 'the advancement of religion' should be removed as a charitable purpose.

Government commitment to ending 'conversion therapy'

- The government [said](#) it would bring forward proposals to end the practice of LGBT 'conversion therapy' in the UK in 2018. In January this year it said it was still committed to doing so.

Conversion therapy: the harm caused

- A 2014 [consensus statement](#) from the UK Council for Psychotherapy concluded that 'conversion therapy' was harmful. In 2017 major counselling and psychotherapy bodies from across the UK [committed](#) to ending 'conversion therapy'.
- According to the Ozanne Foundation's [2018 National Faith & Sexuality Survey](#), well over half of respondents who had attempted to change their sexual orientation had suffered from mental health issues as a result. Around 40% of those who had suffered mental health issues had self-harmed.

Note:

An earlier version of this article mentioned the role of Christian Action Research and Education (CARE), which donated £500 to a conference where speakers addressed the issue of homosexuality in a Christian context in 2009.

CARE has said it didn't co-organise this event or attend it, and it only "learned after the event that the subject of 'unwanted same sex attraction' also known as 'gay cure' was discussed".

A spokesperson for CARE has told the NSS it "does not support conversion therapy, has never lobbied for it and never will". We're happy to publish this clarification.

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