

Participant questions and responses from week two of the assembly

General related to the assembly

Question for WEP / Research team – will delegates receive responses to all questions, not all questions were answered from week 1 put to all speakers?

Answer: We have now published all the responses we received from witnesses [online](#)

Questions for the organisers – Is it possible to allow more time for discussion? Will health be covered next week?

Answer: Week three will allow more time for deliberation (with no witness testimonies). We will not now be able to cover health explicitly, but any recommendations that are cross-cutting or that you have for our health policies are welcome.

Questions for WE party (answered by Tabitha and Ruth)

Q: Is there any existing agreed definition that WEP use to define 'women'? Do other political parties (e.g. Green party) have definitions of 'women'?

Q: Does the WEP have a definition of 'woman' currently?

A: Our 2016 [founding policy document](#) states:

“WE also recognise that the binary words “woman” and “man” do not reflect the gender experience of everyone in our country, and support the right of all to define their sex or gender or to reject gendered divisions as they choose.” P.4

Beyond that, we do not set out a definition of 'woman' or 'man'.

The Green Party, Labour, Liberal Democrats and SNP define or recognise trans women as women. The Conservative Party currently does not have a public statement. All parties to varying degrees have had disagreements within their membership over this.

Q: Would any of the WEP's existing policies be in conflict if we include Trans-women?

A: Our current policies are inclusive of trans women and non binary people. We are asking the assembly what changes, if any, need to be made given the evidence you have deliberated over in your groups.

Q: Are there any parties internationally that we could learn from?

A. There are a number of countries that have enacted some form of self-ID. Ireland has had self-ID since 2015.

Q: In relation to representation, would we consider a different kind of shortlist that included trans and LGBTQI women specifically?

A: This question of shortlists is part of the deliberations you have had in the Equal Representation policy area and we welcome ideas on how we can improve these for all women including those who are currently underrepresented: disabled, BAME, LGBTQI.

Q: What is the party policy on Sex and Relationship Education?

From the [policy document](#), p.18:

WE will make age-appropriate relationships education – including on sexual consent – a compulsory part of the school curriculum for all state-funded schools from the start of compulsory education, and ensure it is taught by specialist teachers and providers and followed up with necessary counselling support to combat the damaging impact of sexual violence and bullying in schools on children’s mental health and well-being.

Education

How would it be possible to balance teaching about gender identities whilst also breaking down gender stereotypes at the same time?

Shereen Benjamin:

It’s possible to teach about gender stereotypes by (e.g.) helping children to discuss the roles that girls/boys and men/women respectively play in stories, and in TV and films, to present them with role models of women and men doing things typically associated with the opposite sex, and to enlist children’s help in monitoring gendered use of their playgrounds and classroom ‘air time’ - children and young people have a strong sense of fairness, and asking them to total up the amount of time girls and boys respectively get to speak in class can have an enormous effect. There are many other ways, and I’ve worked with schools successfully using all sorts of approaches, but I’d need longer to explain that fully. However, within this frame, gender identities as a concept would be taught critically, with the message being that for a small number of people, gender stereotyping is so painful that when they reach adulthood they decide to live as far as possible as the opposite sex. It wouldn’t mean teaching that gender identity is inborn and can be mis-matched with an individual’s body, although that belief could be taught as a belief rather than an accepted truth, and its implications discussed in secondary schools (primary would be too young).

Question for Shereen – the group would like clarity on what lobby groups are actually doing in schools and what controls/ measures are in place to prevent teaching that does not promote equality in relation to gender and sex?

Shereen Benjamin:

Lobby groups (principally Stonewall, Mermaids and LGBT Youth Scotland) influence practice in three ways: they provide training for schools and teachers, they produce resources available on their websites and promoted by them, and they influence policy-makers, particularly as far as I'm aware, in Scotland. They may do direct visits to schools, but that's not their principal technique. Interestingly, the day after I spoke to your WEP meeting, the DFE published new guidance which asked schools to take care about allowing these groups to influence their curriculum, which I was very pleased to see. As far as I know, that's been the first time any of the UK governments have advised such caution, and I hope that the Scottish Government will follow suit, because at the moment there are no curbs in Scotland. Also last week, Ofsted, which inspects schools in England, said that the 'born in the wrong body' narrative should not be taught.

Question for Shereen – more information about the evidence base presented sex being categorised either as binary or a spectrum in the educational context, and the impacts this can have.

Shereen Benjamin:

I'm not sure what's being asked here, but I've provided the link to the Stonewall guidance which teaches sex as a spectrum. Interestingly, following last Thursday's announcement, Stonewall and Mermaids have made hasty changes to their online resources, and have been distancing themselves from the 'born in the wrong body' narrative that they've been promoting.

<https://www.stonewall.org/best-practice-toolkits-and-resources-0>

Question for Zed and Shereen – what is the evidence for girls, or trans children not using toilets at schools? Or is this anecdotal?

Shereen Benjamin:

Here's some evidence of this happening. I'm not aware of comparable research about trans-identifying children not using toilets but I see no reason to disbelieve the anecdotal experience Zed recounted. As I said, I think we can do better, and that we shouldn't compromise with any young person's privacy, safety and dignity.

<https://womansplaceuk.org/mixed-sex-toilets-ins-chools/>

Question for Zed – could they share the sources for the statistics on self-harm and pregnancy among LGBT+ young people?

Question for Zed – They mentioned that they and another teacher transformed the school that they worked in, in relation to LGBTQ+ issues. Could they explain in more detail what they did, and how? And what were the perspectives of teachers, students and parents on any changes?

Representation

Question for Jane – The speaker seemed to suggest that the terms ‘inclusion’ and ‘diversity’ were contradictory. Please could they explain this in more detail?

Jane Clare Jones:

The aim of inclusion tends towards trying to bring multiple different groups together under one category, and this tends towards erasing the differences between the groups 'included,' and therefore works against diversity, which is aimed at the recognition of differences. A good example of this is the 'LGBTQIAA+' type formulation, and the fact that people are now talking in terms of 'LGBT-phobia' for example. This erases the differences between different groups inside the 'community' and their different political interests. Many of us would consider that the political interests of lesbians are very different from the political interests of trans people for instance, and indeed, in the present conflict there are some real points of contention there. I would suggest that 'inclusion' as a political directive therefore needs to be interrogated, because it is being treated as a universal and unproblematic political good, and I think that misses something very important about the erasure of differences under ever widening inclusive umbrellas, and the fact that making good political judgements requires paying attention to the specificity of different groups. As I suggested, in my view, we should be thinking about things more in terms of 'solidarity' than in terms of 'inclusion.' Solidarity is standing together in allyship across differences, rather than subsuming those differences in one type of category.

Question for Jane – They spoke about needing a ‘model’ that addresses difference and political interests, to create solidarity between different groups to tackle patriarchy. Could she clarify/suggest what that model look like?

Jane Clare Jones:

As I think I've suggested above, what this involves in interrogating the idea that 'inclusion' is a universal political or moral good and thinking more about how we give recognition to the specificity of different group's needs. We could take here, for example, three groups of people who are negatively impacted by patriarchal gender - women, trans women, and gay men. From my materialist class based perspective, the way female people are socialised as female in a patriarchy is not the same as the way male people are socialized as male, and the very real challenges male people face in trying to, or failing, to perform patriarchal masculinity are different from the experiences of being socialised, and sexualised, as female. Historically, gay men, lesbians and feminists have stood together as allies on the basis that we were all negatively impacted by patriarchal gender, although it was not thought that the oppression of female people and that of homosexuals was identical, and we had different rights movements to represent the specificity of our interests. Under the efforts to redefine everything on the basis of gender, and the fact that both the gay

rights movement and feminism are currently dominated by the framing presented by the current form of the trans rights movement, the difference between the ways people are harmed by gender policing, and sex-based oppression, are being collapsed, and the aspects of women's political interests that don't conform to the trans ideological framing are being pretty coercively silenced. That is not allyship. Or solidarity.

I know Kristina Harrison has made a video for you to consider. Kristina's political activism is, from my perspective, a really great model of what solidarity between trans women and women looks like, and Kristina and I have a very warm and mutually supportive political relationship. I don't think a reasonable person can listen to Kristina's narrative about what compelled her transition without sympathy, and also, without feeling some anger that the gender strictures of our society are such that she had to go through such a difficult journey. At the same time, Kristina does not accept the framing of that journey put forward by the present form of the trans rights movement, that is, she doesn't agree with a narrative of gender identity essentialism, or the assertion that gender identity should always be taken to straightforwardly over-write sex. She rejects this narrative for the same reasons I do, because it essentialises gender, is anti-materialist, and leads to politically erasing the recognition of sex, which harms women. Identification *with* women and their political interests is central to how Kristina positions herself politically, and what I see in her, and her political behaviour, is a deep understanding why female people need boundaries and sometimes need spaces away from males, and a willingness to put herself forward to express that solidarity with women's interests. As she made clear in [a speech she gave earlier this year](#) to the Scottish parliament, where several gender critical trans people presented their thoughts, Kristina's concerns and framing of trans rights is focused not on trying to force the over-writing of sex by gender identity, and hence, access to all sex-based spaces, but on the issues that materially affect trans people's lives, and in particular, access to good quality medical care and support for the distress many trans people experience on their journey. This is a place where feminist women can stand in solidarity with trans women.

Question for any of the speakers (Jane or Tabitha suggested) - Does gender equality deal with ending sexism?

Jane Clare Jones:

So, the first thing I want to say here is that this question is a really good example of the kind of confusions framing everything in terms of 'gender' leads to, by which I mean, I don't actually know what 'gender equality' means. Does it mean 'equality between the sexes' or does it mean, something along the lines of the way Judith Butler used it the other day in the *New Statesman*, which would be something like 'a belief that anybody of any sex can be any kind of gender and that gender should be

recognised in political life as completely over-writing sex in all instances and we should reorganise political life on the basis of gender categories which are all seen as equally valid.'

So, to take these two possibilities.

a) 'Equality between the sexes.' I'm not a liberal feminist, so I don't frame the objectives of feminism in terms of equality... the reason for this is that framing things in terms of equality often means in practice something like 'women get to be seen as full human subjects and participants in public life insofar as they conform to male ideals of the human.' As Caroline Criado Perez demonstrated clearly in *Invisible Women*, our society is structured around a male default. Women, who have specific material interests, many of which are related to their reproductive capacities and the burden on care work they perform, will not be truly equal in this society until we stop organising everything around male defaults and assumptions based on male defaults. That is, what is required for women's true equality is a much more fundamental transformation than is suggested by the idea that we just want women to be 'equal' to men on terms already set by men. True equality in this sense, would, therefore require the ending of sexism. However, as we have seen, women's formal legal equality is not incompatible with those deeper sexist structures remaining untransformed.

b) 'Gender equality' - If you are asking me whether I think a transformation based on the second kind of idea deals with ending sexism my answer is going to be a very resounding no.

There are basically three models of the thinking of sex and gender at work here:

- *Conservative model:* Sex determines gender. Males are masculine and females are feminine, this is the proper order of things as given by God or nature.
- *Second wave feminist model:* Sex/gender distinction - i.e. people are sexed, gender is the system that says people of certain sexes should behave in certain ways - i.e. sexism - and is oppressive because the gender roles are generated by a power hierarchy aimed fundamentally at appropriating women's labour and reproductive capacities. This entire power hierarchy should be, as far as possible, abolished.
- *Trans ideological model:* Gender determines sex - i.e. gender is innate, the only thing that is oppressive about gender is that it is tied to people's sex, and people of certain sexes are not recognised as certain genders. If we redefine everyone by gender regardless of sex, then there won't be any oppression. This would be 'gender equality.'

There are several reasons why the trans ideological formulation doesn't challenge gender in its fundamental sense.

- a) Because people are redefined on the basis of gender the connection between sex and gender is still maintained. That is, if you say that people should be redefined as a 'man' or a 'woman' by gender, then you are still saying that 'masculinity' = 'man', and 'femininity' = 'woman'. Women then would become politically 'the class of feminine people.' That's what I mean by women being redefined as a gender class. And there are whole lot of female people - who are strongly identified with the material class interests of female people - who would not fit under that definition and would consider it to be the very opposite of dealing with sexism.

- b) The ideas of 'what gender is' here seems to me, in some advocates of the trans ideological position, to rely on rather superficial aspects of gender, by which I mean, mostly the performance of aesthetic femininity of masculinity, and sometimes, to be blunt, sexist stereotypes about women being kind, nurturing, emotional and sometimes, a little bit ditzy. A trans women friend of mine once told me she felt guilty about the fact she was still good at maths. Which brought me up rather short. Even more fundamental than these kind of damaging sexist stereotypes being reified and naturalised, is the fact that, as I said in my talk, I think the deep structure of patriarchal gender and sexism is about women being socialised to prioritise male needs, and male people being socialised into entitlement to those needs being met, and reacting in quite violent and dominating ways when women draw boundaries. The most gender non-conforming and anti-sexist thing a woman can do in this culture is to say 'no' and to centre her own needs and desires, as any full human subject should have the right to. The fact that so much of the rhetoric around the current form of the trans rights project is about demanding that women be kind, place their interests after the needs of trans women, and involves subjecting women to demonisation and harassment when they say 'no,' is, from my perspective, an illustration of the way this discourse not only doesn't challenge, but in fact, often enacts, very fundamental patriarchal sexism. There is no overcoming of sexism in any situation in which women's assertions of their own needs and interests are not respected as such.

Tabitha Morton:

Sexism is a tool of the patriarchy used to uphold the structural inequalities faced by women. This tool is used in many ways to make women's lives smaller, controlled and stifle our potential.

Achieving gender equality means:

Educating our young people equally not pushing them down predetermined routes that often result in women having lower paid careers

Abolishing the gender and race pay gap

Having access to equal health care

Ending the scourge of violence against women and girls

Equal representation across politics, business, law, education

A media that presents a fair, balanced and diverse representation of women

Childcare and caregiving being seen as an intrinsic part of society and valued in the economy

Sexism currently plays its part in stopping each of the above from happening, alongside racism, ableism and homophobia it helps to reinforce structural inequalities.

To achieve gender equality we have to dismantle the structures that have been built and replace them with a vision for the world founded in gender equality. A world that does not need tools such as sexism to control people, so yes a gender equal world is one that no longer has sexism in it.

Ending violence against women

Question for Diana Jones – What's the evidence of impact of the presence of trans women on women in refuges?

(provided by Tabitha Morton)

A: In her evidence to the Women and Equalities Select Committee Diana said, "We have had trans women through the women's refuge and we have had transmen through the men's refuge, and lesbian, gay and bisexual people through our refuge all the time"

Diana was asked if she thought there should be separate refuges for trans women

"I do not see it. I do not see, first, that there is going to be enough need in certain parts of the country for it to happen, because the number of trans survivors seeking refuge is low. If you have the right policies (*risk assessments*) and everything in place and your procedures are robust, we do not see that there is an issue with the survivors that we get. We are really happy with how we are doing it at the moment".

All witnesses to the Women and Equalities Committee were asked to provide evidence of services who had problems because they accommodated trans women or had turned away trans women on the basis of being a trans women.

All replied they had none - this is summed up by Angela Crawley MP below.

Angela Crawley MP:

"I have a panel of experts in front of me and I am hearing no examples of where the protections that are in the Equality Act have, in any way, been enacted or have had occasion to be enacted. Where an individual has presented in a way that was unacceptable they have been turned away, but I am not hearing any specific instances of where you have had to turn someone away specifically because they were trans".

Question for Tabitha – is it true that women’s refuges are scared to speak out on challenges on supporting transwomen, due to concerns about funders pulling funding?

Tabitha Morton:

A: Taken from response from Janet McDermott – Women’s Aid:

"Their primary request to us is for firm guidance on how to write their policies so that they would not be vulnerable to that (*not following the Equality Act which funding commissioners would expect them to*). They have also been asking for guidance around how to be inclusive of different gender identities because many of our services do genuinely want to honour the spirit of inclusive practice. The sector has already made huge strides in terms of developing specialist provision for BME women, disabled women and, in some areas, for lesbian and gay survivors.

Those services are real flagships but a lot of it is a resources issue. Our sector suffers hugely from not being able to meet the demand from women survivors. To be developing additional specialist services is a huge challenge for them. We do have a really strong tradition, as I say, in the sector of BME women setting up their own services that are led by and for BME women, to address that intersection between survivors who are fleeing violence against women and girls but are also experiencing racism from communities and from the state, and need services that understand those intersections".

Janet shared concerns that there had been consistent funding cuts to the sector. More than half of services Janet had worked with in one city had gone.

"Many of the specialist refuges for BME women that we used to send survivors to from Sheffield have disappeared. When we did our survey with members about

specialist LGBT services, we could only find four services in the whole country that were specialist and led by and for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender survivors. Three of those were in London. For the rest of the country, there is very little provision".