

09 Feb 2020

An Open Letter to:

Colum Conway, Chief Executive, Social Work England

Lorraine Gray, Chief Executive, Scottish Social Services Council

Sue Evans, Chief Executive, Social Care Wales

Patricia Higgins, Interim Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Social Care Council

Ruth Allen, Chief Executive, The British Association of Social Workers

Jacky Tiotto, Chief Executive, Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

Request for policy review and practice guidance

We write as a coalition of qualified practitioners, academics and social work students under the umbrella of the Evidence Based Social Work Alliance (EBSWA). We are concerned by the current policies and practices regarding sex and gender identity that have been adopted throughout the social work profession.

We remain anonymous because of our concerns as to how social work professionals who question gender identity policy and practice are treated. This is reflected by our awareness that social workers are being investigated by regulatory bodies for engaging in discussion on this topic.

EBSWA gather and consider evidence on the questions of sex and gender identity to inform professional discussion, and we are concerned by the uncritical use of gender identity theory in social work and other professions. The group believes that there is insufficient knowledge to support the current policies and practice that have been adopted throughout the profession and further debate and discussion is required.

EBSWA believes that our professional Code of Ethics as social workers mandates and requires us to explore evidence relating to policy and practice decisions and contribute to the professional debate and discussion.

The aims of our group are:

- Discuss our responsibilities towards service users, as well as social workers and other professionals, when considering issues of sex and gender identity in policy and practice.
 - Consider the needs and best interests of children particularly, but not exclusively, children who experience gender dysphoria.
 - Seek the voice of children and others affected by notions of gender-dysphoria and gender nonconformity for their views and experiences.
 - Consider evidence in the public domain on gender dysphoria, gender identity and the treatment of children presenting with distress in these areas.
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- Collaborate with allied professions to share and discuss our findings and concerns.
- Defend the right as professionals to challenge and question the merits of existing guidelines and practice of gender dysphoric and gender non-conforming children using an evidence-based approach.

Of immediate concern is the increasing numbers of children and young people with gender dysphoria who are presenting to the profession. The welfare of gender-dysphoric children is increasingly being discussed within the child-protection context, and yet our attempts to explore alternatives to the affirmation model are being met with accusations of hateful conduct and referrals to our regulator for investigation. We are being silenced in our attempts to understand and discuss the evidence-base approaches to exploring this phenomenon.

The recent high-profile Judicial review of the Tavistock and Portman Trust's treatment of Keira Bell, and the resulting update in NHS England guidelines for treating gender dysphoria in children, will change the way in which professionals approach this issue. Social work policy and practice must engage and respond in line with these developments.

It is of deep regret to us that in the past social workers have not always spoken up to safeguard children, when it is clear in hindsight we should have. Our failures in the Rotherham child-grooming scandal is one such example. We believe that in order to ensure social workers do not let down our children again we should be prepared to ask questions of an ideological approach to sex and gender identity.

We therefore request from you the following:

- A review of policy and update of practice guidance for social workers who are working with gender dysphoric children, their families, and schools.
- To make available the evidence upon which policy and practice guidelines in issues of sex and gender identity, both for adults and children, are based.
- To facilitate respectful and considered debate on the topic of sex and gender identity in social work practice.
- To make clear that threats, bullying and intimidation towards social workers who explore evidence for practice in this field will not be tolerated.

We look forward to hearing from you,
Kind regards

Evidence Based Social Work Alliance

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