

Meeting Notes for Working Group on Banning Conversion Practices

Session 4, Formal Meeting

Subject: Working Group on Banning of Conversion Practices

Date: 23 May 2023

Time: 14:00

Chair: Stuart Evans, Deputy Director (he/him)

Supporting officials:

- Head of LGBTQ+ Policy (Dr Alessandro Ceccarelli – Pronouns: He/Him)

Opening and Welcoming the Working Group for Banning of Conversion Practices:

Two formal apologies noted.

Group Discussion on the Notes from the previous meeting” around the use of language, Practices v’s Therapy. Outcome is to use “Conversion Practices” consistently, notes were agreed and approved.

Apologies from Welsh Government officials for the short notice cancellation of April’s meeting, due to unforeseen circumstances.

The Working Group was reminded of the availability of Welsh Government’s welfare and support guidance package.

Updates were provided on the agreed action points from the previous meeting with members thanked for their contributions.

Welsh Government provided updates on actions agreed in the previous meeting, including revisions of the draft definition to integrate members comments and views. The amended version of the definition has been re-circulated to members.

Members agreed that they had received a link to the Banning of Conversion Practices webpage. Welsh Government stated that there had been updates to the webpage following agreed actions.

Members were invited to contact Welsh Government officials through email should they have anything to contribute following the meeting.

Update from Welsh Government regarding meeting with UK Cabinet with regards to the “Draft Bill” for Banning on Conversion Practices.

Welsh Government provided an update with regards to the “Draft Bill” for Banning on Conversion Practices. Welsh Government met with UK Cabinet on 25 May 2023; however, no information with relation to what the “Draft Bill” contains were shared with Welsh Government at that point in time.

Once the “Draft Bill” is published, it will go to pre-legislative scrutiny, and representatives will have an opportunity to view the Draft Bill and evaluate if fit for purpose. Welsh Government will make recommendations to the Draft Bill in order to meet their expectations for the Welsh way of life and will have an opportunity to amend or insert clauses specific to Wales.

Healthcare sector is supportive across Wales – see the “Memorandum of Understanding on conversion therapy” in the UK - a joint statement of support would be beneficial.

Concerns were raised by the members on the UK Government’s Draft Bill, including potential issues related to the involvement of Welsh representatives:

- Discussion around protections and limitations particularly around Faith.
- Potential risks were also discussed concerning asylum seekers in care.

The working group raised how they can best support Welsh Government, once the Draft Bill has been published.

Welsh Government Update: research project on “Experiences of Conversion Practices in Wales”.

Welsh Government officials updated group members on the tendering to the research project on the experiences of conversion practices. Key element is engagement with groups who are not represented on the current Working Group. The research project is moving forward, and Welsh Government will provide further updates in June.

Draft proposal on the Pathway for Banning of Conversion Practices.

A draft proposal for the Pathway for Banning of Conversion Practices was shared with the Group.

Members were asked to consider Pathway sections 1 – 10 within their discussion.

Group Members discussed the following:

A clear consensus: a need for alignment between the messaging and target audiences to maintain a targeted and direct approach.

- The creation of the draft proposal is positively received by the group, they acknowledged this can also progress as the proposal develops.
- Group highlighted the need for consistency within the use of language (e.g., therapies vs practices; survivors, rather than campaigners) and thanked officials for the draft proposal on the pathways.
- **Point 6.** Group consensus that it would be beneficial to have evidence in the Pathway on suicide and self-harm statistics within Wales – as currently not available in Wales.
- **Point 7.** Raised a need to identify and pick up any wide consultation groups that aren’t covered within certain faith groups or spiritual groups. These specific groups can help gather and share a wide range of data and information in faith and religious settings.
- Wales should follow its own route and journey: mechanisms to protect Faith settings from inappropriate allegations.
- While some Faith settings support the BoCP, it is likely that there may be potential challenges.
- Members asked: how do we address this when LGBTQ+ people’s life is within a faith group? In some cases, it may start with “conversion prayer”. It may lead to overwhelming fear of social isolation from friends and family in their religious or faith setting, when sometimes “the religious group is their whole life”.
- Discussed inviting Faith Leaders into a safe space to open discussions and support moving forward.
- Some strong feelings this will (quote) “go nowhere without the support of faith and religious groups”. We hope to see community voices and champions from religious groups.

- Identified a need to gather survivors story's/case studies- to support with evidence-based research.
- **Point 9.** Concerning the devolved competences of the Welsh Government to Ban Conversion Practices in Wales, the group members want to recommit their support and be clear on what can be achieved. Advice on mechanisms was sought: two stages of advice on mechanisms in Wales to Ban Conversion Practices and discussed policy mechanisms, including limits, risks, and implications.
Devolve additional powers. Potential for legislative mechanisms and devolved competencies that could be explored.
Hope to see a “Draft Bill” before Welsh Government can review policy or legislative options.
Group wants to explore all options rigorously.
- **Point 10.** The group would like to see a commitment from Welsh Government to the development of a training and education programme for certain sectors: e.g., Health; front line staff; Education.
Awareness campaign will have a targeted direction, but likely not include training resources. Development of a Trans Guidance for Schools may need a consistent approach across schools and local authorities. The group flagged a need to explore options on training resources and talk with the Minister for Education.
The group also flagged they would like to know how the guidance for schools across local authorities and its implementation will be monitored by local authorities. Group members would appreciate clarity.
Group discussed possible future engagement with children and young people via careful stakeholder engagement: how will this be achieved? Group members would appreciate clarity.
The group also requested that policy should be inclusive of social workers and carers – e.g., the need to work with teachers, child and parent, to obtain the best outcome for the child or young person.
Group asked for clarity “what is included within Education”- Further Education, Higher Education, ALN, etc.

Draft definition of Conversion Practices: Note on Religious and Spiritual Beliefs:

Welsh Government state that following the previous meeting of the group, several comments have been integrated into the draft definition to be inclusive of members views and suggestions.

Working Group discussed the terms “premised on the misconception”, or “the predetermined purpose”, consensus that both were needed within the draft definition.

There are on-going discussions within the working group concerning a specific inclusion of “Religious and Spiritual Beliefs”. The group discussed the need for a separate and clear section within the definition of conversion practices.

- Consideration for religious and spiritual practices: (e.g.) option to include “spoken prayer”.
- Gathering evidence on mental health-self harm and well-being for religious people (possible research projects).
- Clarity on what would be prohibited within a religious or spiritual setting: to avoid confusion.

- Definition: to be addressed in a careful manner and framed within the context of Welsh Governments policy ambitions.
- Our draft definition is for policy purposes and campaigns. Legal definition will be defined by lawyers in the context of Bills. Working Group's definition isn't a legal view.
- The phrase "any practice to effect change" that conforms to society's stereotypical norms for gender and sexual orientation was discussed.
- To include "any setting of conversion practices", including (e.g.) home, health, religious settings. There is often a misunderstanding of what conversion practices look like within this context.
- It is possible that some faith settings, or individuals within those settings, may not agree with their leaders on Banning Conversion Practices.
- The Working Group would like to identify the outcome for the above individuals or groups that may not follow the same direction within their own faith or religious setting – this needs to be clarified.
- Group consensus that this shouldn't impact gender affirming care.

AOB:

Actions

1. WG to explore options for an awareness campaign – in collaboration with WG Comms.
2. WG to arrange a meeting to discuss an awareness campaign on Conversion Practices in Wales and Support Services – with Sub-group.
3. WG to provide update on research project.
4. WG to update draft definition to reflect the agreed wording.
5. Check with Education Officials: How to ascertain and to monitor a consistent approach throughout the implementation of the "Trans Guidance for Schools". Engage with stakeholders to discuss options on how to best capture children and young people's engagement.
6. Next meeting on 20 June.