

BRIEFING NOTE: TRANS GUIDANCE MISINFORMATION

Purpose: To make recommendations on how to support a healthy, fact-led debate around transgender guidance in schools.

Background:

- Policy discussions around transgender and non-binary young people in the education system has proved to be a divisive issue, everywhere from Scotland¹ to Florida²
- The Welsh Government's Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum sparked similar debate and protests³, particularly around the issue of removing the parental opt out
- The Welsh Government's guidance to schools on transgender and nonbinary pupils faces similar risks

Key issues:

- Research⁴ shows that Progressive Activists – largely represented by LGBTQ+ stakeholder/interest groups – only make up 13% of Britons, whereas 50% is made up of sceptical groups (Loyal Nationals, Disengaged Traditionalists, Backbone Conservatives)
- Any aspects of the policy or communications which challenge the autonomy of parents is likely to produce pushback – this is known as 'psychological reactance' and has been observed in the 20mph, COVID-19 lockdown and Low Traffic Neighbourhood debates
- Subjects like trans guidance, which challenge 'core beliefs' aren't suited to a rebuttal-based approach to misinformation, due to the potential for corrections to result in the discrediting of the messenger, rather than updating of beliefs⁵
- One vulnerability of Welsh Government policy is that only 29% of Britons support unisex toilets in schools, while 44% oppose (including 20% 'strongly oppose')⁶

Recommendations: Making use of Government Communications Service '*Wall of Beliefs*' guidance and More in Common's '*Britons and Gender Identity*' research.

- Communications should focus on **emphasising shared starting points** (e.g. 'No one deserves to feel unsafe or bullied'), **building consensus** across different political viewpoints and **embracing a case-by-case approach**
- References to unisex toilets should **emphatically highlight the requirement for provision of single sex spaces** alongside unisex toilets
- Preventing bad faith actors from framing the discussion may require some explicit acknowledgement from Welsh Government of **those worried about the pace of change – making them aware that we hear their concerns**
- We should emphasise the guidance recommends **parental involvement wherever possible**
- We should strategically push to **reduce the quantity and length of any information vacuums** to reduce possibility of anxiety-fuelled speculation (a learning from RSE)
- **Address misinformation through proactive promotion of a fact-based narrative**, only rebutting emerging misinformation when we have evidence that people are acting on it in harmful ways (e.g. removing children from school) – ensuring rebuttals are as targeted as possible (e.g. no replying to tweets)
- **Universal child safety and wellbeing** is likely to be a broadly resonant narrative for communications, but further research is needed to test this with our audiences

¹ [Children to be allowed to change gender in Scottish schools despite Cass review \(telegraph.co.uk\)](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/education/2016/09/02/children-to-be-allowed-to-change-gender-in-scottish-schools-despite-cass-review/)

² [What Florida's 'Don't Say Gay' bill actually says \(nbcnews.com\)](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/what-florida-s-don-t-say-gay-bill-actually-says-n1111111)

³ [Graphic leaflet on compulsory sex lessons in Wales 'spreading panic and alarm' - North Wales Live \(dailypost.co.uk\)](https://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/Graphic-leaflet-on-compulsory-sex-lessons-in-Wales-spreading-panic-and-alarm-20160902)

⁴ [7 Segments \(britainschoice.uk\)](https://www.britainschoice.uk/7-segments/)

⁵ [The Wall of Beliefs - GCS \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](https://www.civilservice.gov.uk/the-wall-of-beliefs/)

⁶ [britons-and-gender-identity-stakeholder-briefing.pdf \(moreincommon.org.uk\)](https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/briefing/briefing-note-britons-and-gender-identity-stakeholder-briefing.pdf)