

**Trans Media Watch**

BM TMW  
LONDON  
WC1N 3XX

21st June 2020

**Kamal Ahmed**

Editorial Director, BBC News  
Broadcasting House  
London W1A 1AA

Dear Kamal,

We are writing, subsequent to the amends made in the last day or so to the news story reporting concerns by Cross-Party LGBT groups over Liz Truss' plans for trans law reform. We are aware of a significant letter already sent to you, by Helen Belcher, which makes in detail many points we would otherwise have made, and therefore, rather than repeat such detail, we attach a copy of her letter as reminder to you and summarise our own concerns below.

1. As you are aware, we were the primary party in the complaint, received by you three months ago, and which Ms Belcher highlighted in her letter.

We are puzzled as to why in three months you have been unable to do more than acknowledge that complaint, while in response to complaints from anti-trans ideologues, you have amended a story within 24 hours.

This adds weight to the contention that the BBC is institutionally transphobic.

2. The many journalists and news professionals that support the work of Trans Media Watch are genuinely perplexed as to what news values you are endorsing in respect of what happened to this piece. It began life as a short story, reporting the fact that the Cross Party Groups had made certain comments. Also, because unanimity by these Groups is unusual, it highlighted that.

The correct "balance" in such a piece would be comment from Liz Truss, the target of their remarks, or the GEO, the department for which, in her capacity as Minister for Equalities, she is responsible.

It was unusual in the extreme to add comments from an individual (Joan Smith) not directly connected to that dyad.

It is beyond unusual to start, as your piece now does, to engage with the accuracy of the comments made by the Cross Party Groups. There is much to be said here: but two principal observations:

- If you start down this road, every single news piece you write will become a feature, and
- If you believe it is appropriate always to inject “balance” into a trans piece, can we meet to discuss how you will in future always ensure that a trans commentary is added

3. In relation to that last point, we were interested to see how the BBC handles other trans related stories. The very first such story we found was this one, from approx a week ago:

#### **JK Rowling responds to trans tweets criticism**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53002557>

What is interesting in respect of that story is the lack of balance. The main story tells only JK Rowling’s side, which includes problematic references to why she made the post she did - and no response at all from any official trans body.

This is then followed OUTSIDE the main piece with a round-up of “reaction” to her statement. For the most part, this reaction appears to be a mix of the great and good plus random twitter users. Except, again, it is kicked off by an individual with a very well known antipathy towards the views of trans people.

In other words, no right of reply within the main news piece, despite this being a principle you have readily conceded this weekend on a story that has a positive trans angle; and a degree of selectivity within the reactions to that story that is clearly intended to suggest breadth of view - but in reality doubles down on Rowling’s commentary by selecting another anti-trans commentator to lead the comments.

In sum, it seems very clear that the BBC is dealing with trans issues in a way it should never contemplate dealing with issues relating to any protected characteristic under the Equality Act. You are treating the lives and existence of a significant minority not as a matter of dignity or Human Rights, but as a culture war within which your anti-trans journalists - and we are well aware that such exist at the BBC - are given free rein to take potshots at trans people.

Along the way, you are applying a new and different standard to the writing of stories with a trans angle. This is the very definition of institutional discrimination and hatred and it is time it stopped.

Yours sincerely,

Jennie Kermode, Chair Trans Media Watch

jane fae, Secretary Trans Media Watch

Fiona MacCarthy, Treasurer Trans Media Watch

Capt Catherine Burton FRAeS, Trans Media Watch

**Supported by:**

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Remi Arnold, Counsellor

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Christine A Beckett, Prop, Strawberry Girl Photography

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Abi Giles, Sparkle Trustee

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Vicky-Jane Gooding, Trustee, MindOut

Paula Goodwin chair of Croydon Pride, director of JPM Services

Hannah Graf MBE, Retired Army Officer

Jake Graf, Writer, Actor and Director

Susie Green, Mermaids

Marianne Greye, Counsellor, MBACP member/ Lead therapist for GenderGP

Dr Samuel Hall, GP, Trustee of The Clare Project

Benali Hamdache, LGBTIQA+ Greens Co-Chair

Kate Hancock

Alyssa Henley, CEO, Support U and LGBT Officer, Reading Labour CLP

Heather Herbert, Trans Officer, LGBT+ Labour Scotland.

Peter Herold, European LGBT+ activist and philosophy graduate student

Tara Hewitt, Co-Founder, Trans Equality Legal Initiative

Dr Mike Hill, Trans Ally and Activist

Teraina Hird

Ayla Holdom, Retired RAF Officer/ Chair, Stonewall Trans Advisory Group

Mr Zhi Holloway Co-chair FTM London

Dr Pippa Holmes, retired university lecturer

Sam Hope, author of Person Centred Counselling for Trans and Gender Diverse People

Suzanna Hopwood, Wandsworth LGBTQ+ Forum/Suzanna Hopwood Associates

Colm Howard-Lloyd, Chair of LGBT+ Conservatives

Dr Mia Hughes, Physicist

Dr Chryssy Hunter, Activist

Kate Hutchinson, Wipe Out Transphobia

Adrian Hyyrylainen-Trett, former Chair and Vice President of LGBT+ Lib Dems

Diana Louise James Independent Strategic Adviser VAWG Devon & Cornwall Police

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Lizzie Jordan, CEO & Founder Think2Speak

Elizabeth Kasprzyk, TransLondon Facilitator

Roz Kaveney, Cultural Commentator

Dr Natacha Kennedy, Goldsmiths College, University of London

Ellysia King, Director, FreeSpirit Sound Ltd

Charlie Kiss, Writer and Activist

Leeze Lawrence, Broadcast Producer/Pinksixty Digital Editor

Tony Mack, Trustee, Sparkle – The National Transgender Charity

Dru Marland artist, poet, mechanic

Benjamin Marriott, Trans Community Activist

Abigail Maxwell

Freddy McConnell, Writer and Journalist

Keira McCormack, Manager, Gender Essence Support Services

Stewart McDonald, MP

Jo McKillop, Biologist

Cailyn McMahon, National Convener of Young Scots for Independence (SNP Youth Wing)

Carolyn Mercer, Member of Stonewall's Trans Advisory Group/ former Chair of Lancashire LGBT/ retired Comprehensive School Headteacher/ Honorary Life Member NASUWT

Shabazz Mohammed, MDPAC (Manchester Disabled People Against Cuts)

Leng Montgomery, Diversity and Inclusion Manager

Dr Igi Moon, Chartered Psychologist, Fellow Royal Society of Medicine/ Chair  
MOU Coalition against Conversion Therapy

Jet Moon, Artist and Activist

Cheryl Morgan

James Morton, Manager, Scottish Trans Alliance

Serge Nicholson, Psychotherapist

Sarah O'Connell, InterMediaUK

Zoe O'Connell, former Councillor and Parliamentary Candidate

Kate O'Donnell, Artistic Director Trans Creative

Siobhan O'Leary, Journalist

Sue Pascoe, Trustee, Yorkshire MESMAC/ Council Member LGBT+  
Conservatives

Dr Ruth Pearce, Trans Learning Partnership/University of Leeds

Sarah Phillips, Director, cliniQ CIC

Alison Phipps, Professor of Gender Studies, Sussex University

Zsófi Pohl, London Gender Support

Karen Pollock, GSRD specialist psychotherapist, Counselling in  
Northumberland

Lisa Power, MBE

Andrew Prince, Activist

Joss Prior, Trans Activist

Annette Pryce, NEU LGBT+ Executive Member

Melanie Plumley, Volunteer/facilitator, Diversity Role Models

Mx Dennis Queen, MDPAC (Manchester Disabled People Against Cuts)

Phoebe Queen, Trans Community Activist

Nim Ralph, Activist and Writer

Sophia Raphaeline, Psychologist and Media Analyst

Linda Riley, Diva Magazine

Lindsay River, activist, campaigner for older LGBTQI rights

Fiona Robertson, SNP National Equalities Convener



Leo Robinson, Social Worker

Juno Roche, Writer

Rev Dr Karl Rutlidge - Methodist Church Minister

Sarah Savage, Children's author and chair of Trans Pride Brighton

Rhonwen Sayer, FRAS, Historian and Translator

Jo Shaw. Co-Founder, Trans Media Watch.

Dr Carol Steele, Transfigurations

Susan Stelfox, Retired Senior Electrical Engineer, Former Member TUC LGBT+ Committee

Dr Jay Stewart, CEO of Gendered Intelligence

Nell Stockton, Chair Barnsley Gender Equality Forum

Stephen Stockton, Treasurer, Sparkle – The National Transgender Charity

Dr Erasmo Tacconelli Consultant Clinical Psychologist NHS

Dr Sahra Taylor, visiting lecturer at City, University of London

Peter Thomas, counsellor and trainer

Vincent Turner Finance Director cliniQ CIC

Dr Jos Twist, Clinical Psychologist

Sonny van Eden, Trans Community Member and Practising Buddhist

Ava Vidal, Comedian and Journalist

Helen Waldie

Natalie Washington, Trustee and Organiser, Trans Pride Brighton & Hove

Jessica Weston, Trans London Facilitator

Katy Jon Went, founder of GenderAgenda.net

Brandon Yeadon, member of Stonewall's Trans Advisory Group/ MAAT member/ Accountant.

**Note:** *the above represents all those who contacted Trans media Watch to ask to be added as signatories before midnight on 21 June. We are aware of many more potential signatories and will forward these names as appropriate.*

## **Attachment: copy of letter sent by Helen Belcher**

**Subject:** Cross-Party LGBT Letter

Dear Kamal

I was one of three people who wrote to you in March regarding the coverage of the Harry Miller case in February, where I was featured on BBC News, and the non-coverage of another case whose result contradicted the BBC's lede for that story.

I am aware that the coronavirus pandemic has used up a lot of resource over March, April and May, but I am concerned that our letter is being left aside, and would appreciate a response as soon as possible.

I'm writing with regards to the LGBT political party groups' letter, reported by the BBC yesterday (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53101071>).

I am pleased that this was reported, as this level of unanimity across all parties bar the DUP and Sinn Fein (who don't take their seats) is unprecedented – the word of the year.

However, I am greatly concerned that a quote from Joan Smith, not opposing the letter but opposing reform, taken from her interview on Woman's Hour on Tuesday, is used – I suppose for “balance”.

In the reporting of the release of Beyonce's new single (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-53119767>), there is no counter voice for “balance”.

In the reporting of the suspension of a Conservative Party activist (Theodora Dickinson) for saying that Naz Shah MP should “go back home” (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-53106605>), there is no counter voice agreeing with Dickinson.

In the reporting of Pride Cymru (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-53052494>), there is no counter voice at all.

So the fundamental question is, when reporting on trans issues, especially a story which shows an enormous amount of unanimity, why does the BBC insist on a balance that is not needed when reporting on other stories?

The Equality Act 2010 defines 9 protected characteristics, which include race, sexuality and gender reassignment. The last one covers trans people.

Why is the BBC repeatedly ignoring the protection against discrimination for trans people, given by the Equality Act, when reporting stories covering trans people – when it rightly protects against discrimination for other those covered by other protected characteristics? Each and every story reported recently has a counter voice. This appears to be an intentional and repeated breach of the law.

If any balance was required in the reportage of the letter, the right one was from the Government, as they were the focus of the letter. No other individual or group was required for comment.

I therefore ask you to remove the comment from Joan Smith from the piece so that the same standards you correctly use in other areas of reporting apply to this issue, and take a good look at how you are reporting trans issues. Take advice.

Another incident is the reporting on Newsnight on Thursday evening, where claims were made but not examined. How many clinicians made these statements? The assumption appears to be 3. What motivated those clinicians to get involved in the GIDS service? The statement about over 40 clinicians leaving the clinic over recent years is an overstatement of the term “clinician”. An FOI statement, easily found, confirms that over 40 people left the service, but no reasons were given, and only one was a qualified medical practitioner.

Trans people have faced a well-funded and significantly hostile campaign against us, waged largely through the media, for around 4 years now. It does appear that the aims of the group behind this campaign are to dismantle rights for all LGBT people, not just trans people. Same-sex marriage is already in their sights. They have a very twisted and essentialist view of the law which, when tested in court, almost always falls down. They are not concerned with the practicality of how trans people live their lives – indeed, they want to mandate us out of existence. The meeting at which one of the groups was conceived was videoed and is full of hate speech. And yet the BBC, in line with many other UK-based media organisations, have given these people airtime and credibility. Why?

When Trans Media Watch was founded, we did so fully understanding that many in the media did not understand trans issues. Our remit was to educate and work with people across the media, to increase their understanding of trans issues and the way trans people lived their lives. That mission still stands. However, it appears that you now, incorrectly, view TMW as a pressure group or a lobby group. If you view everything as a binary, pro or anti, you are not going to be able to acquire impartial advice. I am not really associated with

TMW in any meaningful way any more, but I am sure that the organisation will be ready and keen to advise.

Yours sincerely

Helen Belcher