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Editorial

Penny Lewis is the editor of the SUE Substack. She works at the University of Dundee. Penny has two grown up children. She campaigns for parents rights and against Scottish government laws that undermine the family and adult authority.

At the Scottish Union for Education (SUE), we spend a lot of time discussing what is wrong with our schools and colleges. However, while not wanting to get carried away with the Christmas cheer, there are several reasons to feel optimistic about the coming year. It was certainly good to see the Scottish government held to account in the general election this summer, but perhaps the most significant reason to be cheerful is that in April we saw the long-awaited publication of the Cass Review, the Independent Review of Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People, commissioned by NHS England and NHS Improvement.

The Review not only debunked the claim by transgender rights activists that so-called gender-affirming treatment reduces the risk of suicide in gender-questioning children (p. 187) but also found inadequate evidence to justify the potentially harmful use of puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones in adolescents (p. 194). Subsequently, following advice from the Commission on Human Medicines, Wes Streeting announced just last week a UK-wide indefinite ban on the use of puberty blockers for transgender-identifying under-18s. This is excellent news, as it marks a significant step towards a more cautious, clinical evidence-based approach to the care of gender-questioning children, rather than one that has been criticised as being ideologically informed and driven by pressure from activist groups.

This landmark decision might never have happened were it not for those campaigning against 'affirmative' approaches to 'gender transition'. It is thanks to all the brave nurses and doctors, the women's rights campaigners, gay rights groups, psychologists, churches and other religious organisations, civil rights campaigners and parents who raised their concerns about the social transitioning of children, and the irreversible damage

resulting from subsequent hormonal and surgical interventions, that common sense won out.

The battle is not over though; many Scottish local authorities, LGBTQIA+ lobbyists and others seem to want to carry on telling children that they can be ‘born in the wrong body’. However, if we keep campaigning, we can ensure that transgender rights activists are no longer able to direct the provision of NHS services or education policy.

The promotion of gender ideology to children is just one strand of a whole range of imported ideologies that are being taught to school children as fact, when in truth they are highly contested. Our children don’t need political indoctrination on issues of gender, race, climate or history; they need to be taught to read and write, and to think for themselves.

This year, SUE decided to produce another Christmas Special Substack. We picked 12 of the most important articles on education, standards, curriculum content, teaching and discipline that reflect SUE’s core values. You can read about league tables, modern languages, library books, censorship and decolonisation. We’d be grateful if you would share this newsletter with the members of your parent council, union, or friends and family.

Although SUE organisers are increasingly optimistic about the possibility of mobilising parents and teachers and students to demand better education, we recognise that there may be trouble in schools and universities in 2025. Labour’s government in Westminster is promoting education reform that is aligned with the disastrous approach adopted by the SNP in recent years. We need an education system that exposes our children to the best of our culture – one that is optimistic, demanding and stimulating, as opposed to therapeutic, ‘child-centred’ and risk-averse.

SUE is run by volunteers, so we are always looking for help to run parents' groups and public meetings or to support parents or teachers looking for advice. We need people to help us to raise funds so we can produce more pamphlets and hold more events. Our editorial and research group could do a lot if we had many more people willing to do investigative research and writing. If you are making new year resolutions, please add supporting SUE (financially and organisationally) to the top of the list.

Penny Lewis, Editor

Please [donate to SUE](#) to allow us to continue our support, campaigning and research work throughout 2025

How do we bridge the gap between parents & teachers?

Kate Deeming is SUE's Parent and Supporters Coordinator. Originally from Philadelphia and now based in Glasgow, she is the solo mum to a P7 boy. With three decades of developing performance projects in schools and community settings internationally, she is a long-time advocate for children and childhood. Kate's writing can be found at her Substack, [Deeming Dreaming](#). She also hosts [The Pink Elephant Podcast](#).

Parents often speak to me about how they ‘don’t really know’ what their children are being taught in school. I am not even speaking about the more controversial parts, but the basics: what books they are reading, what maths problems they are working on, what art they are doing etc.

Up until recently, children had textbooks that would come home, and parents could ‘observe’ passively what their kids were learning. With the advent of technology, however, books are no longer *de rigueur* in the home, as iPads contain apps such as [See Saw](#) and [Showbie](#), with links to games such as [Sumdog](#) and, at most, spelling words for the week.

This separation from schoolwork and school time has been exacerbated by an increasing separation between teacher and parent. In theory, the Scottish school system is based on a ‘community model’. In times past, the schools were not only located in the areas where their students hailed from, but their teachers were too. So you might expect to see Mrs Smith and Mr Jones not only in school but also in church, at the local shop, and in the community.

This created an informal social network in which parents actually knew the teacher and the teacher had to face parents day to day. Neither was an anonymous force. Now our teachers have 30 hours’ intimate time with our children every week and we are wwlucky if we see them at the school gate ... from a distance. Many parents are told they are not to contact the class teacher directly, and that all problems or questions should be directed to the headteacher and then delegated as appropriate.

This is odd, right? I have been told that school access and security (and parental access to school) shifted immeasurably after the Dunblane massacre in 1996. I understand why this was done,

but the repercussion is that it created a divide between parents and schools and, more specifically, teachers.

So what do parents do? We frantically try to put the pieces together. We drill our children at the school gate. We form WhatsApp groups with other parents and collectively dissect what our individual children tell us. It doesn't really help; it feels like strangers are teaching our children. This is not to say that teachers are not nice, or doing good teaching, but just that we have no way of knowing and, as is the way with human nature, not all of them are nice.

At my son's old school, I got thirty minutes with his class teacher per year, ten minutes per term. The teacher didn't even bother to bring along my son's schoolwork when assessing his progress. It was only through independent assessment that I discovered he was at P2 level in P5. There were no tests or report cards – vague expressions such as 'he is on track' were the most one might hear.

Teacher training doesn't seem to be helping matters. I sat in on one [Time for Inclusive Education](#) training session for teachers, and the teachers regularly made disparaging comments about parents which were not corrected or challenged by the trainer or university lecturer mediating the session. The general sense was that parents, on the whole, are 'dinosaurs' who don't want to teach their kids 'the right education' (in relation to LGBTQ+), and so teachers should step in.

I have heard from students doing teacher training courses that this is standard. New teachers are trained to keep parents held at arm's length (at best). This attitude follows trainees into the classroom.

One early-years teacher confessed that they were glad that, post Covid, the schools had not reinstated the practice of teachers

coming to the gates during pick-up and drop-off. This teacher implied that parents were a hassle getting in the way of the smooth operation of the class and school.

Despite this teacher's viewpoint, we know both historically and statistically that parental engagement with learning leads to the best outcomes. Keeping parents at arm's length might make for an easier life for the teacher, but it is not leading to good outcomes for kids.

The Scottish government says repeatedly that they want parents to be engaged, but what actually happens more often than not is involvement, not engagement. Schools welcome parents as fundraisers and organisers of school events, but this is not the same as educational engagement. Being engaged with learning is about genuinely understanding what is taught in the classroom.

Of course, there are good teachers doing good work in this system, but even they are undermined by the current situation. We are at a critical time within our educational system. Keeping parents out is only going to further exacerbate decline. As we reflect on how to save, improve and elevate our educational standards, we must bear in mind that allowing parents better access to classroom materials is important if we are to genuinely get anywhere.

Please get in touch with Kate if you have any issues to report, need support within your school, or would like to be part of a local Parents and Supporters Group: psg@sue.scot

What is a reasonable person today?

Stuart Waiton is a senior lecturer in sociology and criminology, an author and journalist, with a particular interest in the over regulation and policing of everyday life. Stuart is the Chair of SUE

I have been looking closer at the Hate Crime Act and the way in which our shared idea of a reasonable person has been replaced by a new set of assumptions about what is socially acceptable.

A major concern that has and is being raised about the Hate Crime Act is that it will be used politically to punish those who do not reflect and follow the values of the authorities.

For example, feminists and others who challenge transgender ideology feel that they may be targeted for not accepting the idea that a person can be born in the wrong body. And in education, teachers, lecturers, parents, or school and university students may fear the consequences of not using the preferred wrong-sex pronouns of others.

These concerns are based on the reality that certain values are being pushed by the authorities, while those who question those values are already either punished or looked down upon.

The Hate Crime Act, in this respect, is replicating what is happening in schools and universities, where we see transgender ideology promoted through the curriculum; or more widely, where we find highly questionable ideologies to do with race and racism pushed through policies to decolonise the curriculum or to introduce so-called anti-racism into every subject.

Over the past decade or so, we have seen a transformation in the use of law, so that rather than new laws being made that reflect the values of the public, they are self-consciously being used to 'change the culture'. As a result, what we find is that the voting patterns in Holyrood are in direct opposition to how the public would vote.

We saw this, for example, with the [Named Person scheme](#), something that three-quarters of the public opposed but the

same percentage of politicians supported. The new smacking ban, that made even the lightest of smacks into a criminal offence, was similarly opposed by the public but supported by the political class.

With other laws and policies, we find this repeated situation where the elites talk about the need to ‘send out a message’ and then use force and policing to ‘change the culture’ of a public whom they believe are prejudiced and abusive and need to be pushed to change their ways.

What we end up with is a two-pronged approach by the political, legal and educational authorities, where on the one hand, the public is forced to understand that they must change their values or be punished, while on the other hand, at school, children are encouraged to change their understanding through a new, and largely dogmatic, social justice value system that has been embedded in the curriculum and developed into a new ethos that schools are being pushed to adopt.

Humza Yousaf and others claim that too much is being made of the Hate Crime Act and point to the fact that punishment will be meted out only if a ‘reasonable person’ would think that what has been reported is both hateful and would create fear and alarm. But there are two problems with this argument.

First, we know from experience, by watching the actions and reactions of transgender rights (and other) activists, that what many would think of as fair comment yesterday has suddenly become seen as hateful, offensive and damaging. Indeed, not only are words increasingly said to be a form of violence, but we now also hear the argument that ‘silence is violence’, so that even saying nothing, for some at least, can be interpreted as criminal. Moreover, we now have the problem that the very idea of

a ‘reasonable person’ no longer works in law. The reason for this, as demonstrated by the new use of law to ‘change the culture’, is that we live in a divided society – one in which the elites’ values no longer reflect those of the public but are in fact set directly against them.

In a development most noticeable from the 1990s, the commonality between the values of those in authority and those of the public has been fracturing. As a result, we find that laws, as discussed above, are supported by the political class and opposed by most Scottish people. Given this situation, it is understandable, and arguably accurate, for many people to think that the new law about ‘hate’ will be used in a way that appears reasonable to the professional and legal classes but entirely unreasonable to the rest of us.

In other words, the Hate Crime Act risks being another extension of the elites’ value system forced onto us through the use of the police, the courts, and ultimately the prison system.

The importance of the opposition to this Act, in this regard, cannot be overstated, because it is only this opposition that can hold the bias of the elites to scrutiny and potentially prevent its politicised use by those such as Yousaf, whose idea of being reasonable is very different from ours.

Reflecting the values divide in society, the Hate Crime Act is both dangerous and divisive. It risks criminalising children, whose teachers will be pushed to report name calling to the police; it is a threat to academic freedom, as universities voluntarily become ‘hate reporting hubs’ and pass on unsubstantiated claims of ‘hate’ to the police; and it is a danger to parents and the public, whose common-sense understanding of things like biological sex are no longer deemed ‘reasonable’ by an elite class who, at the moment, have the power to enforce their values onto society.

Learning a language should be at the heart of secondary & higher education

Rex Last was Professor of Modern Languages at the University of Dundee from 1981 to 1991, having worked for nearly two decades at the German Department of the University of Hull. After becoming the sole carer for his wife, Oksana, who died recently with dementia, he wrote a book deploring the plight of the carer: *The Informal Dementia Carer - Who Cares?* And he has written several novels.

I nearly fell off my perch when I opened my copy of the *Times* to discover that the University of Aberdeen, one of Scotland's top institutions for language teaching, is seriously considering wielding the axe to modern languages. The rot had set in a long time ago with my own department at Dundee University. The institution had scored bottom of the pile in the latest national assessment of universities, and it duly committed the same sacrilege as Aberdeen is now contemplating on modern languages, discarding a thriving and successful group of staff and students because we were the low-hanging fruit and vastly outnumbered by those in the medical, technical and scientific departments. Now Aberdeen's potential closure is being driven by low numbers of applicants because of cuts in the classrooms, a self-fulfilling prophecy if ever there was one.

But it didn't take long for the university to back-pedal and suggest that, given the extent of the protests the decisions have engendered, joint language degrees might still be on offer. It is not made clear what impact that would have on the proposed staff cuts, nor on where the non-existent students and financial resources for these courses would materialise from. The decision-making skills of the university management leave a lot to be desired, particularly since shutting down a department tends to be a non-reversible process with a direct negative impact on the lives and careers of staff and students alike. I note with a rueful smile that the Green MSP Maggie Chapman, commenting on the proposed axe-wielding, stated that it would mean that Aberdeen could no longer call itself a 'comprehensive university'. Now there's a thought.

A quiet war of attrition on modern language teaching has been waged for many years within the educational establishment generally. It is a discipline which has flown in the face of the 'modern' trend away from subjects perceived as perversely difficult,

like Classics and language generally. There had been half-hearted attempts to introduce French, German, Spanish, Mandarin and more in primary schools, but the lack of qualified staff and the absence of a suitable initial curriculum which laid the foundations and segued seamlessly into the secondary classrooms caused the movement to more or less peter out.

And let me raise the dreaded D words – languages were Difficult, Demanding and Disciplining: you had to learn stuff by heart and suffer the indignities of getting something wrong, and you had to work your way step by step, with each stage becoming more challenging than the one before, until pupils gave up and voted with their feet for subjects with the comfort word ‘studies’ in them. With potential learners finding their attention spans whittled down to a few moments watching a YouTube short, why expect the poor dears to challenge their brains with more demanding material taking years to master, if ever. Lower the standards until it meets the dwindling aspirations of the clientele – that’s far easier than challenging them to rise above themselves. And, anyway, here comes AI riding to the rescue, completing the deskilling process. Why bother?

I won’t bang on about the future career benefits of studying one or more languages; I’ll simply remind you of all those Cassandra-like warnings about the detrimental shock to the jobs market of the advent of computing back in the day. Sure, the kind of jobs changed, but it was simply a matter of adjustment and fitting in to rapidly evolving new patterns of employment. My argument lies in a different area: interpersonal skills, the ability to think on one’s feet, and an awareness of the interrelationships between one language and another – just three of the many benefits of learning a foreign language. We have already given up on the positive benefits of learning Classical Latin and Greek, and whole generations have been culturally kneecapped by having lost the

‘open sesame’ password to the linguistic and cultural Aladdin’s cave those ‘dead’ tongues can yield up. That deprivation took a long time to occur, and like with modern languages, it started in the schools, where the dreaded myopic drive for ‘relevance’ left language learning as irrelevant (everyone speaks English, don’t they?), too hard (mustn’t strain the brains of the tender young) and old-fashioned (the taboo word) in the face of the white heat of technology. I recall, as a pretty raw lecturer attending the annual conference of Germanist lecturers at universities in the UK (way back in the 1960s if you must know), being present at a discussion on Classics teaching or its absence. The speaker asked those of us who had studied the discipline at university to raise our hands, and I was one of the red-faced few who tentatively did so. Soon modern languages, now circling the educational plughole, will follow suit, and our children’s education will be all the poorer for it. *Bonne chance*, as they used to say.

Where does a good
education rank
in the secondary
school league table?

Stuart Baird is a teacher who has worked in the
state sector in Scotland for over 25 years.

The *Sunday Times* recently published its secondary school league table. Well-rehearsed arguments point to the table as little more than an indication of where the middle-class schools are in Scotland, and in commentary, Dr Keir Bloomer, former Director of Education, stated that very fact: ‘the more affluent a school’s pupil intake, the better the results’.[1] Bloomer believes it would be more useful for ‘A major research study of schools consistently over or underperforming over five years’.[1] That, though, leads to the question, ‘Performing at what?’

The table ranks schools using the ‘gold standard’ of five Highers and Higher equivalents. In recent years, there has been an increased uptake of these Higher equivalents, awards from Sports Leadership to Computer Games Development – a range of courses boosting choice but often without a final exam. The way in which these courses are equivalent to a Higher is open to debate, but their popularity is increasing and is partly responsible for improved results from 2019.

The pressure to get this ‘gold standard’, driven in part by league tables, can reduce the value of courses to the outcome of the coursework and exam rather than the content explored and experience had by the pupil and teacher. Education is more than an exam result; assessment should flow from the course, building on the engagement between teacher and pupil. Lessons must not be spent solely as a period of preparation for an exam.

Gert Biesta, Professor of Educational Theory and Pedagogy at the University of Edinburgh, has used the term ‘performativity’ to capture, ‘a culture in which means become the ends in themselves so that targets and indicators of quality become mistaken for quality itself’.[2] For schools, their position in the league table or under scrutiny from others can lead to decisions based on what the results for these tables may be rather than on what is best educationally.

Through his work, Biesta has asked how we can explore ‘the question of good education – the question of purpose, the question as to what education is for’. Biesta outlines the parameters of the discussion through three ideas that will be touched upon in turn: qualifications, subjectification, and socialisation.

Biesta recognises that a function of education is ‘qualifications’, of ‘providing students with the knowledge and skills that make it possible for them to act in the world’.[3] Previously, I have written about the importance of our subjects, as bodies on knowledge, as central to that process, and of the threats to those subjects from ideologues and activists.[4]

Lindsay Paterson, Professor Emeritus of Education Policy at the University of Edinburgh, extols the value of a liberal education to inspire and liberate the individual.[5] Biesta describes a process of ‘subjectification’, in which ‘we want our students to go their own way, we want them to take up their own freedom and “own” it in a grown-up way, which means that they may go in a very different direction from what we envisage for them, up to explicitly refusing the future we may have had in mind for them’.[6] Education must nurture critical thinkers with a healthy scepticism.

I doubt the *Times* can create a league table to capture Biestas’ ‘subjectification’ or Patersons’ ‘liberation’, nor should it, but that does not mean that our data-driven education system has not tried to quantify characteristics and life skills. The four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence have bamboozled teachers as they consider how to quantify a ‘responsible citizen’, an ‘effective contributor’, a ‘successful learner’, or a ‘confident individual’.

One thread that runs through the *Times* coverage revolves around the school at the very top of their table: Jordanhill School.

Formerly attached to Jordanhill College of Education, the school remains directly funded by the Scottish government. Its board of management of three staff members and seven parents, selected by other parents and staff, was compared with that of an English academy school. Autonomy from the local authority is seen as a strength, with Walter Humes, Honorary Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Stirling, writing, ‘In the state sector, head teachers are told that they are in a line management relationship to the authority and their first loyalty is to the “officers of the council” rather than to the pupils, parents, and community’.[7]

That link between councils and school leaders has been questioned by the Scottish Union for Education as an enabling route for educational indoctrination and activist intervention in schools. [Critical race theory](#) and [transgender ideology](#) have been taught as fact, and the [Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood education lessons](#) criticised for their content and delivery. Here, the concerns and wishes of parents are usurped as political programmes are implemented. As philosopher Hannah Arendt warned, ‘the belief that one must begin with the children if one wishes to produce new conditions has remained principally the monopoly of revolutionary movements of tyrannical cast which, when they came to power, took the children away from their parents and simply indoctrinated them’.[8] Our local authorities are not taking away the children, but they *are* breaking the partnership with parents and placing barriers between them and what is being taught in schools. A break from local authority control could strengthen the relationship between parents and schools and rebalance how schools depict the world to our young people.

For our young people, understanding their place in the present world is describe by Biesta as socialisation bringing ‘individuals

into existing ways of doing and being. In this way education plays an important role in the continuation of culture and tradition...'[9] Teachers act as representatives of the world, even if they themselves are not in agreement with that world. For Arendt, it is that shared responsibility that is the source of authority of a teacher, which allows trust to be established between teacher and parent.[10] If teachers do not take that responsibility for the world, if socialisation cannot take place, then parents cannot trust teachers.

Considering the parameters set out by Biesta, the league table of the *Times* has no educational value, but we must all be concerned about how well our local authorities and schools are delivering a good education. The framework Biesta describes can help us discuss what that looks like and what it is not. For the sake of our young people, we should ask questions about the courses being studied, the standards set, the support given for their growth, and how they are introduced to our shared world and tradition. The Scottish Union for Education supports a liberal education for all our young people, with education valued for its own sake, protected from the fads and fashions of politicians and activists. Let's all work towards that.

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There are surveys & there are surveys: a case of LGBT 'truth'

Iain Morse is a concerned grandparent and retiree; additions are by SUE review analyst **Rachael Hobbs**.

Never mind the [Cass Review](#), LGBT Youth Scotland, a charity funded in good part by the Scottish government, is now advising Scottish primary and secondary schools to teach non-standard pronouns and the existence of multiple genders, and to accept gender self ID at any age. Under pressure from the Scottish government, schools pay ([‘from as little as £850’](#)) for this ideological advocacy in return for membership of LGBT Youth Scotland’s [Charter for Education](#) programme. The charity has also called for the Sandyford Clinic, which specialises in providing ‘gender services’ to transgender-identifying children in Scotland, to reverse its decision to [suspend prescriptions of puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones](#) to the newly referred.

LGBT Youth Scotland’s central role in both shaping and implementing Scottish government policies on these matters rests on their report [Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People 2022](#), which has been cited as authoritative by Scottish government ministers. At first glance, it looks like a piece of work: 100 pages in length, featuring impressive graphic design, full of statistics and tables, and boasting of being based on responses from 1279 participants.

But here’s the problem. Respondents, aged from 13 to 25, were selected via social media and, additionally, via sessions with young people run by LGBT Youth Scotland and other affiliated groups, with questions answered through an online survey. Any deemed ‘phobic’ were eliminated. Hearsay says that some respondents received informal ‘help’ filling out their surveys.

In the appendix, the report correctly notes that because the survey responses ‘constitute a convenience sample’ (p. 97), i.e. a sample that is not statistically accurate or applicable to even LGBT young people across Scotland, ‘it is not possible to generalise from these results’ (p. 97). And yet that is *exactly* how

the research has been used and abused by activists, organisations and the government!

It is instructive to consider the CV of LGBT Youth Scotland's chief executive, Mhairi Crawford. After completing a Ph.D. in Physics in 2004, she worked in business sales and consultancy before her appointment as development director of [WISE](#), a charity promoting women's participation in STEM sectors of industry. As development director, she solicited corporates which 'sponsor' WISE for accreditation, a widely used business model for charities.

Having moved to LGBT Youth Scotland as its chief executive in September 2019, she has presided over the introduction of an ambitious plan focused on attracting potential sponsors to expand the charity's fee and grant income. The 2022 report and spin-offs achieved just that, identifying schools, universities, the NHS and the police as all needing improvement. The charity also has access to leading SNP politicians and has supported legislation related to hate crime and gender recognition.

We see the fruit of this today, with LGBT Youth Scotland expanding its paid services to schools. Meanwhile, Crawford rejects Cass and advocates puberty blockers. Needless to say, Crawford does not appear to have a single academic or professional qualification relevant to the medical or psychiatric treatment of young people confused about their 'gender' or sexuality.

LGBT Youth Scotland's published accounts for the year ending 31 March 2023 reveal a healthy income stream including grants from Scottish government of £447,677, from Scottish local authorities of £345,893, from trusts and foundations of £450,199, and from NHS Scotland of £154,023 – a total of £1,397,792.

Further income and endowments increase this figure to £1,641,246 for the year. Nearly all of this comes from the public sector, where budgets are being squeezed and front-line services are crumbling. Wages and salaries for the charity cost a total of £1,321,737, of which £254,648 went on key management. One employee, whose identity is not disclosed, received more than £60,000 for the year. The charity spends more on its staff salaries than on any other costs.

LGBT Youth Scotland is not the only charity funded by the Scottish government in this area. The [Equality Network](#), a miniature simulacrum of Stonewall, received most of its funding for the year ending 31 March 2023 – £480,584 – from the Scottish government, but it is growing an income stream from training and research fees, in this way amassing £34,305 for the same year. The Equality Network includes [Scottish Trans](#), both organisations supporting Scottish government legislation on matters such as gender self ID, hate crime, and so-called conversion practices. The spokesperson for Scottish Trans, Vic Valentine, has no qualifications relevant to judging ‘transgender’ clinical matters. Scottish Trans have also rejected Cass’s findings, with Valentine asserting that the decision to pause the use of puberty blockers will ‘[harm trans children and young people](#)’. Wages and salaries for the organisation’s staff in the year ending 31 March 2023 totalled £422,299. Oh, and the newly appointed chief executive, Dr Rebecca Crowther, has a degree in theatre studies and a Ph.D. in ‘wellbeing, and greenspace’.

Then there is [Time for Inclusive Education](#) (TIE), which recently advised Police Scotland on hate crime, training officers with an [example](#) of a ‘transphobe’ taken to be based on JK Rowling. The organisation was cofounded in 2015, as the TIE Campaign, by a Glasgow student, Jordan Daly, and a petrol tanker driver, Liam Stevenson. In the year ending 31 March 2023, TIE’s income,

mainly from grants, totalled £357,592, with total staff costs of £225,081 for the same period. TIE, like LGBT Youth Scotland, is expanding its income stream from advising public sector bodies in Scotland. There are other relevant charities receiving grants; for example, £100,000 went to Stonewall.

It is impossible to judge whether any of these charities achieve anything at all, because they measure their own performance often by surveys of LGBT youth ‘happiness’, ‘wellbeing’ and lived experience testimonials. More seriously, they have been used by the SNP–Green government in Edinburgh to propose, endorse and implement unsafe policies in relation to children and young people, whatever their nascent sexuality and however they ‘identify’. Telling little children they might be in the ‘wrong body’ is *not* a kind thing to do.

Thoughts about the survey

The survey on which the [*Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People*](#) report was based follows a pattern of posing closed, leading questions that are likely to produce the results the organisation is seeking, compared with professional surveys which, as standard, avoid loaded questioning so as not to skew the results.

A key statement declares that ‘The vast majority of participants believe that homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are a problem, both across Scotland as a whole, and in their local area’ (p. 33). On closer analysis, however, we find a potential skewing of the results through the three affirming options of ‘A big problem’, ‘A bit of a problem’ and ‘Not a problem at all’. Here the middle option, which is ideally neutral in a survey, is a negative response. Ignoring that, we also find that the ‘a bit of a problem’ answers have been combined with what is arguably a very different answer of, ‘a big problem’, which leads us to the banner headline

of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia being a problem across Scotland.

The report continues by stating that transphobia specifically is believed to be a ‘big problem’ by 59% of respondents (p. 34). This item of data is left suspended due to no follow-up, the writers possibly not wanting to delve too much into what might be subjective stances on contested matters – as transgender issues tend to be.

It proceeds instead to interpret findings for us, positing that ‘rising levels’ of perceived homophobia/biphobia/transphobia might be due to ‘a rise in this behaviour following increased anti-LGBTI content seen online and in the media during the discussions surrounding issues such as GRA reform and the banning of conversion practices. Additional research would be necessary to shed further light in this area’ (p. 35). Additional work, however, is unlikely and unnecessary now that the highlighted figure has been presented as evidence of the problem of transphobia.

Further on, we find that participants were asked whether they had experienced a hate crime in the past year (38% of the 1183 who answered this question; p. 39), and then whether these crimes had been reported to the police (11% of cases; p. 40). We are left not knowing what these hate crimes were. As LGBT Youth Scotland and other transgender rights activist groups believe that what JK Rowling has said about women’s rights is a hate crime and may well educate children to this effect, these figures are difficult to assess. Nor do we know if prosecutions resulted from these ‘hate crimes’. Were these crimes the crimes of ‘misgendering’ or expressing support for single-sex spaces? We do not know. Conveniently, the report side-steps this landmine by simply not following up with any further commentary.

Instead, the report goes on to describe how all respondents were asked how they would feel about reporting a hate crime and ‘What makes you, or would make you, feel safe and supported by the police and/or the legal system?’ (p. 42). The presumption is that more needs to be done and the question leads respondents in this direction.

Answers regarding the police relate to issues like anonymity of complainants and the need for the police to show ‘visible allyship’ (p. 42), but no consideration is given to the potential bias this could create, the loss of impartiality, or the need for justice and truth.

When asking about how supported the participants felt at school or college, the survey again asked about what improvements could be made, necessarily creating a list of apparent needs generated, in part, by the very nature of the question framed. Demands such as a need for ‘inclusive facilities’ (pp. 59 and 60) are left in the air – and so the buzzword of inclusion is left without a clear sense of what this would mean, or what would be considered exclusion (is LGBT Youth Scotland defining exclusion as the provision of single-sex spaces to avoid infringement of women’s and girl’s spaces?).

Note also that small print in the report concedes that words have been added where missing, and that some editing has taken place. Read the whole report at one sitting and you will notice that the vocabulary and tone of this lived experience testimony is remarkably consistent. At times, it reads like a script that is repeated.

Overall, the report engages with subjective interpretations of many perceived problems, but even if taken as a true representation, it raises as many questions as answers. Why, for example, at a time when the police have been keen to adopt

an [LGBT allyship](#) approach, do we find that only 17% of respondents would feel confident about reporting a hate crime to the police (p. 40)? Or why, when schools have adopted a policy of transgender awareness and promotion via [RSHP education](#), do only 10% discuss their experience in schools as good (p. 59)? Why have feelings of safety on public transport fallen from 79% in 2012 to 48% in 2022 (p. 43) – the very period during which transgender ideology and transgender rights activism have flourished?

Perhaps the answer lies in the very ‘education’ that children and young people are receiving, the ‘awareness raising’ about ‘transphobic’ bullying, the growth of LGBT Youth Scotland services in schools, and the narrative that is being pushed on often vulnerable young children by activists whose message is one of victimhood and exclusion. Here, what we could be witnessing is a destructive and debilitating growth of a victim narrative that is fed to children and then reinterpreted as a rise in ‘hate’ among the public.

The survey results may tell us something, but the, at times, biased nature of the questions and the interpretation of the data make it difficult to differentiate real social changes from propaganda. The authors of the report note that ‘hate’ may be increasing due to controversies over issues like self-identification and a perceived rise in transphobia, and there is indeed some evidence of [real changes in public attitudes](#). But these attitudes arguably reflect the adoption of an increasingly questioning approach to the assertions and demands of the transgender rights lobby, growing concerns about the loss of women’s spaces, and the growth of discussion and debate about the potentially negative impact of the promotion in schools of transgender identities and the social transitioning of pupils. In this context, the attempt made by LGBT Youth Scotland to paint an often one-sided picture of

victimhood and abuse should be understood as a tactic to shut down debate by using ‘research’ to bully those who genuinely want to find the truth around this issue.

Additionally, a major problem with the results of the LGBT Youth Scotland survey is that from the transgender ideological perspective, questions about transgender identity are often mischaracterised as a form of hatred, and with limited details about what this ‘hatred’ includes, we cannot tell whether there is serious bigotry and hate occurring or, as is arguably more likely, what is being reflected is simply more questioning.

Midnight in the Museum

Alex Cameron, parent and design critic, takes a look at Glasgow's new City of Empire exhibition.

Glasgow – City of Empire is a new permanent exhibition at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in the West End of Glasgow. The display was cocurated by Miriam Ali, Meher Waqas Saqib and Kulsum Shabbir from [Our Shared Cultural Heritage](#), a youth project supported by Glasgow Life Museums (GLM). Their [approach to the objects](#) drawn from GLM is to highlight ‘what it means to decolonise museums’, and to ‘combating the collective amnesia in Scotland regarding atrocities such as transatlantic slavery...’ Kulsum Shabbir wanted to ‘[narrow my focus to objects that specifically implicate Glasgow in its involvement in the transatlantic slave trade](#)’, while Meher Waqas Saqib wanted the ‘[whole project to encourage people to view the history of Glasgow in a different way, that acknowledges the struggles and exploitation of people of colour](#)’.

Nelson Cummins, Curator of Legacies of Slavery and Empire at GLM, [said of Glasgow – City of Empire](#), that ‘As soon as you start to acknowledge these histories and educate the public on these histories there can be a wider call for action, and I think that’s only a positive thing in terms of not only having a fuller understanding of the past but also addressing some of the present-day legacies of that as well.’

To understand the development of modern Scotland – warts and all – is indeed a vital project. To know where we have come from can inspire us towards a better future. But the narrow presentist and hyper-racialised social justice view – which rests on a binary understanding of the world made up of ‘oppressors’ and the ‘oppressed’ – robs history of its contradictions, dynamism and complexity, and worse, denigrates the contribution Scots have made in the modern era. *Glasgow – City of Empire* is a bad, narrow, one-sided and racialised reading of Scottish history.

For Nigel Biggar, CBE, Emeritus Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology and a senior research fellow at the University of Oxford, and the author of *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning*, it is a travesty of the truth.

Further, the idea that ‘educating the public’ about the transatlantic slave trade might act as a call to action to fight racism today is a shameful instrumentalisation of history to suit contemporary political concerns. The more the cultural elites say this display is about history, the hollower that claim rings.

By their own admission, this display is not really about engaging with an important historical moment, but rather it is about contemporary concerns of the Scottish cultural elites. It is quite clear that it is about promoting their contemporary political and ideological worldview. The narrative that modern Scotland was built on the backs of slaves and that Britain’s colonial past hangs over Scots today is absurd and just not true. While statues and some street names nod to Britain’s colonial past, they don’t dominate the thoughts and actions of Glaswegians, who simply don’t need trigger warnings (nor did the *Glasgow – City of Empire* display). Glaswegians are not guilty for the sins of their distant brethren.

Dragging us down an ahistorical one-way street, as *Glasgow – City of Empire* does, blinds the viewer to other significant forces, nuance, and the rich tapestry and nature of history. It flatlines history and renders it one long, continuous calamity for the oppressed.

The contemporary cultural elite’s approach to history is not to expand our understand of it, but to deep-mine history for the sole purpose of legitimising their ideological outlook. In their hands, this is ‘the end of history’. To them, history is not up for debate – it is binary, it’s a closed book.

While it is of course true that museums in the past represented the outlook of the ruling cultural and political elites of the time, and how they saw themselves, it is no different today. The real curators of *Glasgow – City of Empire* (Jean Walsh, Senior Curator, Kelvingrove, and the aforementioned Nelson Cummins to name but two) have used and abused their ‘cocurators’ to give a youthful gloss to the idea they are radical outsiders, but their social justice outlook is now mainstream; it is the outlook of the new political and cultural elites in Scotland. They are peddling a wholly destructive ideology that sees the past in binary terms, where no good can be found but only oppression and white supremacy in action.

The idea of the museum’s purpose being to transmit the best knowledge of the past through art and artifacts is being upended in favour of a new role for the museum: to ‘change the culture’ and promote an ever-increasingly narrow and ideological point of view. This is a point of view that runs counter to the existing values and interests of the wider viewing public. But, of course, this is the point. The cultural elites are more interested in ‘educating the public’ through their social justice agenda, while at the same time taking a sledgehammer to traditional Scottish values and mores. From museums to schools and universities, we have political activists recasting the role and function of these institutions. Our cultural institutions should engage, challenge and inspire – not harangue and indoctrinate. Social justice ideology is about ‘controlling the narrative’, not education.

The one-sided and wrongheadedness of *Glasgow – City of Empire* is just the next phase of Scottish museums shaming the Scottish public through ‘decolonising’ the museum. Scots have way more to be proud of than ashamed about. It is worrying that those with their hands on the levers of cultural power refuse to recognise this fact.

Scottish history is littered with social and cultural highpoints, from the Scottish Enlightenment, educational excellence that was the envy of the world, literary wonders that are read worldwide, great artists and designers, industry and invention. That such a wee country and its people had such an international impact should be an immense source of pride, not contemptuously cast aside and damned.

Modern Scotland was not built on the backs of slaves, but of Enlightenment thinkers, inventive industrialists, and hard-working industrious Scots of all stripes.

Museums in Scotland are leaving the arena of knowledge and culture and instead have embraced the world of politics and ideology. No one will benefit from this.

An alternative education policy document with the aim of returning Scottish education to its historically superior level

Julie Sandilands has been a teacher since 1997. She has taught in England, Scotland and overseas. As well as reporting regularly for SUE on education issues, she also writes comedy sketches and children's fiction.

Funding

In 2022–2023, public expenditure on education and training came to just over an eye-watering 10 billion pounds, representing 9.4% of total expenditure. This colossal investment doesn't just include the fixed costs of providing the infrastructure for a functioning system, it also incorporates a wide range of what could be termed 'added value projects', for example, generous funding to influential third-party activist organisations and advisory panels, and large-scale initiatives such as the [Scottish Attainment Challenge](#). What has become abundantly clear is the failure of the current expenditure policy to provide any notable returns on this vast taxpayer investment. It's time to re-evaluate priorities and redirect funds into areas that will directly improve the service for all its stakeholders.

[1]

Immediately disband and pause all funding to advisory panels, committees, task forces and activist groups at both national and regional levels. Regroup and re-establish based on individual need. The money saved will be used to recruit new teachers and maintain teacher numbers.

[2]

Review the Attainment Challenge budget and prioritise strategies to support students who have fallen behind in attainment (i.e. numeracy and literacy interventions at both primary and secondary levels). To ensure accountability and transparency, each school must provide evidence on how any funding has been spent and indicate the success (or otherwise) of each strategy employed. These reports will then be collated by each local authority before being passed on to the government.

[3]

Review and restructure both the Scottish Qualifications Agency and Education Scotland to ensure the highest quality curriculum content, guidance, and externally assessed qualifications without duplication of financial or human resources.

Curriculum

The long-term decline in Scottish education, as frequently reported, has been going on for well over a decade, and government decisions during the Covid era, while continuing to have some impact, cannot be entirely to blame. The latest dismaying PISA results in literacy and numeracy are indicative of continual failed policies. As a starting point to restore trust and confidence (and its reputation), Scotland needs to recreate a solid evidence-based curriculum ensuring that all children achieve their potential at the end of each phase.

[4]

Remove all critical race theory, gender ideology, and environment alarmism from the primary, secondary and tertiary curriculum, initial teacher education (ITE) programmes, headteacher qualification requirements, and continued professional development training materials.

[5]

Ensure that all S4 pupils study a minimum of seven subjects, including at least two STEM subjects, in line with other parts of the UK, to increase career and further study opportunities.

[6]

Rename the Curriculum for Excellence to the more straightforward, no-nonsense Scottish National Curriculum.

[7]

Literacy: introduce reading-age tests at P4 and within the first term of P7. Scores should be shared with all stakeholders (most importantly, parents) to ensure that pupils are adequately prepared for the third-level phase. Introduce literacy intervention for those struggling to achieve expected levels. Ensure all reading and writing assessments are paper based.

[8]

Numeracy: introduce paper-based competency assessments using the Curriculum for Excellence expected outcomes at P4 and within the first term of P7. Scores should be shared with all stakeholders to ensure that pupils are adequately prepared for the third-level phase. Introduce numeracy intervention for those struggling to achieve expected levels.

Initial teacher education

Scotland has a serious problem with teacher training and its General Teaching Council. Teacher training courses are not recruiting or producing enough teachers in the right subjects, and subject-specific skills are not being taught properly. The General Teaching Council has been ideologically captured, and a culture of intolerance has been created in which trainee teachers are taught how to promote the 'correct' political values rather than develop their understanding of their subject or a range of pedagogies. As a consequence of a decline in teachers' ability to be impartial, their authority has been undermined. They also seem to have lost a sensitivity to what is age-appropriate, not just in relation to sex education but also in relation to many issues debated in modern life, such as climate change, armed conflicts, and politics generally. Teachers are now encouraged to see themselves as activists tasked with educating future activists, rather than as objective and impartial

observers hoping to enable children to evolve into independent, thoughtful adults.

[9]

Improve the calibre of new teachers joining the profession by introducing standardised literacy and numeracy tests (standard assessment tests) for all ITE applicants as a prerequisite to entry.

[10]

Adequately prepare student and newly qualified teachers for the classroom by ensuring that specific elements, i.e. classroom management skills and pedagogical approaches to core subject content (literacy and numeracy), are mandatory units within ITE.

[11]

Promote the flexible route of induction (akin to an apprenticeship), where student teachers can achieve full registered teacher status while gaining work experience within schools.

Managing students with one or more additional support needs

Some children need additional support, and it is imperative that this is provided, but when the proportion of these children is approaching forty percent, it's time to look more carefully at why this is happening. The growing number of students in a classroom who are registered as having an additional support need (ASN) undermines those with genuine special needs, ultimately taking away crucial support for learning, with resources diverted to managing persistent disruptive behaviour. This continued rise is simply unsustainable and risks the need to cut budgets in other areas of the sector, as well as placing ever-increasing demands on teachers endeavouring to deliver

the curriculum. The time has come to have a realistic, honest conversation on how best to support pupils who bring additional challenges to the classroom, as a post-school positive destination is often determined by the number of qualifications achieved in senior phase. The idea of an 'inclusive' education sounds nice, but for some individuals, ordinary school life is very difficult to deal with, while teachers and schools often struggle to educate classes while trying to support some children with severe support needs. Rather than a one-size-fits-all, we should aim to help these individuals and assist schools by doing the following.

[12]

Reintroduce off-campus specialised learning centres, staffed by experienced support staff, to accommodate (temporarily or permanently) pupils who struggle to cope in a mainstream setting due to complex social, emotional and behavioural needs.

[13]

A commitment to establish a network of schools, in both the independent and the public sector, specialising in the care and education of pupils with physical challenges, i.e. those registered blind or deaf, or with limited mobility, with the aim of providing high-quality support for them and their families.

[14]

Introduce a clear, concise procedure for a school diagnosis of an ASN (to be used by all schools) when allocating an ASN label to a pupil and adding them to the school special educational needs register. A review of existing diagnoses using the new procedure to be undertaken, with regular statement reviews, including from medical professionals (e.g. biannually).

School ethos and expectations

Research by the teachers' union NASUWT found that serious disruptive behaviour is on the rise in Scottish schools. The report also highlighted an over-reliance on often ineffective restorative approaches to managing poor pupil behaviour, which is driving a rise in violence and abuse of teachers. Poor behaviour is one of the main barriers to education, whether it be persistent and low level or a full-on disruptive incident that stops the lesson entirely. But rather than being managed through a positive behaviour management system which encourages personal responsibility and self-discipline, there is a growing trend to see it as a *condition*, a vulnerability requiring a therapeutic, analytical approach. In some instances, this maybe the case, but it should not be the go-to, easiest-to-reach one on the shelf. Sometimes, it is what it is and should be managed as such.

[15]

Give headteachers the autonomy to create and implement a positive behaviour management policy, clearly outlining expectations of behaviour and attitude. This must include persistent absence and latecoming, with restorative practice as a complement to any policy and not an alternative. A positive ethos will also impact professionalism, which in turn would reduce staff absence and high turnover.

[16]

Review the management information system (SEEMIS) software application for recording and reporting absence to ensure that it accurately reflects absence and latecoming, and differentiates between absence from school and absence from lessons.

[17]

Create an independent inspectorate to oversee practice in schools:

[18]

for primary – a team consisting of headteachers and experienced teachers (practising or recently retired)

[19]

for secondary – a team consisting of headteachers and experienced teachers (practising or recently retired) from different subject areas, including pastoral

[20]

inspection reports would not be graded but indicate areas of strengths and areas for development, allowing schools within each regional area to share good practice

[21]

a guarantee of an inspection every five years and/or a follow-up after two years if deemed necessary by the visiting team

[22]

all reports to be accessible via an inspectorate website.

The capturing of libraries!

Diane Rasmussen McAdie is a professor at an Edinburgh university and a presenter for the independent news organisation UK Column.

Parents: do you have children enrolled in schools with libraries? Do they visit public libraries or local bookstores? If so, please read this. They are likely being exposed to sexual content that is inappropriate for their age.

I have been a qualified librarian since December 2001, when I finished my postgraduate degree in library and information science at the University of North Texas. Back then, in the earlier days of the World Wide Web, we discussed what we would do about what was then called Internet filtering, meant to stop people from exposure to harmful material, such as pornography, online. Internet filters were mostly popular in children's sections of public libraries and in school libraries. (They didn't work well because a legitimate search, such as one for a 'chicken breast recipe', would be blocked by the filters based on detecting the word 'breast', potentially stopping children from accessing useful information.)

At the same time, we were trained to be against censorship or passing judgement. For example, when 9/11 happened, we agreed with our lecturers that if a man 'looked Arab' and wanted books about flying airplanes, we would certainly provide them to him without question, because we're not supposed to judge people for what they read or to censor information from anyone.

In 2024, we now see the inversion of the library profession stance on these issues. I have recently resigned from our two main professional bodies: the UK's [Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals](#) (CILIP) and the [International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions](#) (IFLA). Why? Because they censored and disciplined me, one of their own members with leadership positions within the organisations, for sharing opinions that an anonymous group of other librarians didn't like, including the opinion that young children shouldn't

be indoctrinated into learning LGBTQIA+ ideology in school and public libraries or in bookstores.

Librarians who follow the ‘woke’ agenda – and that is almost all of them – use the argument that we believe in ‘intellectual freedom, including freedom from censorship’, according to [CILIP’s Ethical Principles](#), to allow children to access what many parents and educators would consider inappropriate content.

While being happy to promote age-inappropriate material to children, some of my colleagues appear to find it unacceptable that I, an adult, might dare to discuss controversial topics in public. The result has been a stream of, often anonymous, complaints against me. (Read more about that in my previous SUE article [Academic intolerance](#)).

In my professional life, I would try my best to avoid ‘inappropriate bias’ in providing materials to a library patron. However, at the same time, I have a right, if not a *responsibility*, to express my opinion as a member of the professoriate in my field and to protect intellectual freedom. So, I resigned from library associations.

While I have been essentially bullied out of the professional bodies that have meant so much to me for years, based on my traditional beliefs, we find that the current President of the American Library Association, Emily Drabinski, is a self-defined ‘Marxist lesbian’, a fact which has received [national attention in the American press](#), with all sides of the political spectrum joining in the debate about her suitability for the role. Although I am not interested in deciding for or against a leader of the ALA based on her personal beliefs, I am interested in how her beliefs might influence the direction of the profession, which has been headed in a dangerous direction for the past few years. Let’s look at some examples.

CILIP's [LGBTQ+ Network](#) links to a website called The Classroom, which [according to its aims](#), 'enables teachers to find a range of resources to make Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans people visible in education'. The resources start with the [Early Years Foundation Stage](#), which tells teachers that they must avoid gender stereotypes and expose them to the 'rainbow' colours. By the final stage, teachers are pointed toward resources that tell them how to be an ally to LGBT students, and specifically for Scottish schools, to share 'challenging homophobia' propaganda from LGBT Youth Scotland.

[LGBT Youth Scotland](#) is an organisation frequently suggested and promoted to Scottish librarians via CILIP. [GB News reported in April 2024](#) that LGBT Youth Scotland received almost £1 million in taxpayers' money in 2023. Schools that adopt the LGBT Youth Scotland gender ideology propaganda are asked to install gender-neutral toilets, appoint children and staff to serve as 'LGBT Champions', and ask children as young as age four to state if they identify as LGBT.

The ALA's Rainbow Round Table creates an annual [Rainbow Book List](#), which consists of 'books catering to LGBTQIA+ youth, spanning from birth to age 18'. An example of a book on this list is *Grandad's Pride*. [According to the BBC](#), this book 'is about a man's memories of attending Pride events and was produced to help teach children as young as four about healthy relationships and the LGBT+ community', and it includes illustrations such as a man wearing 'leather fetish gear'.

In America, the number of books in libraries that are being questioned by the public has [increased enormously](#) – many of them are books related to transgender identities. Some of this could be said to reflect a desire to censor certain books for adults, but I would suggest that in the main, the concern is being raised

by adults regarding books they see as inappropriate for children. Once again, we find the confused world of the ‘progressives’, where adult rights and freedoms are seen in terms of children, who in reality often need to be protected from the adult world. Note to the library association: ‘age appropriate’ is not the same as ‘censorship’!

Public libraries frequently sponsor Drag Queen Story Hour, which as the name suggests, features a drag queen reading a story to young children. The [Drag Queen Story Hour UK website](#) shows a photo of a drag queen with a group of young children in the library. It also incorporates a sample of local council libraries that work with this organisation, including Edinburgh City Council, as well as the British Library and CILIP. News reports and other videos can be found of protesters who enter libraries when these shows are occurring; an example is this [report by USA Today](#) covering a 2023 protest in Texas.

The hypocrisy is evident when we look at the other side of the argument, on the side of JK Rowling and other gender-critical people (those who believe that sex is binary, cannot be changed, and shouldn’t be erased in favour of ‘gender’ or ‘gender identity’). The [Free Speech Union](#) and the *Times* reported in May that Literary Alliance Scotland had written in a document for bookshops, ‘Don’t sell Terf books/platform Terf authors. Don’t expect trans booksellers to sell them. Trans people who see Terf books or “gender criticism” in a bookshop will understand that the bookshop doesn’t want them there’. CILIP and other library-related organisations recommend a [policy from an LGBT library called Book 28](#), and follow professional guidance that has been produced to not provide gender-critical books, because these are considered ‘offensive’ by LGBT people.

A former George Watson’s School parent called ‘Rogdmum’ on X shared content available in the library at [St George’s School](#) for

girls in Edinburgh. Rodgmum's post has a photo of a comic book pages showing a hormonal transition about to begin: 'Just in the nick of time before I start uni... I got the key... which I took to ma [*sic*] local nurse to inject into my butt with a 2-inch needle. The joys of transitioning. It's like this whole time my life was on pause... and only now... was I about to press start'.

This article could be much longer, with many more examples of libraries promoting transgender ideology to children, but I will end them there for the sake of brevity. (I suggest following [Dan Kleinman of SafeLibraries](#) on X for frequent updates on this concerning trend, which only seems to be continuing).

Although I am saddened and frustrated that my resignations from CILIP and IFLA have implications for my career and the many professional and personal connections that I have made in library professional bodies for almost 25 years, I am also relieved that I can speak openly about what has happened to me and what the professional bodies are supporting – from a librarian mob, to promoting organisations that encourage young people to explore or even change their sexuality before they have even reached puberty. As I said in an email to CILIP staff in relation to my resignation, I will remain a librarian for the rest of my life, and librarians do have the responsibility to provide access to information. We also, however, have a larger societal duty: to protect children and to promote education, not indoctrination – something that lies at the heart of the Scottish Union for Education.

Educators become censors

Kirsty Miller is an academic psychologist specialising in teenage mental health. She has taught at a number of stages in the Scottish education system including at secondary, further and higher education levels.

I sent an email to colleagues informing them of an event that I thought may be of interest called ‘Education not Indoctrination’, a conference which has been organised to discuss some of the causes of the rapidly declining standards in Scottish education. The responses I received showed exactly why such a conference is necessary.

For context, I am a psychology lecturer, primarily in higher education, but I have also worked in further education. As part of the latter, I’m included in a mailing group which consists of National 5 and Higher Psychology lecturers in Scotland – a group that was set up to share best practice, ideas and support regarding the role. Usually, discussion centres on the exceptionally ambiguous and unclear teaching requirements on the psychology courses, but sometimes members share other points of interest, including relevant courses, conferences and resources.

Therefore, I thought it might be appropriate to share a link to information on SUE’s education conference (given that the thread consisted of educators and given the crossover between the topics of the conference and our teaching subject of psychology). Here is the email I sent:

Hi All,

Please find below details of a conference run by the Scottish Union for Education which may be of interest. As well as covering education, it also covers a number of crucial psychological topics! This weekend, March 9th in Glasgow (details in the link).

Kindest wishes,
Kinzy

Conference
Education not Indoctrination
Saturday 09 March 9.45 - 5pm

Speakers include academics, teachers, film makers, campaigners and parents, all of whom have been working to challenge the different forms of indoctrination taking place in education.

Please come along, meet the writers and campaigners, and share your own experiences and ideas about what we can do to make Scotland a country with a brilliant and inspiring education system for all.

This is the link to the event where you can buy your ticket <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/scottish-union-for-education-education-not-indoctrination-conference-tickets-818510776767?aff=odsttcreator>

Here are some of the responses I received:

'I don't think this is the platform to be gathering support for events on 'transgender ideology' and the anti-intellectualism associated with opposition to decolonising the curriculum.'

'I can't speak for college lecturers, but registered teachers are expected to support transgender pupils and engage in anti-racist practice as per government guidance and GTCS standards.'

'If you oppose those policies, this is not the platform in which to voice your opposition.'

'I wasn't going to respond, but then I figured that it's actually pretty important to speak up against these sorts of view, in these cases specifically that, 'No, there is no "transgender agenda" and that 'White privilege is a real thing and is not a racist term''

'People are welcome to hold whatever opinions they like, but the rest of us are also equally welcome to explain how repellent we find those opinions.'

'The blurb on the conference website actually sounds very divisive and it certainly doesn't sound like a forum for open debate but rather, it sounds like a platform for their own indoctrination they state they wish to avoid.'

'Think I'll pass. Sounds like right-wing indoctrination to me.'

'I personally think it's more harmful to teach kids that being transgender is wrong, especially when we will undoubtedly be teaching kids who are confused about their identity. But each to their own.'

'I've done a little research on this and the SUE is neither a trade union

or an organisation advocating for teachers in the classroom so this is a little misleading.'

'I am really surprised this is being advertised here.'

My initial concern about these responses was their dismissive nature, the tendency for name calling, and the way in which different ideas were simply denounced. As educators, we need to take ideas seriously, especially ideas we disagree with. Otherwise, we risk becoming one-sided and can end up with a dogmatic approach to learning that results in a form of indoctrination.

Additionally, words are put into the mouths of SUE members that have never been spoken.

We don't, for example, argue that children being transgender is 'wrong'. Rather, SUE believes that the 'affirmative' approach to transgender care is harmful. This is an evidence-based belief that has been presented time and again by medical professionals, psychologists, parents who have lost their children, detransitioners, and some trans-identifying people themselves. SUE's beliefs are based on evidence and held with young people's best interests at heart. Individuals may disagree with our stance against the affirmative approach, but they couldn't reasonably claim that it equates to dislike, or even 'hatred', of children who believe themselves to be 'transgender'.

Nor does SUE claim to be a trade union in the traditional sense of the term. What we do is support and act on behalf of anyone who has an interest in education, which includes teachers in the classroom, lecturers, support staff, pupils, students and parents. We cover all aspects of education, and all those who are affected by it.

If we give these educators the benefit of the doubt, we could say that they struggle with accurately understanding the issues they are discussing. The alternative, of course, is that they are deliberately misrepresenting our stance, which is a behaviour that raises questions of a different kind – *moral* questions.

There are also a number of statements that indicate clear misunderstandings of the government's pet policies. When transgender activists are entering schools and 'advising' on policy and even teaching, to state that there is no 'agenda' is either naive or disingenuous. Whatever you think of the transgender issue, as educators we must be aware of the controversies and the contested nature of this debate. Closing down discussion about this issue is both anti-educational and does nothing for the children we teach.

Similarly, when we have educators uncritically promoting the notion of 'white privilege', we have to wonder whether they are aware that this idea is seen by many as divisive and wrong. Judging people by the colour of their skin has rightly come to be seen as racist and wrong, but this appears to be exactly what we see here.

Another example of confusion is provided by the individual who argued that there is no link between the transgender rights agenda and the teaching of 'anti-racism' (and that this, in turn, has no link with falling education standards). But this is not true. The origin of these agendas stem from critical theory and its subsections, queer theory and critical race theory, respectively.

The respondent does not appear to know the origins of what he is teaching. Perhaps he can't be blamed for this, as we can't necessarily expect staff on the frontline to be aware of the theoretical derivation of all government policies – especially

when those in our institutions often go to great lengths to hide these facts. Indeed, the majority of academics don't know the history of critical theory, let alone know that this is what is being implemented in our institutions.

However, we should all know that it is unwise to lay forth on something we don't have knowledge about. In particular, we should avoid the cheap and easy response of calling names and dismissing as 'political' or 'right wing' anything we don't intuitively agree with.

While the responses from these educators were disappointing, the following events were even more so...

The day following this exchange, I found that I had been blocked from accessing my own (further education) work e-mail account. My personal e-mail address had also been signed up to a number of transgender websites.

Had strangers on the Internet behaved in this way, I wouldn't have been surprised; after all, we're all aware of the petty and vindictive tricks of online social justice activists when we dare to offer an evidence-based alternative to their worldview. However, as I was constantly reminded in responses, the people on my mailing list are *professionals*. For people who are educated and claim to be critical thinkers and compassionate, this struck me as very odd behaviour.

However, this is what our government is pushing – both students and staff are to be activists championing social justice (i.e. critical theory) interests. Part of this includes censorship, ostracism and punishment of dissenting voices. The rest involves breaking down the skills that allow challenges to such an ideology.

However, SUE will continue to challenge these behaviours, and will continue to speak out. Anyone who wants to come to the conference will have their opinion listened to and engaged with, thus offering a courtesy that the educators on my mailing list didn't (and couldn't) offer me. Ultimately, the responses indicated that our conference, and our cause, is greatly needed. Not only are students' standards slipping, but so are the staff's.

Thankfully, we know that there are many teachers out there who do not simply adopt government policies and politics uncritically, who still believe in open discussion and debate, and who would be appalled at the one-eyed and censorious behaviour of some of my colleagues. These are the sorts of teachers who children and society desperately need, the sort of teachers who will be at the SUE conference. I hope to see you there.

Children need freedom and leadership

Simon Knight has a PhD in Education from the University of Strathclyde. He has been working with children and young people in a variety of social care, youth work and school contexts for 35 years.

The majority of normal people in the UK still think of childhood as being different to adulthood – as a time of growth, learning and development, when children are travelling towards something qualitatively different to what they currently are. A time when they are in need of instruction and direction, as well as protection from malevolent adults. A time when they are not able to consent to rash, life-changing decisions and can experiment and get things wrong without having to face the full consequences of their actions.

How then do children progress to adulthood?

It has to be much more than simply a natural process of gradually getting older. Some of the journey is under instruction from adults through formal and informal education, the transmission of knowledge accumulated over generations. Other areas involve moral guidance from parents, extended family members, officially sanctioned adults and, to a significantly lesser extent now than in the past, members of the wider community and strangers, upholding social norms and mores.

All these processes have declined in recent decades. In schools, for example, we find that the idea of educational leadership has changed, and that ‘educational theorists and academics involved in teacher training’ have increasingly ‘promoted the idea that the good teacher is child-centred rather than knowledge-centred’.[1]

Of course, this idea of child-centred learning is both true and also untrue. Educationalists like to pretend that kids lead the way in education, but we all know that this is a ruse – educationalists only pretend that the curriculum is co-created.

While children’s egos are being massaged, top-down ‘progressive’ agendas are being delivered – sexualising children,

feeding them fantasy stories about being born in the wrong body, and teaching them that they are the truly enlightened generation, who are to be tasked with educating their racist or oppressive parents.

One problem with the child-centred approach is that it can encourage a form of narcissism – the clue’s in the name.

Being self-centred is limiting, and in reality the individual emerges by *joining* – not separating – their ‘self’ from the established adult world. Becoming part of something enables children to subordinate their immediate desires, allowing them to think about ‘doing the *right* thing’ rather than the thing that is simply about themselves and how they feel.

Developing a conscience is a social process; the metaphorical angel and demon sitting on your shoulder don’t magically appear by themselves.

But if the role of adults as leaders appears to be declining, there is also another important part of childhood that is doing the same, and that is the realm of relative freedom, where children and then adolescents experience what used to be called rites of passage.

Helped by a growing climate of uncertainty and a declining sense of trust in society, safety – and the safety of children in particular – has become a growing concern that impacts on children and indeed upon childhood.

Our rites of passage in the past came in a variety of forms: the walk to school, the wall you climbed, the scary jump from one wall to the other – there were myriad little things we did every day, away from adults and any form of supervision. It’s impossible for this to be entirely taken away from children, but I suspect the

extent to which it happens today is miniscule compared with just a generation ago.

Schools are not oblivious to this shortfall in important opportunities for lessons in life. But some things need to be learned through experience and cannot be taught. As we turn play into ‘safe play’, and as free time becomes time monitored by adults, there is in a sense no ‘passage’, or at least the nature of this process and experience is transformed.

So too with moral decision making. Space is truly the final frontier. Allowing children the space to make their own rules, to explore *their* own world, and to make their own mistakes is a vital part of being a child and growing up.

Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, for example, understood that ‘children need to coordinate current beliefs with alternatives’. Arguing with peers ‘is the only social context that can generate authentic coordination’, he said.

Having an adult present, acting as umpire, fundamentally alters the discourse and precludes negotiation and joint concession followed by cooperation. Children may well act in a civilised way, but ‘acting’ is precisely what they are doing.

For many boys, scarier than jumping walls were girls! Adults can never replicate the private and very personal first steps in forming relationships. But today they appear to be trying to do just that.

Just imagine the torture, or at least the strangeness, of the ‘sex survey’ in schools or the [RSHP lessons](#) that Scottish children are almost compelled to participate in.

Actually, we don’t have to imagine, because at SUE we get reports

of the uncomfortable or ‘weird’ lessons kids receive. One parent even explained how their child started crying when some of the sexualised subject matter was shoved in front of them. And as Dr Carlton Brick explained last week ([Newsletter No93](#)), there is no actual evidence that any of this intrusive education does anything that it is supposed to do.

So, what is an adult?

This is a question that is too big to answer. Indeed, it is one that changes over time, but crucially it would appear that to answer this question we need to have a good idea about what culture and what type of society we want to create.

And here’s the rub. When our ‘experts’ tell us they’re being ‘child-centred’, it may be a bit of a ruse but it also embodies a certain loss of leadership, of adult judgement, and of a world where children are given a clear, coherent and inspiring sense of what it means to be an adult – an adult who is part of something bigger than his- or herself.

Ironically, it seems that only when adults have a certain confidence about their values and their society do they also feel able to allow children, and especially adolescents, the freedom they need to mature. Some things must be taught by adults and other things can never be taught by them. Both are vital, yet both are being undermined by our somewhat empty and intrusive ‘child-centred’ educators.

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Watch out for the UNCRC in your school

Rachael Hobbs is the SUE Substack review analyst, a parent and an educator.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) came into force for countries that ratified it, in 1990, as an international agreement outlining a set of decreed economic, political and social 'rights' for children. It was endorsed in part, in 1991, by the UK government, which created its own legislation around 'Every Child Matters' within the [Children Act 2004](#).

In Scotland, it prompted the (not uncontroversial) [Getting it Right for Every Child](#) legislation, which has involved comprehensive measures for public services. In 2023, the Scottish Parliament unanimously passed the UNCRC into Scottish law, and following recent amendments, it received Royal Assent in 2024 [1].

The Scottish government increasingly focuses its social and educational policies around the UNCRC, and it is centrally referenced as the bedrock upon which the theme of children's 'wellbeing' is framed.

On the surface, the UNHCR sounds like an important initiative for promoting the interests of children – who would want to argue against it? On closer inspection, however, it is for many a mechanism whereby often distinctly *political matters* – and hence their rightful debate – are sidestepped through the misdirection of legislation.

The problem with 'children's rights'

How the UNCRC is benefiting children is open to debate. Few may argue with some of its more obvious and tangible Articles, for example, which ban the use of children in armed forces or combat, and the sale or trafficking of children.

The fact is, however, that through the UNCRC, important national legislation on matters around children is, for a start, transferred to a transnational (indeed, *supranational*), non-accountable, non-publicly elected organisation. The UNCRC gets to direct national decisions on what tend to be profoundly ill-defined matters, which paves the way for arbitrary and subjective judgements.

What becomes more apparent as we look at some of its vaguer themes around children's rights is that the UNCRC actually articulates, within many of its various Articles, *adult*-level concepts around self-determination and freedoms that cannot truly apply to the young.

This is because children, by their very nature and developmental needs, are reliant on adults to provide and decide on matters over their care. Children are also protected via existing *adult laws* which recognise the vulnerability of children as a group due to their dependence on adults, and so their protections come via legislation across all manner of criminal law, for example related to child abuse, neglect, failure to provide formal education, and so on.

Bestowing a specific set of 'rights' on children themselves has, ironically, the potential to undermine their ultimate right as children not to be burdened with what are *adult responsibilities* (not 'child rights') and associated major decisions. Increasingly with UNCRC interpretations in Scotland, children are being encouraged to recognise their independence in making decisions, such as with the policy emphasis on 'inclusion' of their voice in different matters. While this may sound like a noble thing on paper, it increases their vulnerability to making mistakes that have serious or lifelong negative consequences, because children have yet to develop adult skills of taking on measured or difficult decisions.

UNCRC rights and political interpretation

Another inherent risk within the UNCRC's interpretation of 'children's rights' is that they can all too swiftly become political; hence the importance of such a broad topic remaining within a nation's democratic apparatus. By enshrining 'children's rights' doctrine into matters of law, political and even philosophical questions around the care and capabilities of children are bypassed.

In recent years, the UNCRC has incorporated 'children's rights' within clear political interests, despite its standing as an objective charter. Legal academic and writer Andrew Tettenborn, in his critique of the UNCRC, points to a recent report to the UK government in 2023, where, *'giving children the right to declare their gender identity; completely preventing schools selecting by religion; banning "conversion therapy" aimed at changing the gender identity of children; and compulsory LGBT-friendly sex education "without the possibility for faith-based schools or parents to opt out of such education.'*[2].

It also emboldens groups promoting activist interests. According to Tettenborn, *'if they want to get their way, to use lawfare rather than politics. Want to change the law on sex education, or church schools? This might be difficult if you have to persuade voters, or move Holyrood into action. Much easier to make common cause with the progressive establishment and get the Court of Session to issue a declarator that this is already required as a matter of the interpretation of the UNCRC. The activists will be rubbing their hands.'*[2].

The UNCRC is open to political interpretation by others on many matters. Nowhere more so is this seen than through the controversy of transgender ideology. In Scotland, the Children and Young People's Commissioner website provides

'UNCR Simplified Articles' which misquote *Article 8 – the right to identity*. See if you can spot the difference:

Children and Young People's Commissioner website version:
['Article 8 – I have a right to an identity'](#) [3]

A child or young person's identity is made up of many different parts. Among other things, it includes:

- their name and nationality
- their race, culture, religion and language
- their appearance, abilities, gender identity and sexual orientation

Actual wording from UNCRC's Article 8 [4]

1 States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.

2 Where a child is illegally deprived of some or all of the elements of his or her identity, States Parties shall provide appropriate assistance and protection, with a view to re-establishing speedily his or her identity.

Quite a deviation. Similarly, Scottish governance groups are misinterpreting areas such as this while also failing to assess the harms that transgender ideology poses to the young, as evidenced in the recent Cass report. The Convention thus becomes open to manipulation to fit the interests of those using it to further their subjective causes.

Restricting parental consent

More recently, the UNCRC itself seems to be adopting subjective policies which have more to do with political programmes than children's interests, and it is unable to delineate between the two, which is a serious overstep. As Tettenborn highlights, 'The [UNCRC] has demanded a total ban on excluding any primary schoolchild; a bar on children being "threatened" for involvement in climate activism; and (of course) the compulsory decolonising of the school curriculum.' [2] He asks, 'Do parents really want the courts to decide that if their children bunk off school to support Greta nothing can be done by them or anyone else, or to tell them that if their children's education being wrecked by the disruptive, or stymied by a politicised curriculum, that's all right because the law demands it?' [2].

Separating children's rights from those of the family

More widely, the very separation of 'children's rights' within UNCRC from the rights of parents is a subtle but highly significant circumventing of family as the most meaningful foundation for making decisions over children's care.

It pits child against parent in many decisions (including, of course, those related to recent scandals over 'gender-affirming care') but also often simply private and innocuous matters which may engender natural tension between parent and child; for example, the promotion of the UNCRC through the UK Rights Respecting Schools Award encourages children to 'take action' if they are not given parental permission to do something. This is set to continue as long as legislation applies to all children, beyond the minority of troubled families whose situation requires state intervention.

More deeply, the push in Scotland to overly articulate children's rights within the curriculum risks encouraging them to think constantly in terms of entitlement. This creates a reductive world view for themselves and others and fails to enable instead a necessary maturation which balances personal prerogative with duty or a sense of responsibility to the collective.

Transference of political 'values' onto children

In her endorsement of the UNCRC in early-years settings (an increasing push also by various lobby groups in Scotland), researcher Dr Aline Cole-Albäck upholds that children must have formally defined rights as a social group, as they are 'Vulnerable to adult agendas or a professional's personal morality, which lack accountability to the wider society' [5].

This statement overlooks the fact that adults are held accountable already via wider law, and that such conventions in themselves are susceptible to adult agendas. She makes the further mistake of equating children's rights with the same thing as values – a political slip-up, when looking at what drives those endorsing the work of UNCRC: 'Children's rights are important in early childhood because it has long been recognised that early childhood is a critical time for establishing values and attitudes.' Recognising that 'Values, attitudes and behaviours begin forming at a very early age', she concludes that 'Early childhood settings therefore play an important role in laying the foundation for understanding and experiencing rights and democratic values in society' [5].

Children's 'rights' within this context quickly become an opportunity to mould 'values' using educational (and in this case even nursery) settings to impart the supposedly correct attitudes on any number of topics.

In Scotland, there is now an industry of unaccountable policy 'consultancies' jumping on the commercial bandwagon 'children's rights' has become, to sell all manner of social activism branded as 'rights', and the whole theme is becoming saturated with influencing what children think politically – this is something far more insidious.

Watch this space

Overextension of the Scottish state into civic and family life through creeping authoritarianism is, for many critics, nothing new. The UNCRC, and how it is used, is something for parents and the wider concerned public to monitor.

It is another mechanism whereby controlling political ideologies endorsed by the state under the banner of 'progressivism' is projecting one-sided activism onto citizens, but most alarmingly, using children to do so.

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The Final Report of the Cass Review: achievements, strengths and shortfalls

Dr Jenny Cunningham is a retired paediatrician who worked in Glasgow for 30 years.

Why has Dr Hilary Cass’s [independent review of gender identity services for children and young people](#) had such an impact in the UK and internationally?

It is the most comprehensive scientific evaluation to date of evidence regarding the psychological and medical treatment of children and adolescents with gender incongruence/dysphoria.[1] It took four years and was based on seven peer-reviewed systematic literature reviews by researchers at the University of York, together with qualitative research to capture the experiences of children and young people referred to gender identity services, as well as the experiences of their families. The systematic reviews – which represent the highest level of evidence – covered every aspect of gender identity services: care pathways, particularly those following the ‘gender affirmative model’; the characteristics of children and young people referred to gender identity services; use of puberty-suppressing hormones; use of masculinising and feminising hormones; psychotherapeutic interventions; the impact of social transition; and the quality of international and regional guidelines for gender care.

The Review found ‘*remarkably weak evidence*’ ([Final Report](#), p. 13) for the use of puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones and was highly critical of the clinical assessment and management of cases and of the gender affirmative model of care in gender identity services in the UK and internationally.

What has the Review achieved?

- It has discredited *affirmative gender care* – the unquestioning affirmation of a child/young person’s desire to change gender, the facilitation of their medical transitioning, and the concomitant failure to fully assess other conditions complicating their gender-questioning or distress.

- It has discredited the influential international *guidelines* that have justified the provision of affirmative gender care, especially the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) and Endocrine Society guidelines – demonstrating their lack of developmental rigour, the poor quality of evidence, and the use of each other’s recommendations to create apparent consensus.
- As a result of the Review’s recommendations, the gender identity development service for children and young people in England (the Tavistock GIDS in London) was closed and NHS England is establishing regional paediatric gender services; it banned the prescription of puberty blockers for under-18-year-olds. NHS Scotland has ‘paused’ the prescription of both puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones for those under 18 by the Scottish gender identity service for young people (at the Sandyford Clinic in Glasgow). The UK government has extended the ban on puberty blockers to cover private gender services in the UK and abroad.

What are the strengths and shortfalls of the Review?

These fall into two areas: first, the characteristics of those referred to gender identity services; and second, the deficits in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of gender-questioning young people.

The Review’s first strength is its comprehensive consolidation of our knowledge about the very new cohort, of predominantly adolescents, being referred to gender identity services. It examines in detail the exponential increase in referrals to the Tavistock GIDS from 2014–2015 (a trend mirrored in Scotland and internationally) and what has changed when compared with the previously small numbers (of mainly young boys)

presenting in the 1990s and early 2000s. There has been a change in the gender ratio, with over 70 per cent being teenaged girls. The majority of these teenagers did not experience gender unease or confusion in childhood but instead showed what has been referred to as ‘[rapid onset gender dysphoria](#)’ in adolescence. This cohort of teenagers is remarkable for what Cass describes as its ‘complexity’ – with a high incidence of associated or comorbid problems, including mental health conditions (such as body dysmorphic disorder or anorexia nervosa), autistic spectrum disorders, and adverse social experiences (many are in the care system or have a history of sexual or physical abuse and family breakdown). A large proportion are lesbians, gays or bisexual.

It is where the Review posits possible reasons for the exponential rise and the complexity of this new cohort that it appears most limited. This is summarised in one paragraph (p. 27):

Research suggests gender expression is likely determined by a variable mix of factors such as biological predisposition, early childhood experiences, sexuality and expectations of puberty. For some mental health difficulties are hard to disentangle. The impact of a variety of contemporary societal influences and stresses (including online experience) remains unclear. Peer influence is also very powerful during adolescence as are different generational perspectives.

By ‘generational perspectives’, Cass means that Generation Z (today’s 13- to 27-year-olds) are more accepting of the ‘mutability of gender’ than older age groups (p. 120). Biological predisposition is the most speculative: despite the lack of evidence for a biological cause of gender incongruence, ‘it may be that some people have a biological predisposition’ (p. 122).

Although the Review is written within a medical framework, nevertheless, what is most striking is that it leaves out of account

the preceding growth of *transgender ideology*, together with the spread of *transgender activism* in academia, education, institutions such as the NHS, and virtually all the psychotherapeutic organisations. The start of the exponential rise in referrals to gender services in the UK coincided with the 2014 BBC documentary *I Am Leo* – 12-year-old Leo’s story about ‘growing up in the wrong body’: how Lily socially transitioned into Leo at the age of five and subsequently began medically transitioning, with puberty blockers supplied by Tavistock GIDS, together with counselling about what it means to be transgender.[2] In 2015, Stonewall, the organisation that had campaigned for equal rights for gays, lesbians and bisexuals, added the ‘T’ to LGB. One plausible explanation is that once marriage became legal for same-sex couples in the UK, in July 2013, Stonewall needed a new (lucrative) focus and transformed itself into a transgender lobby group, utilising its extensive existing connections in political, state and institutional structures.

Subsequently, large numbers of transgender organisations were spawned and transgender activists quickly gained influence in schools, universities and the NHS. At the same time, health professionals at Tavistock GIDS and the Sandyford Clinic adopted a gender-affirming model of care, under the WPATH 7 guidelines. The prescription of puberty blockers was liberalised, with children/young people almost invariably moving on to cross-sex hormones. Teaching staff were permitted or encouraged to allow the social transitioning of ‘trans kids’ in schools.

It is only in the context of transgender activism that sense can be made of Cass’s observation that ‘peer influence is [...] very powerful during adolescence’

The Review noted that it ‘heard accounts of female students forming intense friendships with other gender-questioning

or transgender students at school, and then identifying as trans themselves’ (p. 122). It also observed that ‘the term social contagion’ is a contested explanation, ‘causing particular distress to some in the trans community’ (p. 117). Of course it upsets transgender activists, who argue that ‘trans people’ have an *innate* gender identity that is in conflict with the gender they are ‘assigned’ at birth (as if the registration of a baby’s sex is some arbitrary allocation). However, *social contagion* does have explanatory power in terms of the sudden surge of adolescent girls claiming to be ‘trans’.

The second strength of the Cass Review is its focus on the inadequacies of the assessment, diagnosis and clinical management of young people by gender identity services. In the Interim Cass Report, published in February 2022, Cass stressed that once gender-related distress was identified, it tended to ‘overshadow’ other explanations and limit the assessment of coexisting conditions. In the Final Report, it is argued that in terms of the international guidelines for gender care, ‘the most striking problem is the lack of any consensus on the purpose of the assessment process’ (p. 28) – the inability to establish whether or not treatment is necessary. Although a *diagnosis of gender dysphoria* has been regarded as necessary for starting medical treatment, ‘it is not reliably predictive of whether that young person will have longstanding gender incongruence in the future, or whether medical intervention will be the best option for them’ (p. 29). In other words, a formal diagnosis is not predictive of the *persistence* of gender incongruence or of *desistence* – the reversion to one’s heterosexual or same-sex attracted status. Studies suggest that up to 80 per cent of young people will desist if not medically transitioned, having come to terms with their bodies and sexuality. Cass has said that the difficulty is knowing into which group an individual will fit; hence the need for extreme caution in instigating medical

transitioning. This is particularly so given the as-yet-unknown but increasing numbers of young adults *detransitioning*. The time to detransition is estimated at between 5 and 10 years (p. 188).

A key weakness of the Cass Review is its acceptance that the psychiatric diagnosis of gender incongruence represents a *genuine* condition which has some underlying cause that can be treated by medical interventions – at least in some cases.

In *medical* diagnosis, people present with *symptoms* that are often very general and subjective. Doctors have to identify *signs* that can be observed and tested for (e.g. signs of infection or other abnormalities found through scans or tests of blood pressure, blood or tissue samples, etc.). Results are then fitted into disease patterns established by medical research. However, as Lucy Johnstone points out, with very few exceptions, *psychiatric* conditions present with symptoms but there are no proven biological causes or measurable, verifiable signs.[3, pp. 26–27]. Diagnoses are agreed by committees of experts on the basis of behavioural features and symptoms. There are two classification systems: the American Psychiatric Association *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, now in its fifth edition (DSM-5) (2013, revised 2022) and the World Health Organisation *International Classification of Diseases*, eleventh edition (2022). The DSM-5 diagnosis of gender dysphoria is a good example of these points.

DSM-5 defines gender dysphoria in adolescents (and adults) as ‘a marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and one’s assigned gender, lasting at least 6 months, as manifested by at least two of the following’ – for example:

- a strong desire to be rid of one’s primary and/or secondary sex characteristics

- a strong desire for the sex characteristics of the other gender
- a strong desire to be of the other gender
- a strong desire to be treated as the other gender
- a strong conviction that one has the typical feelings and reactions of the other gender

To meet the criteria for the diagnosis ‘the condition must be associated with clinically significant distress’.[4]

This begs more than a few questions: what does ‘a strong desire’ mean? – it is immeasurable and entirely subjective; what does it mean ‘to be of the other gender?’; how can one have ‘the feelings and reactions’ of the opposite sex?; and what is ‘significant distress’? Reading the DSM-5 on gender dysphoria can leave one in no doubt that the American Psychiatric Association is in the grip of transgender ideology – from the adoption of its terminology to its recommendations for treatment: ‘Support may also include affirmation in various domains’, such as social affirmation or legal affirmation. ‘Medical affirmation may include pubertal suppression for adolescents [...] and gender-affirming hormones like estrogen and testosterone for older adolescents and adults [...] Some adults (and less often adolescents) may undergo various aspects of surgical affirmation.’

Gender dysphoria is the only clinical symptom in DSM-5 whose treatment involves sex hormone manipulation and surgical intervention. It is the view of Paul McHugh, Distinguished Service Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University Medical School, that gender dysphoria, a term for ‘feeling oneself to be of the opposite sex’, belongs to the family of ‘similarly disordered assumptions about the body, such as anorexia nervosa and body

dysmorphic disorder. Its treatment should not be directed at the body as with surgery and hormones any more than one treats obesity–fearing anorexic patients with liposuction.’ The treatment needs to attempt to correct the false/delusional belief and ‘to resolve the psychosocial conflicts provoking it.’[5]

There is no contradiction between McHugh’s characterisation of gender dysphoria as part of a group of delusory mind–body disorders and the conception of it as a social contagion among teenaged girls. The latter is well known in relation to anorexia nervosa, but what is specific to the contemporary phenomenon is that teenagers have been so thoroughly inducted into transgender ideology in schools and online and imbued with the fallacy of sex being on a spectrum and mutable. Gender dysphoria/incongruence is part of a cultural narrative that confers attention and endorsement.

However, it is wrong to argue that gender dysphoria *does not exist* – that it is simply synonymous with the comorbid conditions affecting many of the young people in the new cohort of referrals to gender identity services. It very definitely exists in the sense that it is given a material transgender form – a *masculinised female* or a *feminised male* – through medical and surgical gender treatment, with its serious, life–changing sequelae. It should not be underestimated how important it is for transgender ideologues to have their mendacious belief in *innate* gender identity embodied in transgender individuals, and young people recruited to their ranks and transitioned. They legitimise and validate transgender identity, putting it on a par with sexuality. That is why transgender activists in transgender organisations and among health professionals are so opposed to the Cass Review and its discrediting of affirmative gender care. It is also why the Cass Review needed to have been more circumspect about suggesting that medical transition may be appropriate

for some young people or that it would be ethical to conduct research to find evidence for or against the use of puberty blockers in children or adolescents.

Notwithstanding such reservations about its limitations, the Cass Review has been an invaluable challenge to the orthodoxy of affirmative gender care, and it has created the space for reasoned debate around these issues in the UK and internationally.

Download Jenny's pamphlet, [*Transgender Ideology in Scottish Schools: what's wrong with government guidance?*](#)

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