



Guide to responding to the UK Government consultation on conversion therapy

HOW TO RESPOND

Respond online – bit.ly/ctrespond21

Read the consultation document at bit.ly/ctconsult21

The consultation closes on Friday 4 February 2022.

See Appendix below for our summary of the Government's proposals.

GUIDE TO THE ONLINE FORM

Introduction

The first link above will take you to a page titled 'Introduction'. Click '**Continue**' to start your response.

Individual or organisation

You must specify whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. **If you are a church leader and you are responding on behalf of your church, please select 'Organisation' here.** Click '**Continue**'.

*If you are responding as an **Individual**, continue to the 'INDIVIDUALS' section. If you are responding as an **Organisation**, skip to the 'ORGANISATIONS' section.*

INDIVIDUALS

About you – On the next screen, you are asked about relevant experiences. *You do not have to respond.* Click '**Continue**'.

You must answer the questions on where you live, your age group, your sex and the occupation of your main household earner when you were 14. '*Prefer not to say*' options are available for the latter two. Other questions on this page are optional. Click '**Continue**'.

Gender – This question is optional. A '*Prefer not to say*' option is available. Click '**Continue**'.

Sexual orientation – This question is optional. A '*Prefer not to say*' option is available. Click '**Continue**'.

Health – This question is compulsory. (This is an intrusive question, so you should feel free to say '**No**' whatever your circumstances. If you select 'Yes', there will be a further question about the impact on your day-to-day activities.) Click '**Continue**'.

Personal experience of conversion therapy – This page introduces questions about experiences of conversion therapy. Click '**Continue**'.

The next page has two compulsory questions on whether you have been offered or had conversion therapy. If you select 'Yes' to the second question, there will be further questions. Click '**Continue**'.

Continue to 'Views on banning conversion therapy' below ▼

ORGANISATIONS

About your organisation – On the next screen, there are a number of questions about your organisation. The only compulsory question is on how many people it employs. Click '**Continue**'.

Continue below ▼

Views on banning conversion therapy

"Do you agree or disagree that the Government should intervene to end conversion therapy in principle?"

We suggest selecting '**Prefer not to say**' or '**Neither agree or disagree**' because of how answers to this question might be used. There is no need to disagree with a ban in principle, because there is no reason for Christians to object to a properly targeted conversion therapy ban. We do not defend wrongdoing. However, we know activists want to attack the ordinary work of churches. They could misrepresent strong agreement with a ban in principle as support for their version of a ban.

You could make two or three of the following points to explain your answer in your own words:

- As Christians we condemn abuse of every kind and believe everyone should be protected. But some activists confuse conversion therapy with Christian conversion. Given that they want a new criminal offence, this confusion is very serious.
- Activists are openly calling for the ban to include praying with people who ask for prayer about sexuality. This could make ordinary church activity illegal where the person being prayed with is same-sex attracted. But praying with friends is not therapy. And it certainly doesn't deserve to be criminal.
- Anti-religious activists object to biblical teaching about sexual ethics. They are free to do that. But it is not the job of the State to dictate Church doctrine. Repentance from sin of all kinds, including sexual sin, is a basic part of Christian belief. A conversion therapy law must not criminalise Christian beliefs.

- Churches that teach the biblical sexual ethic also teach that we must love our neighbour. We are not a threat to LGBT people and we do not deserve to be criminalised.
- It is crucial that the Government keeps its promise that the plan will not impact everyday religious practice, parenting and religious teaching.
- The Government pledges to ensure "private prayer" is not banned. But if that just means "praying alone" it is worthless. No-one is going to report themselves to the police for praying. The Government must make clear that praying with other people, at their request, will not be criminalised.

Click **'Continue'**

Targeting physical conversion therapy

"To what extent do you support, or not support, the Government's proposal for addressing physical acts of conversion therapy?"

This relates to the first part of the Government's proposal: encouraging tougher sentences for criminal offences, like assault, if motivated by conversion therapy. It clearly would not create problems for the ordinary work of churches, since we condemn violence. A response to this question is required. **Please answer it as you see fit.** A 'Prefer not to say' option is available. Click **'Continue'**

Targeting talking conversion therapy

"The Government considers that delivering talking therapy with the intention of changing a person's sexual orientation or changing them from being transgender or to being transgender either to someone who is under 18, or to someone who is 18 or over and who has not consented or lacks the capacity to do so should be considered a criminal offence. The consultation document describes proposals to introduce new criminal law that will capture this. How far do you agree or disagree with this?"

This relates to the second part of the Government's proposal: creating a new criminal offence based on the coercion or controlling behaviour offence. A response to this question is required. **Please answer it as you see fit.** A 'Prefer not to say' option is available.

"How far do you agree or disagree with the penalties being proposed?"

A response to this question is required. **Please answer it as you see fit.** A 'Prefer not to say' option is available.

"Do you think that these proposals miss anything? If yes, can you tell us what you think we have missed?"

Activists will use this question to call on the Government to go much further. It is important for Christians to argue that the proposals must not be expanded. Instead, they must be tightly targeted and clearly defined.

A response to this question is required. We suggest answering **'Don't know'**. (Answering 'Yes' suggests going further than the Government proposes, while 'No' implies the current plans are perfect.)

You could make two or three of the following points to explain your answer in your own words:

- Christians oppose coercion and control but this plan is disappointingly short on detail. There is a serious lack of clarity about how the new offence will work in practice.
- There are questions over what evidence will be required to demonstrate informed consent. We must not have a situation where a church minister has to ask a person to sign a consent form before agreeing to pray with him about issues of sexuality.
- It is welcome that the Government's policy intention is not to impact on the ordinary, everyday work of churches.
- The Government must ensure the absolute ban in relation to under-18s does not contradict its promise to respect the right of parents to bring up their children in the faith. The Supreme Court has emphasised the importance of families being "left to bring up their children in their own way".
- The Government must target the offence to ensure that a church which teaches the Christian sexual ethic, and takes steps such as withdrawing membership from people who reject it, cannot be construed as engaging in coercion or control.
- The Government must ensure that a 17-year-old LGBT activist who visits a church youth group cannot call the police and allege that hearing an explanation of the Christian sexual ethic was "talking conversion therapy".

Click **'Continue'**

We have skipped the next five pages. Responses are required. **Please answer as you see fit.** 'Prefer not to say' options are usually available. Click **'Continue'** at the end of each page.

Equalities impacts appraisal

This question is a further opportunity to reiterate the points above about the potential implications for religious liberty of the proposed ban, particularly if the Government was to cave in to activists' demands. **You could make two or three of those points again, in your own words.** Click **'Continue'**

Confidentiality

You must indicate whether you are happy for your free text comments to be quoted anonymously or would prefer your response to remain completely confidential. Click **'Continue'**

Almost done...

Enter an email address if you would like to get a copy of your response. Click **'Submit Response'**

APPENDIX

A summary of the Government proposals

The Government is proposing a two-fold approach.

The **first part** is to encourage tougher sentences for those who commit violent physical acts that are already criminal, like assault, if their motivation is conversion therapy.

The **second part** is a new criminal offence outlawing 'talking conversion therapy'. This is based on an existing coercion and control offence against domestic abuse. To apply it to 'conversion therapy', key elements of the existing law would be dropped, drastically broadening the scope. The new criminal offence would have two elements:

1) 'Coercion or control'

This would cover talking conversion therapy that had a "serious effect" on the victim, including "a substantial adverse effect on the victim's day-to-day activities". This language is very vague.

2) 'Motivation of conversion therapy'

This means having the "intention of changing a person's sexual orientation or changing them to or from being transgender". This is also unclear.

Adults would be able to give informed consent to talking conversion therapy but under-18s would not. The consultation document says:

"consent requirements will be robust and stringent. The person entering the arrangement must have freely consented and received all the appropriate information about the potential impacts, short and longer term, of such counselling to allow them to do so, otherwise this would amount to an offence."

What activists are calling for

Given the immense seriousness of making something a criminal offence, you would expect the focus of a conversion therapy ban to be on abuse. But anti-conversion therapy activists are not content with that. They want a much broader, repressive law. One that could criminalise the ordinary work of churches.

So far, the Government has not bowed to these radical demands. It says the ban on talking conversion therapy:

"could not be reasonably understood to include communication such as casual conversations, exchanges of views, private prayer or pure speech acts."

It also says the plans:

"will not impact everyday religious practice. An adult who wants to be supported to be celibate will be free to do so; parents will remain able to raise their children with the values of their faith, and simply expressing the teachings of a religion will not constitute conversion therapy."

These are welcome assurances, as far as they go. But serious concerns remain. The proposal to target talking conversion therapy is lacking in clarity and detail.



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