



Women: Facilities in Public Buildings QSD on 24 February 2020

On 24 February 2020, the Lord Lucas (Conservative) is due to ask the Government “what plans they have to ensure that at least half of the communal changing or toilet facilities in public buildings are reserved for women only”.

Summary

Women-only facilities have been subject to debate in recent years. For example, the Royal Society for Public Health, in a report on public toilets, called for “equality of access to toilets”, noting this was important “particularly for women who take longer and cannot use urinals”. This, it added, “leads to the long queues familiar in many public toilets”. The report called for ‘potty parity’ to ensure equality of access, with more unisex toilets, more toilets for women and taking into account the needs of transgender individuals.

Some critics maintain that gender-neutral toilets, and also changing facilities, [are more dangerous for women and girls than single-sex facilities](#). Others have said that while gender-neutral toilets should be commended, labelling single-sex toilets as gender-neutral, even if they contain urinals, [may ultimately mean fewer facilities are available for women to use](#).

A [report by Stonewall](#) showed that almost half of trans people asked (48 percent) do not feel comfortable using public toilets. Stonewall defines ‘trans’ as being an umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. [Proponents of more gender-neutral](#) facilities note that gender-neutral toilets can be used by anyone and would stop trans people feeling isolated and distressed about going to the bathroom.

The issue of toilets in public buildings was subject to a series of parliamentary questions tabled by Lord Lucas. He asked about changes to toilet facilities in the Department of Education’s London offices to make them unisex. The Government responded that changes were to “[make the office environment as inclusive as possible](#)” noting visitors who do not wish to use, or may feel uncomfortable using gender-neutral facilities, are able to use other toilets in the building.

The Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination, for example in employment or the provision of public services, on the basis of protected characteristics that include age, disability, sex, and gender reassignment. However, the Act allows providers to offer single-sex services in permitted circumstances. It also outlines the limited circumstances where gender reassignment discrimination might be permissible, but it must be a proportionate means of meeting a legitimate aim.

Heather Evenett | 11 February 2020

A full list of Lords Library briefings is available on the research briefings page on the internet. The Library publishes briefings for all major items of business debated in the House of Lords. The Library also publishes briefings on the House of Lords itself and other subjects that may be of interest to Members. Library briefings are compiled for the benefit of Members of the House of Lords and their personal staff, to provide impartial, authoritative, politically balanced briefing on subjects likely to be of interest to Members of the Lords. Authors are available to discuss the contents of the briefings with the Members and their staff but cannot advise members of the general public.

Any comments on Library briefings should be sent to the Head of Research Services, House of Lords Library, London SW1A 0PW or emailed to purvism@parliament.uk.

Further Information

- Royal Society for Public Health, [Taking the P***: The Decline of the Great British Public Toilet](#), May 2019

Briefing discussing the provision of public toilets in Great Britain. Includes call for ‘potty parity’ to ensure equality of access with more unisex toilets, more toilets for women and taking into account the needs of transgender individuals.

- YouGov, [Potty Parity: Would it be Fairer to Make Women’s Toilets Bigger?](#), 20 March 2018

Research outlining public opinion on the issue of ‘potty parity’.

- House of Commons Library, [The Gender Recognition Process](#), 8 January 2020

Briefing from the House of Commons Library outlining the current situation with regard to the Government’s consultation on the reform of the gender recognition act. The briefing details the provisions regarding the provision of single sex spaces under the Equality Act 2010.

- Government Equalities Office, [Reform of the Gender Recognition Act—Government Consultation](#), July 2018, pp 1–14 and 43–45

Excerpts from Government Consultation explaining the remit of the consultation and the background to the issues of single and separate sex services.

Parliamentary Questions

- A selection of written questions from the House of Lords: [HL17167](#) (24 July 2019); [HL17166](#) (23 July 2019); [HL17165](#) (23 July 2019); [HL17164](#) (23 July 2019); [HL17163](#) (23 July 2019); [HL16830](#) (11 July 2019); [HL16829](#) (11 July 2019); [HL16828](#) (11 July 2019); and [HL16827](#) (11 July 2019).

Press Articles and Comment

- Caroline Criado Perez, [‘Women Can’t Win When it Comes to Loo Queues’](#), *Times* (£), 6 October 2019
- BBC News, [‘Two Female Loos for Every Male One, Experts Recommend’](#), 23 May 2019
- Fair Play to Women, [‘Advice to Service Providers about Female-Only Changing Rooms’](#), 15 May 2019
- Andrew Gilligan, [‘Unisex Changing Rooms Put Women in Danger’](#), *Times* (£), 2 September 2018
- Paul Twocock, [‘Inaccurate Reporting’](#), Stonewall, 25 June 2018
- Radhika Sanghani, [‘Why the UK Should Ditch Male and Female Toilets for “Gender Neutral” Loos’](#), *Telegraph* (£), 6 April 2017