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Press Release

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CHARITY WARNS OF PUBLIC FUNDS USED TO CREATE “BIASED RESEARCH” INTO ‘GAY THERAPY’ IN NORTHERN IRELAND

PUBLIC funds are being used to create “biased” research into so-called ‘conversion therapy’ of gay and lesbian people in Northern Ireland.

A major research project seeking to understand the views of recipients of ‘conversion practices’, commissioned and funded by the Department for Communities (DfC), has been handed over to the ‘Rainbow Project’, and a steering committee composed of prominent LGBT activist organisations, Cara-Friend, HEReNI and Transgender NI. Promotional material ‘calling’ for research participants is being targeted only at Northern Ireland’s LGBTI+ ‘community’, and not former members of that community or, others who may have benefitted from therapeutic counselling or interventions of their choice.

In a further ‘politicisation’ of future healthcare in the country, the DfC is using what academics call ‘Advocacy Research’ – biased canvassing, *“designed to influence the formal and informal policies of policy makers and those who have influence in social policy and planning”*.

The biased nature of this healthcare research has been revealed in an Open Letter from Dr Mike Davidson, Charman of Core Issues Trust, a registered charity in Northern Ireland, to the DfC. Dr Davidson, who lives in County Down, is also Director of the International Foundation for Therapeutic and Counselling Choice (IFTCC).

Dr Davidson, who was employed by the Universities of Ulster, Surrey and Nottingham in academic-related roles, said he *“welcomes unbiased research into sexuality and identity,”* but added: *“What the DfC has done, by handing over this important research to political activists, is to deliberately create research which rejects ideological diversity and promotes the consensus viewpoints of the researchers. Its danger is that it falls into ‘confirmation bias’ which is the tendency of researchers to favour information confirming or strengthening their own premises or values. Such research is aimed at the public and is difficult to dislodge once affirmed.”*

Dr Davidson says the issue with Advocacy Research is its failure to deal with bias, adding that *“it is used where there is an assumed consensus and ignores dissenting viewpoints and data. The result is viewpoint discrimination - and tax-payers’ money must never be used to politicise healthcare.”*

The charity leader has called on the DfC to change both approach and its promotional strategy to remove discrimination against former LGBT persons. He explained: *“Rather than conducting research to prove a viewpoint, ‘Inquiry Research’ should be used. That asks questions and seeks to understand phenomena, regardless of viewpoint.”*

His letter to the DfC questions the Department’s ability to produce representative findings for the NI community when it is conducted by LGBT advocacy groups alone, who are unlikely to access dissenting views.

“The DfC research is aimed at ‘LGBTQAI+’ identified individuals which means those formerly LGBT individuals are ineligible to take the survey offered,” he said, *“and to share their experience of the positive contribution of counselling, pastoral care or associations that have helped them to leave former behaviours and attractions.”*

Dr Davidson claims the sampling for such a study is also unrepresentative of the community as a whole, only representing the LGBT population and that such initiatives are something that a 'neutral' government department should avoid.

He concluded: *"This is exactly the approach the UK Government erroneously adopted in 2017 when it launched its National LGBT Survey and the report on the survey following, in July 2018 which it was unable to act upon. But without representative sampling and by disqualifying participants who are recognised to not agree with the premises of the study, this cannot be considered a scientific study. Its Report then can be described at best, as a political treatise. Which is likely to be the case with the DoC research. This may explain why the lead academics are political and social scientists without apparent expertise in healthcare."*

Dr Davidson has asked for the promotional literature for the research project to be withdrawn, then changed to attract ex-members of the LGBTI+ community as well. He has also called on Northern Ireland's politicians to look into the politicisation of healthcare.

- For the full text of Dr Davidson's letter and supporting documents, visit <https://archive.iftcc.org/letter-to-department-for-communities-ni-public-money-being-used-for-biased-lgbt-research/>

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Editor's Notes:

Core Issues Trust is a registered Charity in Northern Ireland, (reg No NI105095), details can be found at www.core-issues.org

The **International Foundation for Therapeutic and Counselling Choice (IFTCC)**, is a project of the NI charity Core Issues Trust. Operating in 34 countries it advocates for the rights and freedoms of individuals to seek and to receive professional and pastoral help to achieve their primary values concerning their sexual identity and practises. The IFTCC has raised questions about the funding that the Department for Communities is using for advocacy research on 'conversion practises in Northern Ireland' dominated LGBT groups, without reference to dissenting organisations and groups in Northern Ireland who promote freedom of choice. Visit www.iftcc.org