

FET celebrates 50 years!

On Saturday 3 July the Family Education Trust held its AGM and Annual Conference in our usual venue of the Royal Air Force Club in Piccadilly. In spite of the unfortunate covid restrictions forcing us to limit numbers to a maximum of 70 people, the conference was thoroughly oversubscribed with many people joining via the YouTube livestream. 2021 is a special year for FET as it marks 50 years since our foundation in 1971.

Opening the conference, FET chairman Arthur Cornell shared his personal experience of first becoming involved in FET. He said:

Everyone who joins FET has a personal story of becoming aware of changes in our culture which claim to bring more personal freedom and wellbeing, but are actually undermining historic institutions and producing mental or physical health issues which are costly to the nation and damaging to human relationships. What has appealed to me, and I sense to many of us in the work of FET, is the principle of being 'evidence based'. It is this element which enables us to make a special contribution to the debates around family life.

Mr Cornell noted that FET had not been conceived out of religious or political motives but 'out of a concern that the direction of our culture was becoming increasingly destructive of relationships in all walks of life, while the increasing cost to the nation of broken families was becoming unsustainable. The state was gradually usurping the role historically held by parents.'

When the Trust began its work in the 1970s, Mr Cornell was working in a school in Southampton where he noticed that children were taking out their frustrations about home life on staff in schools. At the same time, Valerie Riches was exposing a web of organisations involved in sex education in schools. They were promoting value-free information that frequently ignored the age of consent and had no respect for marriage and the family. As a result, there was a rise in STDs, teenage pregnancies and abortions. More recently, this approach had made children open to exploitation and abuse as FET publications have

demonstrated.

As a headmaster, Mr Cornell had sought help from FET in developing a relationships programme sensitive to the needs of parents and pupils. In 20 years there was not a single teenage pregnancy in the school where Mr Cornell was headmaster.

Mr Cornell said he was grateful for the work of FET's three former directors, Valerie Riches, Robert Whelan and Norman Wells. While the tragic death of Norman Wells had been a temporary setback, FET, its trustees and staff were building on Norman's legacy and taking the work forward.

The Future of FET

FET trustee Sarah Carter outlined a vision for FET's next four years. Mrs Carter laid out a plan to reduce the formalities of the annual conference, simplifying the decision-making process by aligning the trustees and members so that we can use the annual conference to hold more workshops, shared experiences and provide more practical support.

Mrs Carter said that the Trust wanted to appoint advisors and specialists who could host panels through Facebook groups, Zoom calls and other means, to deal with particular topics. FET's new strategy will also look at improving fundraising and support for parents/governors as well as developing how-to guides and engaging schools.

FET celebratory cake



Family Education Trust 50th Anniversary Video



One of the highlights of this year's conference was the showing of a 12 minute video celebrating 50 years of FET's work. The video highlights FET's achievements and features interviews with key figures from past and present as well as parents who were helped by the Trust.

We strongly recommend our supporters watch this video and share it with others. The video is available on YouTube at the following link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuziSm4mm_c

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Remembering Norman Wells

Dr Trevor Stammers

It is a huge tribute to Norman Wells that he had become synonymous with the Family Education Trust when his life was so unexpectedly cut short as one of the very early victims of the ruthless Covid pandemic. Taking over the helm of FET from Valerie and Denis Riches and Robert Whelan was always going to be a very difficult task but he carried it off with distinction.

Norman was capable, unflappable and had great integrity - a holy trinity of virtues all too rarely found in leaders. He was in short utterly professional. Meetings of the Trust were always well prepared, documents sent out on time, and Norman's reports to the trustees were always a highlight of our meetings as they were every year at this AGM. Those reports said as much about Norman as they did about whatever topic he was dealing with. He was a prodigious and precise worker. The number of meetings he had attended, media interviews given, press articles written and books written bore eloquent testimony to his dedication to the cause and were underpinned by his deep Christian faith which was never paraded, yet always present for those with ears to hear.

Consummate professional that he was, his analysis of data and other forms of evidence always led the responses FET made to policy and as I have said on YouTube earlier this year, woe betide any mandarin or politician who tried to pull the wool over Norman's eyes. He would patiently persist in putting his questions until he got an answer.

Anyone involved in campaigning for organizations with Family in the title or as its focus, will know that dedicated professionalism is not enough. Many still today fall foul of the ancient lament "They made me a keeper of the vineyards but my own vineyard I have not kept." Not so with Norman. In the days when the office was near Norman and Nicola's home, the trustees always used to be invited to have supper before the meetings. The Wells' hospitality was

always notable for the wonderful spread Nicola and their children prepared to eat but also for the evident joy of living which their children displayed on those visits and as far as I know still do. I still recall Elliot showing me his giant snails with a pride as large as the molluscs themselves. Norman doubtless made mistakes in parenting because he was human but the letter that Nicola sent on behalf of the family around a year after Norman's passing confirms that he was as loving and loved a father as he was an exceptional and respected campaigner for the values he lived out as well as campaigned for.

Those values have never been under greater threat as 'wokeness' increasingly seeks to send our society to sleep morally speaking. We owe it to Norman and to the future of the family life that he exemplified and campaigned tirelessly for to see the work of FET continues as we support Piers and Lucy and the Trustees to carry on what Norman Wells so energetically modelled for us all.

New Trustee



FET is delighted to welcome a new member to our board of trustees.

Gillian White will already be familiar to many of our supporters. Gillian has been an active member of FET for over 40 years and joined the Executive Committee in 1997. She has worked as a teacher in the UK, USA, Canada and Hungary. On returning to the UK, Gillian became concerned about slipping standards in schools and was very glad to find that those who had founded FET shared her aims of standing up for traditional families and moral standards. Gillian is a passionate campaigner for unborn children and believes that easy access to abortion has contributed

to a breakdown of family stability. She continues to be a staunch advocate for children, young people and marriage as the basis for strong families and the best outcomes for children.

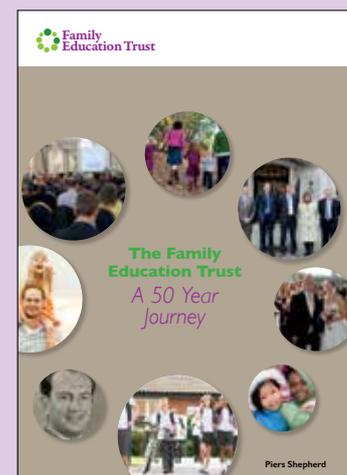
New Booklet

The Family Education Trust A 50 Year Journey

Piers Shepherd

Condensing a history of 50 years into a short booklet was something of a challenge. In this booklet I have tried to tell the story of FET by focusing on the major issues with which FET has dealt over 50 years. Within the pages of the booklet you will read the history of FET's efforts to defend marriage, oppose inappropriate sex education and defend the rights of parents over their children's education.

In researching for this booklet I was struck by the incredible faithfulness of our supporters over five decades. Reading through the minutes of our very first AGM in 1972 I came across the names of people who are still faithfully supporting us today. Through 50 years you, our supporters, have continually been our greatest asset. Thank you!



This booklet can be downloaded for free from the FET website at the following link:

<https://familyeducationtrust.org.uk/product/the-family-education-trust-a-50-year-journey/>

Hard copies can be purchased for just £1 per copy.

How Radical Gender Ideology Cheats Our Children

Sharon James



In the ongoing war against the natural family, the current strategy is to exploit children.

Use a fictitious theory: gender ideology. Create a new (fictitious) class of 'trans-children'. Turn them against their own bodies. Turn them against their own parents – the people who care for them most in this world. Award them the ultimate 'victim status'. That means that nobody, not even their own parents, can question their demands. An eleven year-old may come home from school and announce to mum: 'I'm pansexual and transgender!' To challenge that may be viewed as regressive and bigoted.

Gender ideology is the culmination in the attack on the natural family. And it's a wholesale assault on the most vulnerable members of society – our children.

The Truth about Children

They are Boys or Girls. When a baby is born, the first thing we ask is: 'boy or girl?' A tiny number of babies suffer from hormonal or genetic disorders which affect sexual development. But those vanishingly rare exceptions are routinely inflated and exploited by campaigners. We know that children are either boys or girls. Children should be taught about the wonder of the human body: that a male and female when united have the capacity to create new life.

Until puberty, children are not sexualised, and their natural innocence should be protected. One of the most appalling effects of the Sexual Revolution was the spread of the notion that children have the right to sexual expression and pleasure. Then came the insistence that children should be informed of their right to sexual pleasure, via explicit sex education from a very young age. But the explicit sharing of sexual information, such as that included in much sex education is itself a form of abuse. The sexual innocence of children should be protected without exception.

Small children believe what you tell them. Little children are by definition, childish, immature, gullible. That makes them delightfully trusting – and terrifyingly vulnerable. They need to be protected from exploitation. Most often, the adults who would throw themselves under a bus to protect their children are their own parents. Parents are desperate to protect their children from pain, illness, accidents, or abuse.

But today, hundreds of thousands of decent caring parents, who would never dream of opening the door of their home to violent predators, are missing the fact that by means of peer contagion, social media, and activist indoctrination in schools, their own children's minds are being opened to a deception that has the potential to ruin their lives, and alienate them from those who love them most.

The Lie of Gender Ideology

So what is gender ideology? One LGBT group tells young people: *Everyone has a gender identity. This is the gender that someone feels they are. This might be the same as the gender they were given as a baby, but it might not. They might feel like they are a different gender, or they might not feel like a boy or a girl.*

Note the emphasis on feeling. Not truth. Not science. Not reason. Gender ideology is based on four false claims, and it's constructed a false vocabulary:

'Binary is bad'. No! The human race is made up of male and female people. The word 'binary' simply means 'relating to two'. 'Binary' is the foundation of LGB and T! Lesbians? They are women attracted to other women. Gays? Men attracted to other men. Bisexuals? They are people attracted to men and women. Trans people? They want to live as the 'other' of the two sexes. All those categories are defined by 'binary' differences.

'Gender is a Spectrum'. There are an infinite number of ways in which we live out our lives as male and female. We are all different! But that doesn't mean there are seven billion different gender identities. It doesn't negate the fundamental reality that we are either men or women.

'Male and female are just social constructs'. No. They are universal human realities, not just socially constructed identities. The social roles lived out by men and women vary from place to place, and from time to time. But sexual differentiation is a biological reality, not just a social construct.

'We all have a 'gender identity' that may be separate from our sex'. The way men and women live (gender roles) varies from culture to culture. This does not mean that we can each

claim a 'gender identity' that can be separated from our biological sex. A comprehensive survey of the scientific evidence was published in 2016 in *The New Atlantis*. It discussed over 200 peer-reviewed studies in the biological, psychological, and social sciences, and concluded:

The hypothesis that gender identity is an innate, fixed property of human beings that is independent of biological sex — that a person might be "a man trapped in a woman's body" or "a woman trapped in a man's body" — is not supported by scientific evidence. In the absence of any scientific evidence, gender theory has gained acceptance by constructing a false vocabulary. If you control the language, you control the debate.

How Gender Ideology Cheats our Children

Impact on children and adolescents.

Some children exhibit 'gender non-conforming behaviour' from an early age. They may behave like the other sex with regard to clothing, play styles and interests. They may even assert that they 'are' the other sex, and believe they have been 'given the wrong body'.

There's a natural solution to this. Puberty.

When gender nonconforming children are not encouraged to identify as the opposite sex the great majority adjust to their birth sex once following puberty. However, there is an increasing tendency to insist that such children should be allowed to 'socially transition', adopting the name, pronouns, clothes etc of the opposite sex, and allowing the child to use the toilet and facilities of the other sex. When social transition is permitted, the child's dysphoria will probably persist. That's because those who socially transition almost invariably then demand drugs to suppress puberty – thus denying themselves nature's own remedy for dysphoria! And those who are prescribed puberty blockers usually go on to cross sex hormones.

A growing number of adolescents experience what's been described as 'rapid-onset gender dysphoria' (ROGD). This seems mostly to occur among girls. The number being referred for 'gender treatment' has increased by more than 1,000 percent in the United States and more than 3,000 percent in the United Kingdom.

The first major study of ROGD was by Lisa Littman and published in 2018. She found that adolescents experiencing ROGD tended to either belong to a group of friends in which multiple members became transgender-identified around the same time, or they were immersed in social media, or both.

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Gender ideology cheats our children

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Young people learn what to demand, and what to say, from others, especially online. They are told by trans-affirming peers that parents who resist such demands are 'transphobic'. There is encouragement to cut ties with biological family and others who don't endorse the demand for transition. They are told that young people who aren't allowed to transition are 'likely to commit suicide', and misleading suicide statistics are spread around. There is mutual pressure in such groups to demand hormone treatments. Increasing numbers of girls are 'binding' their breasts when they start developing, and boys may seek to conceal (tuck) their genitals. At around the age of 16, 'cross-sex' hormones may be given. Girls may be able to have a double mastectomy (removal of breasts).

For children and young people who transition, there are lasting physical, emotional, mental and spiritual harms. Not least, for many, they are robbed of their future prospects of motherhood or fatherhood.

Children are being robbed of the security of objective reality. Biological sex is the most fundamental physical and natural reality of all. Male-female differences are integral to our humanity. We are sowing confusion and ignorance, when we tell innocent children that they can't trust the evidence of their own eyes, and they can never know, if someone is 'really' a man or a woman. Children need security in who they are and who others are.

The dignity of humanity is grounded in the reality that we are embodied beings. But we're teaching children to disrespect the human body. That's to disrespect humanity. It's wrong and dangerous to tell children they can and must always trust their feelings over everything else. That does not equip them well for a healthy and well-adjusted adulthood.

Children are robbed of personal and relational security. A child is most secure when safe in the knowledge that they can trust their parents. But a wedge is driven between a child and his or her parents when they go to school and they're told that if their mum and dad don't think people can change sex, then mum and dad are immoral and hateful. This is destroying family trust.

Stonewall gives guidance to teachers saying that if parents aren't sympathetic to their children transitioning, schools should socially transition children without telling the parents. And Stonewall is trying to persuade the government that if a parent resists a

child's demands for transition, that should be classed as damaging 'conversion therapy'. Parents could be criminalised for telling the truth to their children. Online influencers coach anxious and confused children to believe that if their parents question the idea of gender transition, they are hateful, bigoted, stupid: in short, the enemy.

Many parents feel powerless, and believe that they have no choice but to accede to the demands of their children. But children and young people need boundaries. They need their parents to be parents. They don't need parents to be their best chum, affirming whatever whim takes them. We wouldn't be so stupid as to accede to every other request from children – refusal to wear a seat belt, demands to smoke, get a tattoo, or bring illegal drugs into the house. Why surrender on this?

A mother in America told how her daughter announced she was trans, after having spent a significant amount of time on the internet:

Her personality changed almost overnight and she went from being a sweet, loving girl to being a foul-mouthed, hateful pansexual male . . . At age 16, my daughter ran away and reported to the Department of Child Services that she felt unsafe living with me because I refused to refer to her using male pronouns or her chosen male name. Although the department investigated and found that she was well cared for, they forced me to meet with a trans-identified person to 'educate' me on these issues.

Shortly after that time, a pediatric endocrinologist taught her daughter, a minor, how to inject herself with testosterone.

My daughter then ran away to Oregon where state law allowed her at the age of 17 without my consent or knowledge to change her name and legal gender in court and undergo a double mastectomy and a radical hysterectomy," she continued. "My once beautiful daughter is now 19 years old, homeless, bearded, in extreme poverty, sterilized, not receiving mental health services and extremely mentally ill . . . The level of heartbreak and rage I am experiencing as a mother is indescribable."

Children are being pushed back into regressive stereotypes. We should be challenging regressive stereotypes and helping every young person achieve their own potential, whatever their aptitudes. But many of the books for children promoted by transgender lobby organisations reinforce those stereotypes.

Can I tell you about Gender Diversity? describes a little girl, Kit, who explains 'I didn't like playing with dolls or wearing dresses and I hated hav-

ing long hair'. Obviously then, this little girl must really be a boy! In *I am Jazz*, Jazz (a little boy) announces: 'For as long as I can remember, my favourite colour has been pink' - as if that explains his "need" to "change sex".

As puberty hits exposure to porn cements horrific sexualised images of so called 'real women' and 'real men'. The porn industry portrays women being horribly and violently abused, and true femininity as over-sexualised and ever-available for that abuse. In such a culture, what girl would want to grow up to be a woman?

And masculinity is presented as 'toxic', men are the oppressors. In such a culture, what boy wants to grow up to be a man? One dad writes: *Trans activism is a form of bullying; if you're not porn-culture straight, a proper 'boy's boy' or 'girly girl' you must be defective, in need of fixing by re-classification, drugs or a scalpel.*

Children are being denied the right to privacy and safety. We are hearing of girls who avoid going to the toilet at school. They are reluctant to use unisex facilities. That's a health risk. Other girls have to compete against biological males in contact sports. That's a safety risk.

How should we respond?

We should support organisations such as the Family Education Trust and The Christian Institute (for whom I work) and other concerned groups who are willing to call out the lies.

We must respect the vulnerability of children.

We must respect the rightful authority and role of parents.

We must campaign where necessary:

Against activists going into schools.

Against the proposed 'conversion therapy ban' applying to trans issues.

For the high court ruling in the case of Kiera Bell to be upheld and applied.

And above all: we must tell the Truth. We must refuse to tell lies.

It is impossible to really change sex. A trans man is not a biological woman. Or vice versa. Boys are Boys. Girls are Girls.

Thank you Family Education Trust for standing for truth.

Sharon James's full talk can be found on FET's YouTube channel at the following link:
<https://www.youtube.com/user/familyeducationtrust>

Turning the Tide: How to get a hearing from a hostile media

Robin Aitken



I worked for the BBC for 25 years, leaving about 15 years ago. I joined the BBC and I was very proud to do so, because I had imbibed with my mother's milk that the BBC was the finest broadcaster in the world. That view was very common amongst the population at the time.

The scales took a while to drop from my eyes but it became apparent to me throughout the course of my career that the BBC is not what it says it is. BBC claims to be impartial. The great fabrication is that because we all pay for the BBC, everyone has a voice. This is exactly the reverse of the truth. The licence fee guarantees the BBC's independence. The trouble is, what it has done with that independence.

The BBC has become a battering ram for one side of the argument, and that side of the argument is what is termed 'progressive'.

The BBC's cultural reach is greater than that of any other organisation in the country. More than 90% of the population use its services at least once a week. No other organisation touches so many people and in such an intimate way. When your brushing your teeth or having your breakfast, there's the BBC on in the background, telling you things and moulding your ideas. So, what is the nature of the BBC and who are the people who man it?

To explain what has happened in the BBC you need to understand that this is something that has happened across society. There has been a long march through the institutions by people who have a definite political agenda. These people call themselves 'progressives', They are, mostly on the left, although it's surprising how many politicians of the right, describe themselves as being progressive.

The BBC's 'Progressive Values'

The reason why there was such a radical change in the BBC during the

60s, 70s and 80s is to do with generational change. The War Generation had little choice but to exercise discipline and self-restraint. It was imposed on them by the circumstances of history. However, the generation that came after that felt no need for that restraint and discipline. The thing which they probably saw in their parents was what they reacted against and in the 1960s, the great revolution began. We began to grant ourselves all sorts of liberties and freedoms, which our parents had denied themselves. Often these were in the realm of personal life and personal relationships, particularly in sexual relationships. The BBC, like many other organisations, had an intake of young people who were filled with these ideas and intoxicated by the new liberties which this generation promised itself. Ever since then the BBC has instinctively allied itself with any campaign which is transgressive.

Let's take the abortion issue. I've never heard a fair minded discussion on the BBC about abortion. What I have often heard is reports about countries which in their reactionary stupidity have failed to fully to implement the idea of abortion on demand. Just a few months ago, there was the question of extending abortion rights to Northern Ireland. That was an issue where there was a clear question of democratic accountability. The whole point of devolution is that the different parts of the United Kingdom should be able to make their own rules and regulations in certain areas of life. But that was not the line taken by the BBC. Their line was why are these people in Northern Ireland being so reactionary about something which is an obvious good. The tone of the coverage was laudatory: parliament was stepping in and correcting this obvious wrong. The BBC lines up on these arguments, almost without thinking. It's an absolutely instinctive response.

Now, I should say something about my ex-colleagues. Many of them are very nice people. They tend to be very well educated middle class people. They're very congenial people to work with, and the BBC is a very interesting place to work. But they have a curious blind spot and it is that they do not see their views as political. The BBC tends to see its own position, which is born of its internal culture as being something which is, as it were, value free. It is a combination of what in their mind is decency and civilised values. In the Brexit debate, the BBC instinctively took the view that leaving the EU was the wrong thing to do. It was portrayed as a wrong and wicked thing to do and some sort of mental aberration.

The BBC lacks the facility for self ex-

amination because it believes itself to be right. And anyone who criticises the BBC or takes issue with it is therefore putting themselves, in the BBC's eyes, in the wrong. And not only are you wrong, you're probably evil.

When I was still at the BBC I wrote to all the governors of the BBC pointing out what I felt to be lapses in the creed of impartiality. But the governors would not engage and they still will not engage with their critics. I think it's because if they did engage they would lose the argument. They're in a position where because of their independence and their guaranteed income they're insulated from the pressures which apply to everyone else. It's a great irony that every institution in the country, from the monarchy to the parish council, is held to account by the BBC. Everyone can be hauled up by the BBC and cross-examined and put in the doc by the BBC, but the BBC itself, who can do that to it? There is nobody who can hold it to account. Ofcom is said to be its regulator but is mainly staffed by ex-BBC people. In fact, it was an ex-BBC man who set up Ofcom. They are all in it together.

Long Grooming Process

My view of the BBC is that it has been involved in a long grooming process of the British public. It does this unconsciously. It doesn't see its own bias. Secularism passes itself off as neutrality, but of course it's not. Secularism is not neutral but is actually hostile to religious belief and the BBC is infused from stem to stern with a belief in secularism and a celebration of atheism. It was no surprise that the BBC celebrated Richard Dawkins's book *The God Delusion*. They publicised it mightily through the World Service all across the world because it was a book which really chimed with their central ethos.

The grooming process which the BBC undertakes with us, it's passive audience, is a very subtle thing. Here's a trivial example but an important one. The Six O'Clock News on Radio 4 has always been regarded as a special kind of news bulletin. The old BBC idea was that if you listened to the Six O'Clock news on Radio 4, you would be getting a full breakdown of all the news you needed to know.

Well, the other day, one of the items was the fact that the Women's Institute had for the first time put on the cover of its magazine, a trans woman. You might well ask yourself why in all that had happened in the world that day was that picked out by the editor of the Six O'Clock

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Turning the tide

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News as an item that should be covered in that important bulletin. It shows you the way in which ideas are insidiously slipped into everyday coverage. The purpose of such items is to gradually accustomise the public to the idea that 'trans women are women'. The BBC carries this social contagion into all its programmes: the news, drama, comedy and light entertainment.

Why is this happening? Why is the BBC so blinkered and one sided in the way that it presents the issues? My explanation is this. The BBC in its higher echelons is composed of people who are very similar in certain regards. A disproportionate number of them have been through the Oxbridge mill, they've been exposed to ideas about the Enlightenment and what the Enlightenment meant. They have been taught and have come to believe that the underpinnings of British society and British public morality owe nothing to their Christian antecedents but everything to the Enlightenment, which was when the superstition ended and the light came in and that's why we've got progress. These are unquestioned assumptions within the BBC, and you can see it in almost everything they produce.

The news is not something that falls out of a tree at your feet every morning. It is constructed in the newsroom by the news editor and his reporters and producers. The news is a construct and the BBC's construct of the news is one sided and propagandist. There is a kind of Neo Marxism in the BBC, a cultural Marxism, by which I mean that the salient features of Marxism: it's atheism, it's collectivism, it's disregard for religious tradition and family tradition, all these things are deeply embedded in it, and the BBC, essentially regurgitates those kind of opinions on a daily basis.

Constructing the News

How does the BBC therefore control the debate? You may have heard of the Overton window. Overton was an American sociologist who had this idea of trying to understand how

public debate is controlled and he came up with this idea that the public debate exists within a window. The crucial thing is, where's the window frame? Overton said that within the window you have a range from, what is unacceptable, scary and radical to what is current government policy and in between you have various shades of opinion. The trick, which is played on us all is this. There is a simulacrum of a free and vigorous debate, but you have to look at where the window frame is. What is outside the frame? Why is it that the voice of Family Education Trust, or other similar groups, is not heard on the BBC? It is because within this construct of the window FET's views lie outside the frame. And this leads to all sorts of absurdities.

For example in the last few years there has been a flurry of interest about increasing incidence of mental health problems among young people. If I was setting out to debate that and investigate it I think a very fair avenue of debate would be what has the transgender campaign or the rate of family breakdown done to the mental health of children? Many psychiatrists would agree that family stability is probably the most important factor in a child's mental well being. But that is not an angle you will ever hear pursued. You will hear people expressing concern about the rise in mental health issues in children. But there's no follow through on any angle which would challenge the underlying assumptions of the so called 'progressive agenda'. That agenda says that free and easy divorce, or cohabitation without marriage or sequential relationships are all well and good and they are equally valid and good for all involved. This is obviously a lie. What is obviously true is that for children to be brought up by their two biological parents is the best possible circumstance for a child to be raised. But it's not an argument you'll ever hear on the BBC.

Getting a fair hearing

So how do we get a fair hearing? How do we get these socially conservative issues raised on the BBC, or in other media? There are things you can do. We've recently had the advent of a new TV station GB News.

This is a very healthy development, because it means that you've got an alternative. If we look at what happened in America with Fox News, that changed the whole media landscape. Fox News found an audience, which didn't want to be told the same old thing by CNN, CBS and all the rest of them.

Their audience wanted to hear something which chimed with their views, where their voices were heard. And that's what's been lacking in the British media scene. I think that GB news will be sympathetic to the views of FET and similar groups. I would advise the FET, and every other campaigning group which is currently shut out by virtue of being outside the window, that you should concentrate on this new outlet. Get your views on there. If GB News is a success that will force a reaction from the BBC.

The result of the Brexit referendum was an enormous upset for the BBC because it is so used to getting its own way. But Brexit proved that despite the BBC's loud voice, not everyone is persuaded. I am sure that on the transgender issue, out in voterland they are on our side, not the BBC's. There's a residual common sense in people but that common sense is not nourished by the media. It's easy for people to feel isolated and that's where GB News and outlets like talk radio come in. As a campaigning group, you've got to make merry where you can, you've got to make hay where the sun shines and GB News might be somewhere where the sun is shining for you right now.

The Brexit result tells us that the tide can be turned. FET must keep fighting because the tide will turn. The arguments you are making are not only common sense, they are right. They are morally right and right for children and for families. So stick at it.

Robin Aitken's full talk can be found on FET's YouTube channel at the following link:
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Interview with Rachel Rooney, author of *My Body is Me!*

Lucy Marsh

Rachel Rooney trained and worked as a teacher of Special Needs for many years before re-discovering her love of writing poetry. She taught across a range of school settings and has particular interest and experience working with pupils with ASC (Autism). She is now an award-winning children's poet and picture book writer. Rachel was shortlisted for the CLIPPA Poetry Award in 2015 and 2019 and was longlisted for the Carnegie Medal. She has also been a judge for both the CLIPPA and the Betjeman Poetry Prize.



Rachel Rooney

Rachel partnered with author Jessica Ahlberg and campaign group Transgender Trend to write a rhyming picture book *My Body is Me!*, aimed at helping children to be comfortable with their own bodies. Sadly, as a result of this book, Rachel has been targeted the transgender lobby. We got in touch to ask her about the book and her experience writing it.

What's your background and what

led you to becoming a children's author?

Before becoming a published author, I trained as a teacher of primary and special education and taught for many years in a range of school settings. I have experience working with children with autism, developmental delay, physical and sensory disabilities and those with behavioural and emotional challenges. My last post was as a pre-school teacher working as part of a multi-disciplinary assessment team.

My childhood interest in poetry was reignited after attending a children's writing course at the relatively late age of 40, just after my third son started school. I continued to write while working as a teacher when my first award-winning poetry collection for children, *The Language of Cat*, was published. I've had several more poetry collections and picture books published since. Until recently, my work has involved going into mainstream schools as a visiting author.

What was your motivation for writing *My Body is Me!*

I had been closely following the gender identity debate for a year or so when I was approached by Jessica Ahlberg (the illustrator of *My Body is Me!*) to collaborate on a picture book to be published by Transgender Trend, whose work I was familiar with. Like them, I had concerns around the ethics of social and medical transitioning of children and the reductive sex-stereotyping that they were being exposed to within the teachings of gender ideology.

I was worried about the numbers of youth, particularly girls, who present as autistic making life-altering decisions before fully understanding the impact autism might have on them. I say this as someone who not only has experi-

ence working with such children, but as someone who has raised an autistic son and with a late autism diagnosis myself.

After discussing with Jessica about what messages we would like to convey within the book I wrote the text and we then worked closely together to ensure the illustrations reflected these messages. The book is entirely inclusive of all children. The text does not exclude those with significant physical or sensory impairments. The characters are diverse and it features (amongst others) gender non-conforming girls and boys both in presentation and behaviour.

I've written teacher's notes to accompany the book and Jessica has created some worksheet templates. I've recorded a reading of the book for those who are interested. All of these can be downloaded from the Transgender Trend website.

How prevalent are the use of picture books for young children with pro-transgender messages, and have you found that these are used frequently in schools?

There are numerous picture books being published that promote the wrong body message to young children. It can take the form of a boy teddy bear becoming a girl teddy bear (it swaps a bow tie for a hair bow), the retelling of fairy tales (a girl cuts her hair, puts on a suit and goes to the ball – now a transgender prince), a story of a non-binary guinea pig (don't ask!) or more explicitly, an illustrated image of elective double mastectomy on the cover of a picture book purporting to promote 'cool' bodies to the very young.

The messages given to young children are understandably reductive – there's no psychological nuance or physical reality involved.

Continued overleaf...

Interview with Rachel Rooney

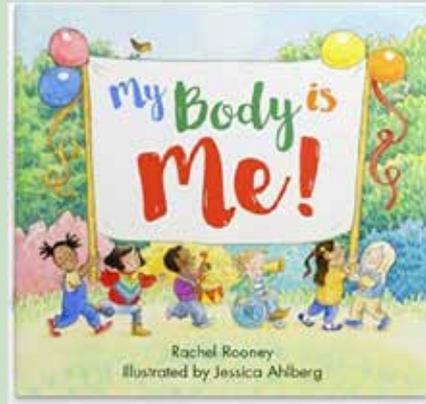
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It relies on magical thinking, which is fine in itself, but the literature is marketed as a starting point to introduce gender identity as fact while promoting sex stereotypes to impressionable young children. These books are used regularly in schools and are often recommended online within diversity and inclusion lists or as part of school packs, often alongside genuinely enriching literature.

What has the public reaction been to *My Body is Me*?

I knew I'd get some kickback from online trolls or gender identity activists but I received more than I'd anticipated. I had abusive emails sent through my author website, threats from anonymous accounts and trolling attacks on my other unrelated children's books, targeting publishers of my work. However, I wasn't prepared for the very public and defamatory attacks on my character and motives, the questioning of my suitability to work in schools as an author, and the misrepresentation of the contents of the book – all this coming from a handful of fellow authors, illustrators and librarians. I've also received some industry coercion from colleagues to remain quiet on this topic. Of course, I have many more private

messages from those who agreed with me but are too scared to speak out or even 'like' an article or comment on Twitter. There's a climate of fear around this issue, which is worrying – there should always be a space for dialogue when children, treatment pathways and safeguarding are involved.



It's been a difficult two years for me but I've gained many supportive friends both online and in real life who have helped me stay upright. It's also been wonderful to note the overwhelmingly positive reaction our little book has had with young children. It's become a firm favourite in many households.

How can supporters get hold of the book?

My Body is Me! can only be bought directly from the Transgender Trend website, I think. I have no involvement in the production or distribution of the book, nor do I get a percentage of

sales. It was simply mine and Jessica's gift to them and we are very pleased the book is out there.

Are there any books that you can recommend to parents of older children who want to support their child to be happy in their own body?

The wrong body message is a relatively recent phenomena in children's publishing so I think most books published before 2015 will be grounded in material reality. I am aware of a fantastic booklet being produced as I write, which tackles sex and gender from a gender-critical position and will be aimed for young teens. This will be available in September 2021. Watch this space...

Have you got any more books in the pipeline?

My final poetry book *Hey, Girl!*, (a semi-autobiographical collection for young teens) is out this August, and a picture book about emotions, *The Fears You Fear* (the third in a trilogy) is out in January 2022. I have no plans to publish after that.

Anything else you'd like to share with FET supporters?

Yes, my website is here if you want to support my work.

<https://www.rachelrooneypoet.com/>

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