

### **Inclusive Practice Steer**

- A new cross government network has been established - Sex Equality and Equity Network (SEEN).
- The network ascribes to Gender Critical Beliefs which was recently tested at Employment Appeal Tribunal and was found to be a Protected Belief under the Equality Act 2010.
- Employers must provide a safe environment for trans people, and they continue to risk liability under s109(4) of the Equality Act for any acts against trans people committed in the course of employment. The right to be protected from discrimination and harassment also applies to those with gender-critical beliefs. Just as an employer will not wish to create an atmosphere which prioritises one religion over others, so it is with gender-critical beliefs.

### **Defra**

- Defra as an organisation is committed to creating and maintaining a diverse and inclusive working environment for all our staff. This includes valuing difference and diversity of thought.
- As a public body, Defra is also required to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010. This applies in relation to all protected characteristics. It requires us to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

### **Why has the new SEEN network been allowed to set up?**

- The new network is a cross government network, recognised by the Civil Service Inclusive Practice Team, based in Cabinet Office. The network will focus on the protected characteristic of sex, and equality between men and women, from the perspective of the protected characteristic of what are often termed 'gender critical beliefs'. We recognise the right of all groups of staff who share a protected belief to form networks.

### **But this network is transphobic/bigoted and promotes hateful views**

- The new network is not seeking to challenge the existence of any colleagues and has stated its aims to encourage a diversity of voices and open and respectful dialogue and tolerance between those with differing beliefs and experiences. The network is not seeking to promote hate.
- Whilst we recognise that there is a wider discussion going on in society which has sometimes included hurtful comments made on both sides, it is important to respond to what this network says without making assumptions based on what has been said by others elsewhere.
- The Defra position is clear. There is no place for harassment, bullying or hatred in the workplace and it is therefore important that everyone is careful about how they express their beliefs. We will not tolerate bullying or harassment of our trans colleagues, and neither will we tolerate bullying and harassment of colleagues who share the protected characteristic of holding gender critical beliefs.
- We need to ensure our workplace is a safe place for all our colleagues.

### **The way forward**

- We have been consulting on a set of principles for how we communicate with each other, that make clear that all communications must be respectful, professional, and appropriate for the workplace. We need to work together and respect differences of belief (that are protected in law), support open and respectful dialogue, listen to each other, and understand each other's perspectives.
- We will take action when behaviours fall short of these principles.