

From: Nicola Williams Fair Play For Women <nicolawilliams@fairplayforwomen.com>

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To: maggie.carver@ofcom.org.uk <maggie.carver@ofcom.org.uk>

Cc: burnst@parliament.uk <burnst@parliament.uk>

Subject: FAO Chair of OfCom

Dear Maggie Carver,

I write to you seeking clarity and reassurance about the witness statements made by Dame Melanie Dawes at the DCMS Select Committee hearing on 'The future of public service broadcasting' on 15th December.

She was asked by John Nicolson MP for her views on how the BBC should best provide balance in its reporting of transgender issues. He suggested that the BBC are calling in 'transphobic groups' to give a counter argument and likened this to asking a racist organisation to comment on equality for black people.

In her responses she said more than once that she "agreed" with him and that this was "something that we've been talking to Stonewall about" and "what we're going to try to do is to engage with Stonewall who are actually really expert on this". She said Stonewall had "raised this actively with us" and that she had "spoken to the chief executive [of Stonewall] myself". She said she wants to make sure that broadcasters can cover the debate "without causing offence and without bringing inappropriate voices to the table on questions like this".

This is concerning because 'trans issues' includes within it a much wider discussion about how some laws and treatment regimens advocated by transgender pressure groups could impact on other groups in society. This is not a settled issue and remains an active and contentious area of public debate.

Transgender pressure groups frequently refer to individuals and organisations who wish to uphold the existing sex-based rights of women and girls as 'transphobic' and 'anti-trans'. They hold a position of 'no debate' and refuse to participate in any broadcast interviews alongside any advocates for sex-based rights. Indeed, I have direct experience of being [dropped from a BBC radio discussion myself](#) when a transgender panellist branded Fair Play For Women as 'like the Ku Klux Klan'. This is a gross misrepresentation of my organisation who's stated aims are respectful, constructive, and evidence-based debate. As such, we have been engaged as stakeholder representatives by a range of respected organisations including Sport England, World Rugby, IPSO, Ministry of Justice and the Government Equalities Office.

For this reason, it is wrong for OfCom to be engaging exclusively with representatives lobbying for one side of the debate. It is particularly concerning that Stonewall is considered the 'experts on this' by Dame Dawes suggesting that they will be having undue influence on OfCom's view on what is the 'right information to give to broadcasters' and who are the 'inappropriate voices'.

As a neutral arbiter OfCom must take care to hear a full range of views so that it can develop fair solutions that work for everyone.

With that in mind, I would like to request a meeting with you to offer an alternative perspective on this very sensitive and contentious area of public debate.

Best wishes,

Dr Nicola Williams
Director, [Fair Play For Women](#) Ltd

For ease of reference here is a transcript of the relevant question and answer and a link to the video recording of the session [here](#).

John Nicholson: "I notice the BBC seems to be under the impression that it's got to balance all its reports about trans issues now by calling in transphobic groups like the so called LGB alliance to give a counter argument. I mean I think that this is absurd because you would never do a report on racism for example and call in a racist organisation to say that they don't think that black people have a right to equality. What can the BBC do to address this, and do you think that it's buckling under a very well-funded concerted campaign to attack trans people which seems to have been given undue prominence recently?"

Dame Melanie Dawes: "I think that's a very good point and actually a very good example of something that we've been talking to Stonewall about actually, about how can the broadcasters, when they do feel they need to bring balance into a debate, do it in an appropriate way, rather than in the way that you've just described which can actually be extremely inappropriate. So, I don't think that there is a lack of will here by the BBC or others, but I do think that we can do more to basically give people the information they need to be able to make the judgements in some areas that can be quite contentious and where the debate can move quite quickly but to make sure that they've got, that they're doing the right thing."

John Nicholson: "...the way that the BBC is behaving with trans people at the moment shows that that mindset is still in existence 25, 30 years on, because many of the arguments that are used to attack trans people now are the same arguments used to attack gay people in the 1990s"

Dame Melanie Dawes: "I can only agree with you Mr Nicholson and I'm just so glad that things have moved on over these last decades but there is still more we need to do. And I do agree with you, and I think what we're going to try to do is to engage with Stonewall who are actually really expert on this and who raised this actively with us, I've spoken to the chief executive myself, and make sure that we try to make sure we give the right information to our broadcasters so that they can steer their way through these debates without causing offence and without bringing inappropriate voices to the table on questions like this."