

Politics

Scottish politicians clash over gender recognition reform and Tory attacks on 'woke' culture

Jun 15 • Written by Patrick Kelleher

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The panelists at the PinkNews Edinburgh reception 2023. (Ben Fitzhugh)

Senior Scottish politicians clashed on the direction of gender recognition reform and the future of LGBTQ+ rights, during a fiery debate at the PinkNews Edinburgh

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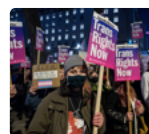
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parliamentary reception.

Social justice secretary and SNP MSP Shirley-Anne Somerville was joined by representatives from the Scottish Greens, the Conservatives, Labour and the Lib Dems for a panel discussion at the Scottish Parliament on Wednesday (14 June).

During the wide-ranging discussion, politicians reflected on gender recognition reform, the UK government’s unprecedented **Section 35 order**, harmful media coverage of trans issues and free speech.

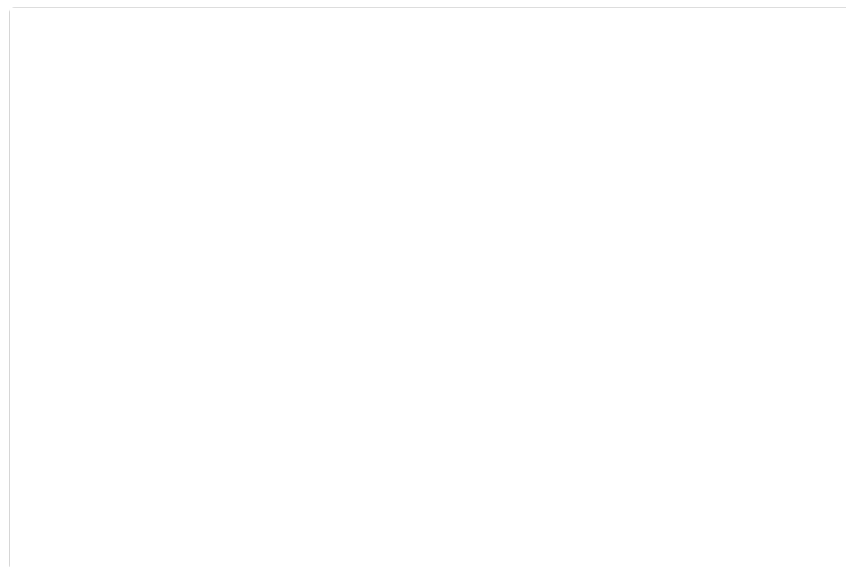
Somerville reaffirmed her party’s commitment to getting gender recognition reform over the line after their bill was blocked by Westminster.

“Our previous first minister **Nicola Sturgeon** had a deep, personal commitment to this agenda and a real desire for change in this country,” Somerville told the PinkNews Edinburgh reception.

She also said the new SNP leader and first minister Humza Yousaf understands the issues faced by LGBTQ+ people because he too has faced discrimination based on his ethnicity.

“Humza has been there, yes in an entirely different way, but he knows what it’s like to be othered.

“He knows what it’s like to be the person that people doubt and question in a room.”



Ellie Gomersall, moderator of the panel discussion at the PinkNews Edinburgh parliamentary reception. (Ben Fitzhugh)

Later in the discussion, Somerville vigorously defended **Scotland’s Gender Recognition Reform (GRR) Bill**, saying it had been debated by parliament

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and had undergone a robust consultation process.

“Now I can respect that people have different views about different parts of the bill. However, for me this comes down to a principle; you either believe in the rights of everyone in our society, including the trans community, or you don’t,” she said.

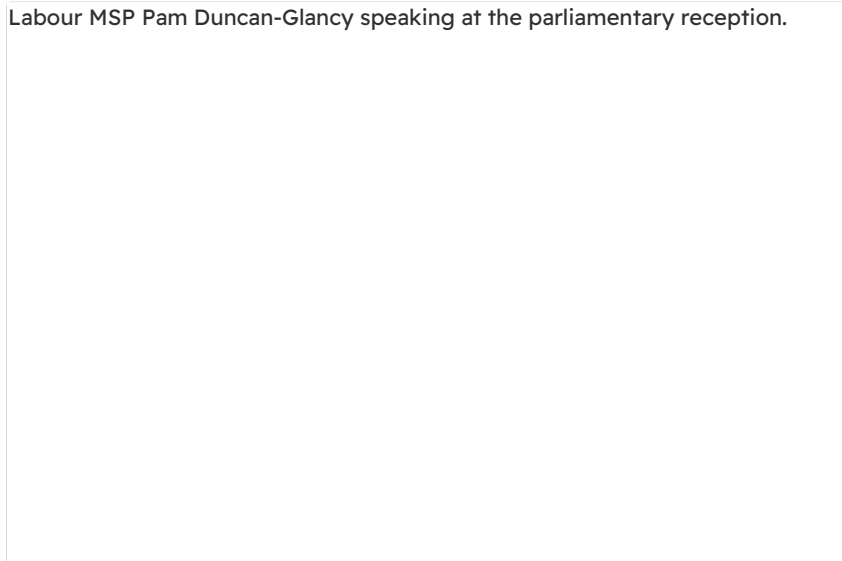
Elsewhere in the discussion, Scottish Greens co-leader Patrick Harvie reflected on his experience of growing up gay in the 1980s and spoke out against anti-LGBTQ+ abuse on social media.

“I can’t tweet something positive about my community without being called pervert, deviant, nonce, paedophile. Trans people standing up for their own basic existence get it tenfold worse than that,” Harvie said.

He also spoke out against the weaponisation of free speech by the far-right, arguing that homophobia, misogyny and racism prevent minoritised groups from participating freely in society.

“We need a way of talking about freedom of speech which is inclusive of everyone’s freedom of speech and which is protective of everyone’s freedom of speech, and that means limiting the ability of people who are more powerful to destroy the feelings of others,” Harvie continued.

Labour MSP Pam Duncan-Glancy speaking at the parliamentary reception.



Labour MSP Pam Duncan-Glancy speaking at the parliamentary reception. (Ben McHugh)

There were chaotic scenes when Scottish Conservatives MSP Craig Hoy claimed that he was a “trans ally” while admitting that he voted against the Gender Recognition Reform (GRR) bill.

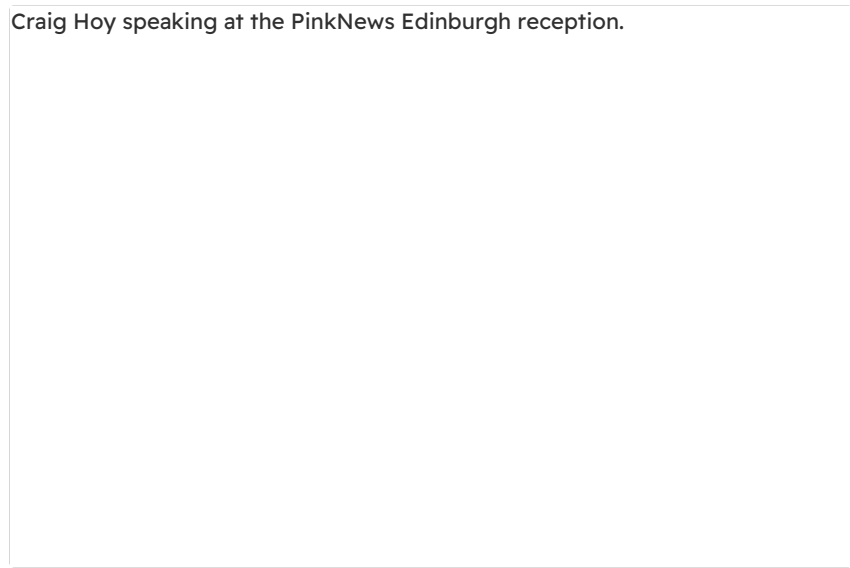
Hoy was repeatedly heckled and interrupted by members of the audience who questioned his stance on trans rights.

There was laughter and applause from the audience when Harvie hit out at Hoy and the Conservatives for their use of the word “woke”.

At one point, Harvie interrupted Hoy, asking: “When your colleagues in the UK government use language like ‘woke’ as a slur, as a derogatory term, does it not make you cringe a bit?”

Elsewhere, Labour MSP Pam Duncan-Glancy spoke about her experiences as a disabled woman and reflected on her journey to LGBTQ+ allyship.

The PinkNews Edinburgh parliamentary reception was launched and sponsored by Scottish Conservatives MSP Jamie Greene, who was one of a small number of Tories who voted in favour of the GRR bill.



Craig Hoy speaking at the PinkNews Edinburgh reception. (Ben Fitzhugh)

While Hoy was heckled and criticised for his opposition to gender recognition reform, Greene was applauded for reaffirming his commitment to advancing LGBTQ+ rights.

“I can take the snubs in the bar. I can take the booing on top of the Pride bus. I can do that because that’s my job,” Greene said.

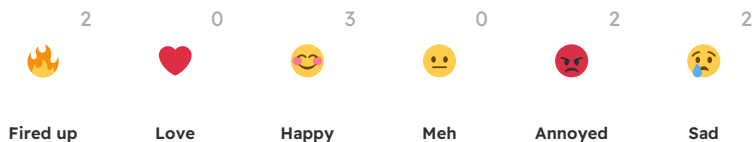
“But here’s what is unfair. What is unfair is the young gay lad who’s afraid to come out, a couple who are beaten up after a night out in the town, the young trans person who reads the headlines where they use the word ‘trans’ in the same sentence as the words ‘monster’ or ‘pervert’.”

The reception took place amid the ongoing fallout from the Gender Recognition Reform (GRR) bill, which was unexpectedly blocked by Westminster in January 2023 after a majority of MSPs voted in its favour.

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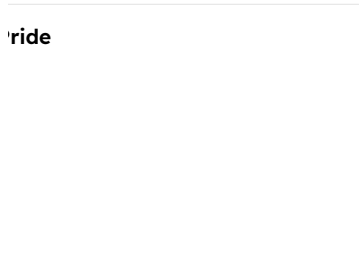
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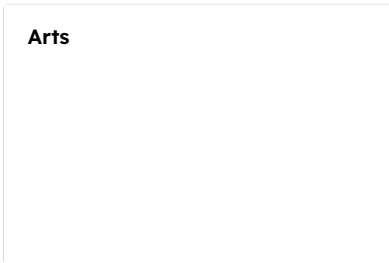




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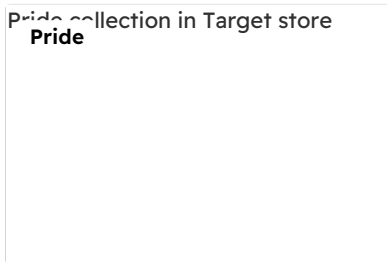
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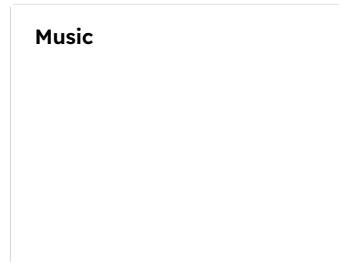
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