



Published on *Dods Information* (<https://www.dodsinformation.com>)

[Home](#) > The Sexual Offences Act 1967: 50 years on

---

## The Sexual Offences Act 1967: 50 years on

Written by Lizzie Hendy, Monitoring Content Manager on 25 August 2017



2017 marks 50 years since the Sexual Offences Act 1967 came into force. As the UK marks this milestone, campaigners reflect on how far LGBT legal rights have come and what changes are still needed.

Overall they note that the law change was only a [partial decriminalisation](#) [1]. The Act decriminalised homosexual acts between consenting men, however it set the age of consent at 21, compared to 16 for heterosexual couples.

Restrictions were placed on what was considered a private act, and the reform [was not extended to Scotland until 1980 and to Northern Ireland until 1982](#) [2]. Moreover it did not include the armed forces or the merchant navy. Campaigner Peter Tatchell [commented](#) [3] that prosecutions increased in the years following the Act and “remaining anti-gay laws were policed even more aggressively than before.”

Since then, significant progress has been made on LGBT rights, with the passing of marriage equality in 2013 and a record number of openly lesbian, gay and bisexual MPs [voted into Parliament in 2017](#) [4].

However, “when it comes to rights and protections for trans people, there is still a long way to go” Prime Minister Theresa May acknowledged.

To have their gender legally recognised, transgender people must currently obtain a formal medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria and prove to a panel that they have lived as their self-identified gender for two years.

The Government has long been called to action as the financial cost, vagueness of the requirements, and bureaucratic burden have been criticised. As a result of this, progressive steps have been taken by the Conservative Party and Equalities Secretary Justine Greening, who is openly gay herself. A consultation on the Gender Recognition Act is [expected this Autumn](#) [5] which aims to simplify the process for people who wish to have their gender recognised.

Women and Equalities Committee Chair Maria Miller [welcomed](#) [6] this [stressing](#) [7] the process was “bureaucratic, expensive and even humiliating, and the burden of providing documentation can cause people significant distress.” Suzanna Hopwood, a member of the Stonewall Trans Advisory Group, [added](#) [5] that it was vital that the reform “removes the requirements for medical evidence and an intrusive interview panel.”

Another area where LGBT people are currently treated differently under the law is blood donation. Heterosexual donors may practice unprotected sex and donate, while gay or bisexual men who practise safe sex with a known partner are excluded for 12 months, despite statistics that in 2015 in the UK, [38 per cent of new HIV diagnoses](#) [8] came from heterosexual sexual activity.

In July, Greening [announced](#) [5] that the Government would make it easier for gay men to give blood, dropping the 12 month restriction to three months. The Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs had recommended the changes after concluding that new testing processes were accurate and safe.

Ruth Hunt, Chief Executive of Stonewall, [commented](#) [5] that changes to the rules were welcome, but called for individualised risk assessments. She added that the announcement should be a stepping stone to a system that did not automatically exclude most gay and bisexual men.

Another question for the LGBT community is the issue of marriage equality within the Church of England.

Ministers within the Church are at present prevented from conducting or blessing same sex marriages, but have shown themselves somewhat open to the issue. The Church has passed the issue to [working groups](#) [9], however these will not report until 2020. In July the Prime Minister [commented](#) [10] that while the issue “had to be a matter for the Church”, she urged them “to reflect as attitudes will generally change as society changes.” In July, the Church of England passed motions [welcoming](#) [11] transgender people within the church and [supporting](#) [12] a ban on conversion therapy.

Overall while many institutions have come a long way since the 1967 law change, there are still significant hurdles to overcome and as figures show, LGBT people are often still struggling to feel fully accepted - visible in persistent [hate crime](#) [13], [bullying](#) [14] and higher [self-harming incidents](#) [15]. Finally, the outcomes of the post-election deal struck between the Conservatives and the Democratic Unionist Party, historically opposed to marriage equality, remain to be seen

[Society and welfare](#) [16]

Lizzie Hendy, Monitoring Content Manager

---

**Source URL:** <https://www.dodsinformation.com/blog/sexual-offences-act-1967-50-years>

**Links**

- [1] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/27/true-equality-took-longer-gay-people-sexual-offences-act-1967>
- [2] <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/overview/sexuality20thcentury/>
- [3] <https://inews.co.uk/opinion/arrests-didnt-end-gay-sex-decriminalised-1967-rocketed/>
- [4] <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/lgbt-mps-election-results-final-seats-record-numbers-gay-lesbian-bisexual-trans-a7782831.html>
- [5] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-action-to-promote-lgbt-equality>
- [6] <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/women-and-equalities-committee/news-parliament-2017/gender-transition-chair-statement-17-19/>
- [7] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2016-12-01/debates/D4F283FB-2C02-4C8C-8C7E-BEAB889D1425/TransgenderEquality>
- [8] <http://www.fpa.org.uk/factsheets/sexually-transmitted-infections#hiv>
- [9] <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2017/02/result-of-the-vote-on-the-house-of-bishops-report.aspx>
- [10] <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/07/19/prime-minister-church-should-reflect-allowing-gay-couples-marry/>
- [11] <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2017/07/welcoming-transgender-people.aspx>
- [12] <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2017/07/general-synod-backs-ban-on-convulsion-therapy.aspx>
- [13] <http://www.galop.org.uk/the-hate-crime-report/>
- [14] <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/news/stonewall-school-report-2017-anti-lgbt-bullying-down-lgbt-young-people-still-risk>
- [15] <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/media/lgbt-facts-and-figures>
- [16] <https://www.dodsinformation.com/categories/society-and-welfare>