

## Same-sex marriage: a 'very dangerous measure' that threatens the freedom of us all



*Ann Widdecombe addressing the Conservative Party fringe meeting, organised by the Coalition for Marriage in a packed Birmingham Town Hall on 8 October.*

**Addressing a fringe meeting of the Conservative Party conference organised by the Coalition for Marriage (C4M), former shadow Home Secretary Ann Widdecombe warned a packed Birmingham Town Hall that the Prime Minister's plans to re-define marriage present a serious threat to liberty of conscience and freedom of speech.** Commenting on her speech, which was punctuated by vigorous applause and finally culminated in a standing ovation, a BBC political reporter remarked, 'David Cameron could only dream of this sort of fervour when he delivers his big conference speech on Wednesday.'<sup>1</sup>

Dismissing charges that she was being alarmist, Miss Widdecombe pointed to the experience of countries in which marriage had already been redefined, where the words 'husband', 'wife', 'mother' and 'father' had been written out of the law and where more than two people were being considered legitimate 'parties to a marriage'.

### Legal opinion

Referring to a legal opinion prepared by the leading human rights lawyer Aidan O'Neill QC, Miss Widdecombe noted that if same-sex marriage were to be introduced, it could lead to the sacking of an NHS chaplain who preached in his own church that marriage is only possible between a man and a woman and the dismissal of a teacher who did not wish to teach about same-sex marriage in school. Potential foster carers could be turned down if they opposed same-sex marriage and faith groups or other organisations that did not support the new definition of marriage could be denied the use of council-owned facilities.

Miss Widdecombe cited several cases where individuals and organisations had already suffered the consequences of supporting traditional standards:

- A registrar had been dismissed for changing her shifts with perfectly willing colleagues to avoid conducting civil partnerships.
- Christian bed and breakfast owners had been taken to court for refusing a double bed under their own roof to homosexuals, despite having exactly the same policy towards unmarried heterosexuals.
- An author had been quizzed by police after saying she did not support homosexual adoption.
- Roman Catholic adoption agencies had been forced to close.
- A housing official had been demoted for saying on his own *personal* Facebook site that he thought same-sex marriage was a step too far.

'Is that how we really want Britain to look in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?' Miss Widdecombe asked. Do we really want a country in which nobody who believes in a definition of marriage honoured throughout the world is 'able to be a printer, a website designer, a guest house owner, a teacher, a housing official, a registrar, an NHS chaplain, and adoption worker, a foster carer – to name just a few of those who would be affected'?

### Not simple and not wise

She argued that it is not remotely sensible or wise to tamper with the definition of marriage. Once people understand the implications of what is being proposed, very few support it, and it is certainly not something people want the government to give priority to. What might appear to

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# How casual attitudes towards teenage sex are placing vulnerable girls at risk

The Review of Multi-agency Responses to the Sexual Exploitation of Children conducted by the Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children Board raises serious issues about child protection that extend far beyond the failure of one local authority to arrest the systematic abuse of vulnerable teenage girls on its watch.

The safeguarding board's report records that during 2007, the newly-formed Sexual Exploitation Working Group identified 50 children and young people who were 'considered to be affected by, or to be at risk of, sexual exploitation. The children in this group were overwhelmingly girls; they were aged between 10 and 17 years old.'

Yet the authorities in Rochdale failed to take any decisive action to protect these vulnerable children. In fact, the report reveals a disturbingly blasé attitude towards underage sexual activity. It records that:

*[C]hildren at risk of sexual exploitation were being provided with support by agencies such as Early Break, the young people's drug and alcohol advisory service, and the Crisis Intervention Team, which provides one-to-one advice to vulnerable young people in respect of their sexual health. However, for those children who came into contact with children's social care, it often appeared that 'no further action would be taken. Case files state that the children were often considered to be 'making their own choices' and to be 'engaging in consensual sexual activity'.*

In other words, because teenage sexual activity was considered normal and natural and because to suggest otherwise is to be judgmental, the statutory authorities in Rochdale did little more than provide sexual health advice to minimise the risk

of sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancy. The report relates that:

*One of the victim's parents reported that the police and CSC [Children's Social Care] did not tell them what was happening and said that their 16-year-old daughter was just hanging out with a 'bad crowd' and was making choices about relationships and sexual partners...*

*The victims describe being trapped with no hope of escape from the abuse. They felt unable to tell their parents or friends what was happening as they felt they would not be believed. A common disclosure by the young people was that even when they cooperated with agencies, nothing changed, the abuse continued.*



Far from protecting the girls concerned, the assumptions made by local authority personnel and the police placed them at

risk of further abuse. The Labour MP for Rochdale, Simon Danczuk, commented:

*What this report shows is that young girls' cries for help were systematically ignored and I'm in no doubt that the poor response by council services would have emboldened the criminals to make them think they could carry on abusing with impunity.*

*They knew the girls had been to the police and social services and because nothing happened they must have thought, 'We can get away with raping girls for as long as we want.'*<sup>1</sup>



Simon Danczuk

In a recent House of Lords debate, Baroness Butler-Sloss, a former President of the Family Division of the High Court remarked:

*There appears to have been a culture of non-interference because they were seen as bad girls but this was a form of human trafficking. The law against exploiting children is particularly there to protect children from themselves. A man who has sex with any girl under the age of 16 is committing a criminal offence... I cannot understand why the criminal aspect was not recognised and effective action taken. The accounts of the plight of these girls...are a disgrace. As a nation, we should feel ashamed that we cannot protect our teenage girls. It is a distortion of national well-being.*<sup>2</sup>

Over eight years ago, Dr Sarah Nelson, an expert on child sexual abuse from Edinburgh University, warned that 'child protection agencies, schools and sexual health projects have not taken under-age sex seriously' and that 'liberal people in sexual health programmes...have failed to address issues of coercion and macho sexism even among similar-aged teenagers, and act as if everyone was giving freely informed consent at 12, 13 or 14 [with the result that] numerous cases of coerced sex have been missed by well-meaning people.'<sup>3</sup> Yet we have still failed to learn the lesson and the persistent exaltation of children's 'autonomous choices' above the law is continuing to leave them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

## Notes

1. Martin Robinson, 'Council and police had 127 warnings about sex abuse in town where Asian gang raped dozens of children, finds damning report', *Daily Mail*, 27 September 2012.
2. HL 11 October 2012, cols 1140-1141.
3. *Community Care*, 19-25 August 2004.

• Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children Board, *Review of Multi-agency Responses to the Sexual Exploitation of Children*, September 2012.

## Turning a blind eye to underage sex: 'a form of reckless abandonment'

Sunday Telegraph columnist Jenny McCartney makes some incisive comments in the light of the Rochdale case

"[O]ne fact was glaringly clear: most of the girls involved were below the age of consent, so what was happening was obviously against the law. But that apparently didn't strike the authorities with any force, partly because the age of consent has so often come to be regarded as virtually irrelevant. It started out, some years ago, as a kind of pragmatic exercise in damage limitation: many girls did have sex below the age of 16, and the concern of the authorities was not to dissuade them from having sex – which it deemed a lost cause – but to prevent them from getting pregnant. Now, pragmatism has effectively hardened into a form of reckless abandonment.

"Last year, in Britain, nearly 5,000 girls below the age of consent were given long-term contraceptive implants or injections. Did anyone bother to investigate exactly who was having illegal intercourse with these under-age girls, who were being so diligently primed by the authorities for pregnancy-free sex, and in what circumstances?...

"[I]f under-age sex no longer feels illegal to those who are under-age, then you can bet that it will matter less and less to predatory adults as well. In Britain we have abandoned innumerable young girls to a host of risky situations, ranging from the regrettable to the life-destroying."

• Jenny McCartney, 'Teenage girls suffer as we look the other way', *Sunday Telegraph*, 30 September 2012.

## Same-sex marriage a 'very dangerous measure'

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many a simple little measure at first glance was in reality not simple at all, but very dangerous. 'I know you, David Cameron,' Miss Widdecombe declared, 'and I know that this is not the sort of Britain that you want. So drop this measure now!'

Responding to those who accused opponents of same-sex marriage of bigotry, Miss Widdecombe pointed out that many homosexuals were themselves opposed to changing the definition of marriage, and asked:

*Is it bigoted to recognise that the complementarity of a man and a woman in a union open to procreation is unique and cannot be replicated by other unions?*

*The real bigots – those who really deserve to be described as such – the real extremists, the real 'nasties', are those who believe that those who dissent from their view have no right to do so, and that the state itself should silence them.*

*No society can be free without the freedom to dissent and no democracy real without the recognition of a plurality of views.*



### Public opinion

On the eve of the Conservative Party conference, a poll revealed that 71 per cent of local Conservative Party chairmen think the proposals to redefine marriage should be dropped, with only 11 per cent viewing it as a political priority at the present time.

The poll also showed that nearly half the chairmen claim their local parties had lost members as a result of the plans, while only three per cent said they had gained new members on account of it.<sup>2</sup>

Recent opinion polls have shown a lack of popular support for the redefinition of marriage. A ComRes poll undertaken in February 2012 found that 70 per cent supported the view that marriage should remain an exclusive commitment between a man and a woman.<sup>3</sup> A separate poll found that only 39 per cent of people who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual considered redefining marriage a priority for gay people.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile the Coalition for Marriage petition in support of marriage as the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, as defined in law, has attracted over 610,000 signatures and continues to grow.<sup>5</sup>

Earlier in the year, the Government Equalities Office 'Equal Civil Marriage' consultation attracted over 228,000 responses. The government plans to publish its response before the end of the year.

### Notes

1. Brian Wheeler, 'Tory conference: Activist anger over gay marriage', BBC News Online, 8 October 2012.
2. Patrick Hennessy, 'Drop your gay marriage laws, Tory chairmen tell David Cameron', *Sunday Telegraph*, 7 October 2012.
3. ComRes, Marriage Survey, 23-24 February 2012.
4. ComRes, Civil Partnerships Survey, 27 April – 20 May 2012.
5. To sign the Coalition for Marriage petition if you have not already done so, please visit <http://c4m.org.uk>

## Same-sex marriage – more reasons for the Prime Minister to think again

*Other speakers at the C4M event in Birmingham highlighted some of the far-reaching consequences of redefining marriage.*

### **The implications for education and language**

Colin Hart, Campaign Director for the Coalition for Marriage



We want our children to grow up in a society that knows what marriage really is and where people are not bullied or intimidated for saying what marriage really is...

Currently we have a law in this country that says that children should be taught about the importance of marriage. If marriage is redefined, teachers will be required to teach children about the importance of same-sex marriage. Well, what if the teacher disagrees with this? Do they get a free vote? What about parents who want their children excused from such lessons? What about pupils who take a different view?...

Those saying they want to redefine marriage in the UK have already admitted that the terms 'husband' and 'wife' will be stripped out from matrimonial law. These are not merely words that can be jettisoned at the whim of the Prime Minister. They are words that have precious meaning to ordinary people in this country. They are words that describe our deepest relationships. They are personal to us and to millions of others. They don't belong to the government... They can't just throw them into the dustbin of history.

### **Not a priority**

David Burrowes, Conservative MP for Enfield Southgate



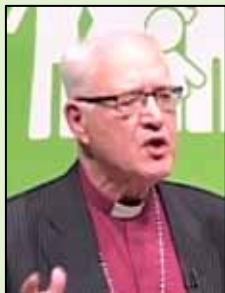
The issue of gay marriage was not a priority of my constituents, nor a priority of my colleagues' constituents. I did not receive one email, one letter, one telephone call, one tweet, calling on me to redefine marriage during the General Election campaign. It did not feature in the main Conservative manifesto, nor, crucially, did it feature in the coalition agreement. It has now become a top issue on MPs' mailbags. It's filling their inboxes...

After the 2010 General Election, Ben Summerskill [Stonewall's chief executive] told me that he did not think that gay marriage is a priority. His members when they were surveyed were not asking for it. He himself feared it would put us all in our trenches and not advance gay rights...

The irony is that the desire to be relevant through support of gay marriage is in danger of showing us Conservatives to be irrelevant to the concerns of ordinary people.

### **Misguided views of equality can be destructive**

Lord Carey, Former Archbishop of Canterbury



It seems to me that so many of our current problems revolve around the all-too narrow attempt to make equality the controlling virtue. Acceptance of differences does not challenge equality. We are *not* the same. Men and women are equal in the sight of the law, but that is a statement about our legal status, not our identity. And same-sex relationships are *not* the same as heterosexual relationships and should not be put on the same level...

My argument is this: removing all differences in order to make everything the same may end up destroying or undermining the very thing we want to protect... We can be entirely sure of this, that any move away from a traditional understanding of marriage is to put our society on a slippery slope where the unintended consequences may be quite shocking in days to come...

The matter is so serious and so important to our nation that we cannot allow politicians, no matter how much we respect them, to plunder something as sacred as the institution of marriage.

## Contraceptive clinics in schools: Southampton health chiefs agree to wait and see

Following a lengthy correspondence with Family Education Trust, the Southampton, Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Portsmouth (SHIP) PCT cluster has conceded that there is no hard evidence for the claim that confidential sexual health schemes in Southampton schools have contributed to a reduction in the city's teenage pregnancy rates.

Earlier in the year, reports appeared in the press suggesting that a confidential scheme offering girls as young as 13 contraceptive implants had dramatically reduced teenage pregnancy rates in Southampton. One newspaper reported that health chiefs had pointed to figures showing that:

*[T]eenage pregnancies have dropped by 22 per cent since sexual health services went in to schools. In Southampton there were as many as 136 pregnancies among 13 to 15 year olds in 2001- 2003, this fell to 106 in 2007-2009.<sup>1</sup>*

Another newspaper similarly stated that: 'NHS managers have defended sexual health services going into schools, saying teenage pregnancies had dropped by 22 per cent as a result.'<sup>2</sup>

### Premature

However, given that the services in Southampton schools only commenced in 2009 – the last year for which under-16 conception figures were available when the press reports appeared – Family Education Trust put it to the SHIP PCT cluster that it was premature to attribute lower underage conception figures to this intervention. It will only be possible to attempt an assessment of the success or otherwise of the scheme when figures are available for a period of several years after 2009.

Family Education Trust also noted that there had been a marked fall in under-16 conceptions in Southampton in 2003-2005, long before sexual health services were introduced into the city's schools (see table below). The Trust pointed out that the fact that the statistics for 2007-2009 were similar to those in 2003-2005 (rates, 9.8 per 1,000 and 9.9 per 1,000 respectively) in itself urged caution in attributing the fall in 2007-2009 from 2006-2008 to the introduction of sexual health services in schools.

Under 16 conceptions (girls aged 13-15) Southampton	
2001-2003	136
2002-2004	127
2003-2005	110
2004-2006	114
2005-2007	115
2006-2008	124
2007-2009	106

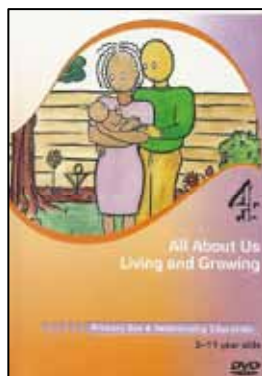
Source: Department for Education

Although initially reluctant to concede the point, the SHIP PCT cluster has now acknowledged that it is premature to make any claims about the impact of confidential sexual health services in schools and that several years will need to pass before it can begin to make an assessment.

### Notes

- Girls as young as 13 given contraceptive implants at school in UK, *Irish Independent*, 7 February 2012.
- Rebecca Smith, Girls, 13, given 'secret' contraceptive implants, *Daily Telegraph*, 8 February 2012.

## Channel 4 withdraws explicit sex education resource in response to parental concerns



Channel 4 executives have finally decided to withdraw the *Living and Growing* series of programmes from the station's catalogue of resources. The controversial resource is in widespread use in primary schools throughout the UK and has aroused the concerns of large numbers of parents over many years on account of its graphic portrayal of sexual intercourse in cartoon format.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Channel 4 website, the decision was made 'as a direct result of the government's announcement that the PSHE [Personal, Social, Health and Economic education] curriculum is under review'.<sup>2</sup> However, since the PSHE review commenced in the summer of 2011, that does not explain why the resource was withdrawn a year later. The Channel 4 website goes on to state, 'We want to ensure that our customers are purchasing educational resources that reflect government's current policy.'<sup>3</sup> But this is not a convincing explanation either, given that the government has still not announced any change of policy as a result of its review and does not expect to do so until early 2013.<sup>4</sup>

### 'Robust discussion'

The real reason for Channel 4's action lies in the fact that the then Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, had a 'robust discussion' with Channel 4 executives earlier in the year and told them that parents would be shocked that this type of material was present in primary schools and even more surprised that local authorities were recommending it.<sup>5</sup>

The PSHE Association expressed disappointment at Channel 4's decision, which it attributed to 'vociferous lobbying of the Department for Education by a small but influential number of politicians, parents, and right wing religious groups'.<sup>6</sup> Family Education Trust director Norman Wells commented:

*'Although Living and Growing no longer appears in Channel 4's catalogue, it still remains in use in hundreds of primary schools throughout the country. But parents who object to its use will now be able to appeal to the fact that the product was withdrawn after a government minister met with Channel 4 executives. This should greatly strengthen the hand of parents when they complain about the use of this material in future.'*

### Notes

- See, for example, Lisa Bullivant's account of the impact of *Living and Growing* material on children in her local primary school in Lincolnshire, in Bulletin 140, Summer 2010.
- <https://shop.channel4learning.com/?page=shop&pid=1707>
- Ibid.*
- HL Hansard, 11 October 2012, col 1166.
- Jonathan Petre, 'Minister attacks Channel 4's "shocking" sex education film aimed at five-year-olds', *Mail on Sunday*, 3 June 2012.
- PSHE Association 'PSHE Association questions decision to remove key Channel 4 Learning SRE resource', 9 July 2012.

• Copies of the popular Family Education Trust leaflet, *Sex Education in Primary Schools: Dispelling the myths* are available at the following prices: 10 copies - £1.50 + 75p p&p; 25 copies - £3.00 + £1.00 p&p; 50 copies - £5.00 + £2.00 p&p; 100 copies - £9.00 + £4.00 p&p. Prices for larger quantities and for overseas orders available on request.

# Government interventions fail to reduce under-16 conception and abortion rates

There is no evidence that government strategies to reduce conceptions to girls under the age of 16 have been successful, according to a review published in the journal *Education and Health*. In a review of trends in England and Wales over the past four decades, Professor David Paton of Nottingham University Business School observed that under-16 conception rates were almost exactly the same in 2009 as they had been in 1969. During the intervening period there had been peaks and troughs, but Professor Paton remarked that 'it is very difficult to establish a strong case that standard policy interventions have been at the root of such changes'.

For example, the underage conception rate reached an historic peak in 1996, just four years after the launch of the previous Conservative government's Health of the Nation initiative, which aimed to reduce teenage conceptions by 50 per cent.

When the Labour government's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy commenced in 1999, the under-16 conception rate had already begun a marked decline, but Professor Paton noted that:

*[A]s expenditure on this latest strategy was rolled out in the early 2000s, the downward trend in underage conception rates levelled off, whilst the most recent decrease (from 2008 to the present) has come at a time when policies promoted by the Strategy were under significant pressure due to spending cuts.*

So how do we account for the general downward trend in underage conceptions since 1996? Professor Paton suggests that:

*There is considerable agreement that underlying socio-economic factors such as poverty, educational achievement and family stability have significant impacts on teenage birth rates and an improvement in some of these measures appears*

*likely to be at the root of reductions in underage births since 1996.*

However, there is no evidence that sex education in schools and confidential contraceptive schemes aimed at young teenagers have succeeded in reducing under-16 conception and abortion rates.

## Abortion rates

Both the 1992 Health of the Nation report and the 1999 Teenage Pregnancy Strategy contributed to a significant increase in the numbers of under-16s accessing contraception, yet there was no corresponding reduction in the underage abortion rate. Indeed, research has found that areas where emergency hormonal birth control (the 'morning-after pill') was promoted among young people did not see bigger reductions in underage conceptions than other, similar areas, although they did experience relative increases in underage diagnoses of sexually transmitted infections.<sup>1</sup>

In view of the resilience of under-16 conception and abortion rates to the policy initiatives of successive governments, Professor Paton concluded that a different approach is required:

*Looking forward, the time appears ripe for a shift in focus from policies aimed at reducing the risks associated with underage sexual activity to those which are aimed more directly at reducing the level of underage sexual activity.*

## Note

1. S Girma, D Paton, 'The impact of emergency birth control on teen pregnancy and STIs', *Journal of Health Economics*, 2011, 30:373-80.

• David Paton, *Underage conceptions and abortions in England and Wales 1969-2009: the role of public policy*, *Education and Health*, 2012, Vol.30 No. 2.

**'For this generation of teenage girls, taking the morning-after pill is like pressing the delete button on a computer.'**

In a revealing article, *Sunday Times* associate editor, Eleanor Mills, related a discussion she had about the morning-after pill with a group of 16-17 year-old girls from some of Britain's top independent schools.

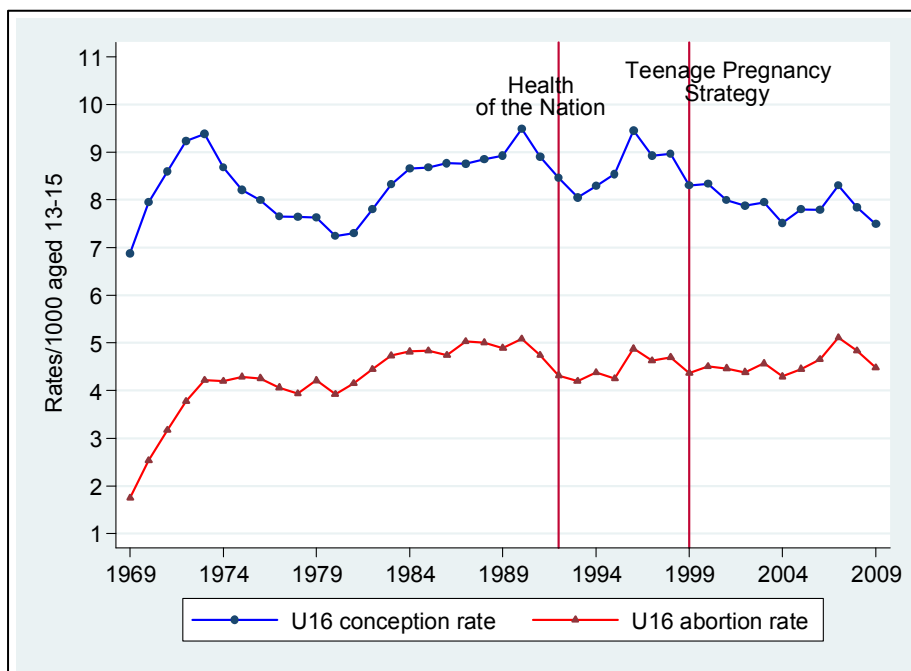
All of them were familiar with it and half had taken it. They had first heard about it at school when they were 10 or 11. One of them recalled, 'It was all sex is fun and don't get sexually transmitted infections. They told us to use condoms.'

Another girl related: 'I took the morning-after pill when I was 13 because I was too young to even think of getting pregnant. I thought it was responsible. But boys push you into sex by saying you can take it the next day.' Eleanor Mills comments:

*To a liberal-minded woman like me who has always seen contraception as a plank of female empowerment and freedom, to hear how these girls have been coerced into unprotected, casual sex because they can just 'go and get the morning-after pill' is shocking and upsetting. Natalie sums it up: 'Boys just think it's all right. Makes it okay for them to be very irresponsible — if it didn't exist, they would have to use other protection, have to think about us more. But we've got no comeback. It's true that if they do it to you, you can get the pill the next day. It doesn't make it right.'*

• Eleanor Mills, 'Mums are stockpiling it for their daughters, and boys think it's a licence to have sex. Is the morning-after pill good for girls?' *Sunday Times*, 22 July 2012.

Under-16 conception and abortion rates, England & Wales, 1969-2009



Rates per 1,000 girls aged 13-15 at the time of conception. Source: ONS.

## Peers urge government to recognise marriage in the tax system without further delay



The government has been reminded by peers of its commitment to introduce transferable tax allowances for married couples and urged to make the fulfilment of its pledge a priority. The calls were made in the course of a wide-ranging House of Lords debate on childhood, initiated by the Bishop of Chester, Dr Peter Forster. Stressing the importance of marriage for the general wellbeing of children, Dr Forster stated that:

*A recognition for marriage in the tax system would send a powerful symbolic message from government into society. At the end of the day, governments cannot simply wash their hands when moral issues are presented, because government is intrinsically a moral activity. To recognise marriage in the tax system would say something important about the wider importance of marriage to society.*

Dr Forster's plea was echoed by Lord Mackay of Clashfern who said that the promised reforms were not so much a matter of providing couples with an incentive to marry as of removing the difficulties that the tax system has created for married couples living on a single income.

### Urgency

Given the time that would be required both to draft the relevant legislation and

to make the associated IT arrangements, the Bishop of Chester, Lord Mackay and Lord Browne of Belmont all remarked that time was running out and that the government would need to give urgent attention to the matter if it were to fulfil the commitment it had made in the coalition agreement.

The Liberal Democrat peer, Baroness Garden of Frognal, responding on behalf of the government stated that that the government remained committed to rec-



## Fatherlessness: 'a deep and dangerous divide'

*In his contribution to the House of Lords debate on child development, the Chief Rabbi, Lord Sacks, drew attention to an oft-neglected dimension of child deprivation when the 'haves' are compared with the 'have nots'.*

[I]n the space of half a century we have become two nations that are divided into those who, as children, have and do not have the gift of growing up in stable, loving association with the two parents who brought them into being. According to copious research, those who have not will be disadvantaged in many ways. On average, they will do less well at school and have less chance of attending university. They will be less likely to find and keep a job. They will be less well off and less likely to form stable relationships of their own. They will be more prone to depression and its syndromes. They may even be less healthy. All that will be through no fault of their own but through the circumstances of their early childhood.

The result is a deep and dangerous divide between two cultures, in one of which children are growing up without the support and presence of their natural fathers and often without constructive male role models. They are at risk of being robbed of the habits of the heart, the security and self-confidence, the discipline and restraint that they will need safely to negotiate the challenges of an ever-changing world. Too many of our children are being robbed of hope.

The depth of this divide has been hidden from public attention by a perfectly honourable desire not to sound judgmental, not to condemn any freely chosen way of life and not to add further to the immense burdens of being a single parent. I respect those scruples. But we have seen in recent weeks...how an equally honourable wish not to offend certain sensitivities allowed young girls in Rochdale and Rotherham to be ruthlessly exploited. There is a price to be paid for silence and it is usually children who pay that price.

We cannot change the past but we can change the future.

• HL Hansard, 11 October 2012, col 1148

## A date for your diary...

The 2013 AGM and Conference of the Family Education Trust will be held on **Saturday 18 May 2012** at the Royal Air Force Club, 128 Piccadilly, London W1, when we are looking forward to hearing addresses by Jonas Himmelstrand and Dr Sharon James.

• *Further details will accompany the next issue of the bulletin. Please note the date in your diary now and plan to join us if you are able.*

ognising marriage in the income tax system and was considering a range of options before laying proposals before Parliament 'at an appropriate time'. However, she would not be drawn on the likely timescales.

### Social benefits of marriage

Earlier in the debate, the Bishop of Chester had emphasised the social benefits of marriage. He expressed concern that advocates of same-sex marriage tended to view the institution in an individualistic way and had lost sight of its significance as a social institution. Dr Forster remarked:

*Marriage has to be seen as part of a broader context of relationships in the extended family... Good marriages are not just a benefit for the couple themselves and for their children, they serve to strengthen the wider society of which they are a part. A strong respect for marriage will actually support single parents and others with the care of children who are in different relationships, and indeed society as a whole in all its aspects. That is because marriage is first and foremost not a contract between two individuals, but a social institution. It is not merely a convenient and helpful way in which two people may choose to relate to each other and thus to be encouraged on that basis.*

*This...is the problem with much of the current discussion of same-sex marriage, that it is framed in too individualistic a way and fails to see the wider social setting in which marriage has traditionally been seen. To declare civil partnerships to be marriage is actually unlikely to help us to recover a deeper sense of the honourable place of marriage as the natural and best context for the nurture of children; it will just further confuse a confused society.*

• House of Lords debate on child development, HL Hansard, 11 October 2012, cols 1132-1170.

## Forgotten Families? The vanishing agenda

**I**n a policy paper launched at the Conservative Party conference in October, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) accuses the government of a failure to tackle 'the over-riding priority of family policy' - family breakdown. Entitled *Forgotten Families? The vanishing agenda*, the report highlights evidence showing that 48 per cent of all children born today will see the breakdown of their parents' relationship and that social trends are heading in a direction that is contrary to the stability children need to thrive.

Although the number of divorces has been declining since 1993, rates of family breakdown have been fuelled by the growth in the number of cohabiting couple families which are less stable than families headed by a married couple and more likely to result in children being brought up by a single parent. Recent figures from the Office for National Statistics reveal that in 2011, the proportion of children born outside marriage in England and Wales reached 47.2 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

### Married couple families in decline

While married couple families represented two-thirds of the UK's families in 2011, the CSJ report warns that if present trends continue, only 57 per cent of families will be headed by married couples by 2031, and married couple families will become a minority within 35 years. We are already witnessing high rates of father absence and the situation looks set to get worse. As one commentator has noted, by the end of childhood, a young person is considerably more likely to have a television in his bedroom than a father living at home.

The financial cost to society of family breakdown has been estimated at £44 billion, but the costs are not only economic. Family breakdown is also 'associated with a range of poor outcomes for adults and children: educational failure, mental and physical ill-health, likelihood of becoming addicted to drugs and alcohol, and living in debt and poverty'. According to the CSJ policy paper,

*[T]he importance of marriage has been neglected yet it is indispensable for fostering a culture that values stable relationships...*

*If the Government is to be effective in emphasising stability and the importance to children of growing up with both parents, it cannot afford to be neutral or non-committal about marriage:*

- 97 per cent of all couples still intact by the time a child is 15 are married;
- Fewer than one in ten married parents have split by the time a child is five compared with more than one in three who were not married. Where parents were not living together when a child is born, the break-up rate (five years later) is a staggering 60 per cent;
- 75 per cent of family breakdown involving children under 5 results from the separation of unmarried parents.

### Proposals

The CSJ concludes with a series of proposals, chief of which is the establishment of a government Department for Families. It argues:

*Working from this solid base, the Government can develop a range of measures to address father absence, intervene early and effectively to support couple relationships and ensure local authorities also prioritise strengthening families. They can also communicate clear and explicit support for committed relationships and send the clear message that increasingly unstable families are not an inevitable fact of twenty-first century life.*

### Note

1. ONS, Births and Deaths in England and Wales, 2011 (Final), 17 October 2012.

- Centre for Social Justice, *Forgotten Families? The vanishing agenda*, October 2012. <http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk>

## Former children's minister issues 10-point plan to support the family

The former children's minister Tim Loughton endorsed the Centre for Social Justice report at its launch and set out a 10-point plan to promote stable family life.<sup>1</sup> He stated:



*All the research shows that the presence of mum and dad throughout childhood gives children the best chance of good health, successful education and freedom from dependency. At its extreme, the absence of strong family structures contributes to the chaos of the herd instinct and lawlessness that we saw in last summer's riots.<sup>2</sup>*

Mr Loughton warned that many decent parents had been made to 'question their own right and ability to parent' and called for a rebalancing of the relationship between the family and the state, in order to rein in what he described as the 'surreptitious influence of the anti-smacking brigade, the obesity police or the accusing bureaucracy of excessive CRB checks'. 'The role of the state is to support families not supplant them,' he said.

The Conservative MP for East Worthing and Shoreham warned about the damage that is done to children when the lines between adulthood and childhood are blurred and children are accorded adult 'rights':

*Children have rights and parents have responsibilities but when 14 year olds girls who have been lured into sexual abuse by child sex exploiting gangs are described as having made 'lifestyle choices' then misguided political correctness has knocked common sense out of court to a dangerous level. Parents need the confidence and support of government so that the parent-child status remains paramount until that child becomes an adult.*

Among his other recommendations Mr Loughton called on the government to:

- honour the coalition agreement commitment to recognise marriage in the tax and benefits system;
- stick to its guns and introduce a long-overdue full presumption of shared parenting in the forthcoming Children Bill to prevent willing fathers from being frozen out of their parenting role after an acrimonious split;
- re-energise Reg Bailey's report into the Sexualisation and Commercialisation of Childhood and respond with urgent action to implement its recommendations rather than rest content with warm words;
- crack down on the 'elf and safety' mentality which risk-assesses rough and tumble activities out of sight; and
- harness the growing pool of recently-retired men who can offer mentoring skills to fatherless teenage boys who need direction in their lives.

### Notes

1. Tim Loughton, 'My 10-point plan to tackle family breakdown', *Daily Mail*, 8 October 2012.
2. James Chapman, 'Get a grip on family policy, says ex-minister as shocking report claims half of all children will see parents separate', *Daily Mail*, 8 October 2012.

## State intervention does not compensate for the lack of a strong family

Recent research published in the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* has found that in both Great Britain and the United States, a strong home environment, defined as 'intellectually stimulating, nurturing and physically safe' reduces the likelihood of behaviour problems in children.

The lead researcher, Dr Toby Parcel, from North Carolina State University, embarked on the study to ascertain whether state welfare programmes can make up for deficiencies in family life. Dr Parcel explained:

*We wanted to see whether the role of parents was equally important in both societies, because the argument has been made that more developed welfare states – such as Great Britain – can make the role of parents less important, by providing additional supports that can help compensate for situations where households have more limited resources. This study tells us that parents are important in households, regardless of the strength of the welfare state.<sup>1</sup>*

The researchers evaluated data from a 1994 study of 3,864 children between the ages of five and 13 in the United States and a 1991 study of 1,430 children in the same age range from England, Scotland and Wales. They recorded:

*Findings suggest that in both societies, male children, those with health problems, and those whose mothers are divorced are at increased risk for behavior problems, while those with stronger home environments are at reduced risk.*

In spite of large-scale state investment in social welfare programmes in the United Kingdom, the study showed that the importance to children of being raised in a stable two-parent married family is more marked in Great Britain than in the United States. The researchers concluded that 'parents are important in both societies in promoting child social adjustment, and evidence that the more developed

welfare state in Great Britain may substitute for capital at home is weak.'

Family Education Trust director, Norman Wells, commented:

*This study underlines the fact that there is a limit to what schools can achieve and that there is no substitute for parents who are committed to their children and fully engaged in their lives.*

*Although it is not uncommon for political leaders and educationalists to trumpet the importance of parents, all too often the authority of parents is undermined in practice. In the name of children's rights, children are frequently treated as autonomous individuals and encouraged to act independently of their parents rather than as members of a family.*

*Increasingly, schools are appealing to the 'right of the child to know' to defend ignoring parental concerns about what is taught in sex education and other parts of the curriculum, and to justify keeping parents in the dark on all manner of issues, including the confidential provision of contraception and abortions.*

*As this study emphasises, parents have a crucial part to play in the education of their children. Schools should therefore be looking for ways of enhancing the involvement of parents and increasing their influence, not pursuing policies that minimise their role or exclude them altogether.*

### Note

1. North Carolina State University press release, 'US and Great Britain Share Risk Factors For Child Behavior Problems', 16 May 2012.

• **Toby L Parcel, Lori Ann Campbell, Wenxuan Zhong, 'Children's Behavior Problems in the United States and Great Britain', *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 53,165-182.**

## Babies need fathers!

**A new study has found that the involvement of fathers with their children in early infancy can limit the development of behavioural problems later on.** Led by Paul Ramchandani of the University of Oxford, a team of researchers followed a sample of 192 families from two maternity units in the United Kingdom. They discovered that the failure of fathers to engage with their children as early as the age of three months was associated with behavioural problems manifesting themselves at the age of a year.

In a paper published in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, the researchers note that other studies have shown that mothers and fathers interact differently with their children from an early age and that the involvement of fathers with their children has consistently been shown to influence child outcomes. However, this is the first study to examine interactions between fathers and their infant children and their association with behavioural problems within the first year of life.

• **P G Ramchandani, J Domoney, V Sethna, L Psychogiou, H Vlachos, and L Murray, 'Do early father-infant interactions predict the onset of externalising behaviours in young children? Findings from a longitudinal cohort study', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.2012.02583.x**



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### Family Education Trust

Jubilee House  
19-21 High Street  
Whitton  
Twickenham  
Middlesex TW2 7LB  
Tel no: 020 8894 2525  
Fax no: 020 8894 3535  
Email: info@famoyouth.org.uk  
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