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## Upholding religious liberty in the UK

Religious liberty and free speech are at the forefront of our work. We can give thanks that we enjoy such vitally important freedoms in our country.

These days there are attempts to suppress views which don't conform to politically correct thinking. This is most readily seen with opposition to same-sex marriage and transgenderism. Such views might even be logged as 'hate incidents' by police.

But encouragingly, people are starting to challenge this liberal

orthodoxy. The law, and most people, still treasure genuine tolerance.

We're very pleased that the Government has taken action to protect the freedom of people in Northern Ireland to disagree with same-sex marriage. More needs to be done.

We also welcome new gambling restrictions. We have campaigned for this for many years. But Christians will be rightly concerned about the impact of rapid sex-swaps, not least on vulnerable women.

# Scottish Govt under fire over 'express sex-swaps' proposal

The Scottish Government has been criticised by pro-gay activists for its radical proposal to allow people to change their legal sex by self-identification, rather than with the agreement of two doctors.

The draft Bill would also scrap the current two-year waiting period. An individual could simply state they have lived as the opposite sex for three months before applying for a Gender Recognition Certificate and a new birth certificate. A further three month "reflection



period" would follow before their legal status is changed.

The LGB Alliance Scotland called on the Government to withdraw the plans, saying such legislation would unleash a "gender free-for-all", and that "there would be nothing to stop" a

man gaining access to female-only changing rooms and hospital wards.

The taxpayer-funded LGBT Youth Scotland, however, claims both waiting periods are "arbitrary", and that with parental consent under-16s should be able to

change legal sex on demand.

They described the life-altering decision as simply an "update" to children's birth certificates, and also called for legal recognition for those who say they are neither male nor female.

In February, news that the UK Government is reconsidering its plans for rapid 'sex-swaps' was welcomed in Scotland. The Roman Catholic church called it a "sensible move that should prompt the Scottish government to take stock".

# Govt acts to protect free speech on N Ireland same-sex marriage

Safeguards for free speech and religious liberty in Northern Ireland were in place in time for the first same-sex weddings there in February.

The Christian Institute had warned the Northern Ireland Office that it faced possible legal action if protections applying in the rest of the UK were not extended to the Province.

Former Northern Ireland Secretary Julian Smith confirmed a series of legal changes to coincide with the introduction of same-sex marriage.

Public order law was amended to underline that criticising it is not an offence. Equality law was also changed so that religious bodies



◀ Former Northern Ireland Secretary Julian Smith announced the changes.

and staff cannot be sued for declining to take part in a blessing or other event marking a civil same-sex wedding.

A consultation on protections affecting religious ceremonies closed in February, but the results have not yet been published.

The Institute's Simon Calvert welcomed the news but warned: "We will be monitoring the situation very closely to ensure that the guidance needed to protect freedom of speech and conscience in schools and workplaces is suitably

clear and robust.

"It is also important that there is proper training and guidance for the police to ensure respect for freedom of speech on these issues. We don't want people using the police to try to punish those who believe in traditional marriage."

## PM revives 'flawed' quickie divorce Bill



Boris Johnson has revived plans to make divorce much quicker and easier in England and Wales.

Under the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Bill, spouses will be able to simply walk away from a marriage. They will not have to give a reason and their spouse will be unable to contest the decision. A similar Bill ran out of time before the General Election.

Institute Director Colin

Hart said "making divorce easier and quicker will lead to more divorces and more broken families".

In a debate in the House of Lords, Lord Farmer told Peers the no-fault divorce Bill was "fundamentally flawed because it not only ignores the urgent need to strengthen families, but weakens them".

Lord Farmer ▶



# Royal College of General Practitioners stays opposed to assisted suicide

In February, the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) opted to maintain its opposition to assisted suicide, following a survey of its members.

The independent survey of 6,674 RCGP members found that 47 per cent said the College should oppose a change in the law. Of the remainder, 40 per cent backed a change and eleven per cent favoured neutrality. The decision is expected to stand for another five years.

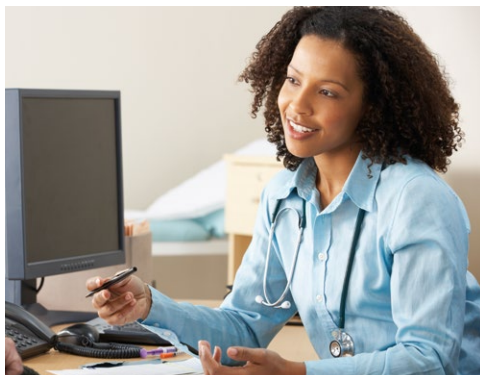
The announcement came shortly after the UK Government confirmed it has no plans to review the

current safeguards against assisted suicide in England and Wales.

Writing to pro-life campaign group Care Not Killing, Lord Chancellor Robert Buckland QC also expressed his reservations about weakening the law, recognising that it would endanger vulnerable people.

Buckland said: "Personally, I have grave doubts about the ability of legislation to be watertight when it comes to the potential for abuse."

Care Not Killing's CEO Dr Gordon Macdonald welcomed the news. He said



the current law "balances a strong deterrent against abuse whilst allowing a compassionate response to those who are in very distressing and difficult circumstances and

experiencing terminal illness".

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon was among 82 MSPs who opposed introducing assisted suicide when it was last debated at Holyrood in 2015.

Would you like us to visit your church?



We visit nearly 100 churches a year in Scotland to talk about the work of The Christian Institute.

If you would like your church to be one of them, email us at: [scotland@christian.org.uk](mailto:scotland@christian.org.uk)

## Gambling on credit cards to be banned from April

The Christian Institute has welcomed a ban on using credit cards to place bets. It will come into force on 14 April.

The Gambling Commission's Chief Executive said the new measure should reduce the risk of people "gambling with money they do not have". Some are understood to have accumulated tens of thousands of pounds in debt.



Payment services such as PayPal will be included in the ban, but the National Lottery will be exempt.

The then Culture

Minister Helen Whately said there is more to be done: "We will be carrying out a review of the Gambling Act to ensure it is fit for the digital age".

## UK firsts for 'marriage-lite'

The UK's first heterosexual civil partnerships have taken place following a change in the law on 31 December 2019.

The Supreme Court had ruled in June 2018 that civil partnerships should be available to opposite-sex couples.



◈ Civil partners Charles Keidan and Rebecca Steinfeld

## Feeling left out at school counts as 'hate crime' says CPS

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has said that if a pupil believes they have been excluded from a friendship group because of their sexual orientation it could be a 'hate incident or crime'.

The new guidance for schools was written alongside LGBT activist groups. Other examples include "rejecting someone" and "not wanting to work with them".



## Liberals attack CofE after it affirms traditional marriage

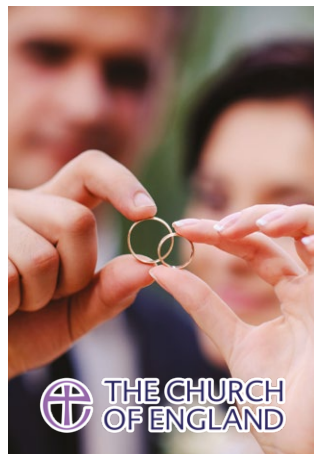
The Church of England has been attacked by LGBT campaigners, including one serving bishop, for restating the biblical position on sexual morality.

A statement from the House of Bishops in January said sexual relationships outside heterosexual marriage "are regarded as falling short of God's purposes for human beings". But it admitted that the Church has a study underway which will "inform further deliberations".

Opponents claimed the statement "significantly damaged the mission of the church".

Following the controversy, the Church released a statement apologising for the timing but not the content of its statement.

In December, the new Archbishop of York was announced. Bishop Stephen Cottrell has advocated 'looking again' at biblical texts on sexuality "to see what they are



actually saying to our situation", claiming "for what we know now is not what was known then".

Bishop Cottrell also said there was "no reason" why thanksgiving prayers could not be offered for same-sex civil partnerships.

## English council risks court over primary school sex ed policy

Lawyers acting on behalf of The Christian Institute have written to Warwickshire County Council over a catalogue of errors in its relationship and sex education policy for primary schools. Failure to respond satisfactorily will lead to legal action.

The *All About Me* programme is used in over 200 Warwickshire primary schools. It

misleads teachers and pupils over transgender rights and encourages schools not to inform parents if their children are sharing rooms overnight with pupils of the opposite sex.

Materials designed for use in lessons promote LGBT issues and include gratuitously graphic sexual images, but make no reference to marriage.

Scotland's new Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) curriculum has prompted similar concerns, with some content being likened to pornography.







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## Sunday trading opposed by Belfast shopworkers

Over 90 per cent of Belfast shopworkers are opposed to extending Sunday trading hours, a recent survey has revealed.

It was conducted by the trade union Usdaw, which said that allowing shops to open for longer would have a "negative impact" on workers, families and communities.



## COMMENT

# Identity politics undermines the fabric of our society



By Colin Hart,  
Director

'Identity politics' has come to dominate public debate.

This divisive ideology fractures society into groups formed around characteristics such as gender, sexuality, or ethnicity, and pits people against one another in an arms race of victimhood.

Those deemed to be the 'most oppressed' are given the highest status. Everyone is expected to endorse their 'rights'. Questioning their demands is considered hateful. Failing to champion socially liberal views on transgenderism, homosexuality or abortion makes you unfit to take on public office or even take part in public debate.

Identity politics clearly

damages free speech and religious liberty. Christians and others with dissenting views have faced marginalisation and sometimes direct hostility for failing to conform. It also undermines social cohesion, making people intensely individualistic and unconcerned for society as a whole.

Mercifully, people are starting to wake up to the damage this does. Academics, journalists and commentators on the left and the right are increasingly speaking out against it.

As Christians we seek the good of all, not just some. We recognise that because human beings are made in the image of God, we have intrinsic and equal value rather than one based upon a hierarchy of characteristics. It's a belief that stands in marked contrast to the polarisation of identity politics.

## Ex-transsexual takes NHS to court over gender ideology

While the Scottish Government contemplates offering on-demand 'sex-swaps' (see [page 1](#) ▶), there is a backlash against radical transgender ideology south of the border.

A former transsexual is challenging the NHS

in the English courts over its policy of giving drugs to gender-confused children. Keira Bell was given cross-sex hormones when she was a teenager, but has now returned to

living as a woman.

She said: "I do not believe that children and young people can consent to the use of powerful and experimental hormone drugs", adding they should not be offered to under-18s.



# Impending Scots smacking ban opposed by local councillors

Councillors in Scotland oppose the Government's impending smacking ban and say local authorities are not equipped to deal with the repercussions.

A survey of nearly a fifth of all Scottish local councillors found that seven in ten do not think parental smacking should



be a criminal offence.

Conducted on behalf of the pro-parent campaign group

Be Reasonable, it also found that three quarters didn't believe their local authority would

have sufficient resources to cope with the ban.

Police Scotland has said it expects the

incoming ban to have a "significant impact" on its finances.

It is assessing how much retraining its 17,000 officers will need, and says that IT systems will have to be upgraded.

The force has yet to give a figure for how much it will cost to investigate and charge parents.

## Your legacy will help Christians to be salt and light

None of our work would be possible without the generosity of our supporters. Leaving a gift in your will to The Christian Institute will help us to continue working to preserve Christian freedoms for future generations.



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## MPs call on UK Government to close 'abuse of trust' loophole

A long-running child protection campaign from The Christian Institute received a boost in January.

A group of MPs called for a loophole that allows sports coaches and religious figures to have sexual relationships with 16 and 17-year-olds to be closed.

Current legislation protects them from being abused in this way by teachers, social workers and police officers but does not apply to sports coaches or church leaders. MPs called for a change to the Sexual Offences Act 2003, as well as publicity to



highlight the move.

The same loophole exists within Scotland's Sexual Offences Act 2009.

Addressing 'abuse of trust' has been an Institute campaign since 1999.

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