How would you characterise your views on the Bill in general?

In opposition

I believe it is unnecessary to redefine marriage to include same sex relationships which are already catered for through civil partnerships.

How would you characterise your views on the introduction of same sex marriage, so that same sex couples can marry each other?

In opposition

The institution of marriage lies far back in the Judeo-Christian tradition and predates nation and church. It has deep religious as well as functional significance and is intended to formalise the union of a man and a woman and the creation of new life in families. For many Christians the sanctity of marriage, as understood for millennia, is a matter of deep conviction. Its redefinition poses substantial issues of belief and conscience. For them it is most certainly not an issue of discrimination or homophobia as popularly represented. It is a contradiction of their deepest convictions about life and faith.

How would you characterise your views on putting belief celebrants on the same footing as religious celebrants?

How would you characterise your views on the arrangements for authorising celebrants to solemnise opposite sex and same sex marriage (including the opt-in procedures)?

How would you characterise your views on civil partnerships changing to marriages?

In opposition

How would you characterise your views on allowing civil marriage ceremonies to take place anywhere, other than religious premises, agreed between the couple and registrar?

How would you characterise your views on allowing the religious and belief registration of civil partnerships?

How would you characterise your views on allowing transgender persons to stay married when obtaining a full Gender Recognition Certificate, which provides legal recognition in the acquired gender?

Would you like to comment on the wider issue of protections for those in society who may have concerns about same sex marriage?
The European Convention of Human Rights, Article 2 of the First Protocol, lays down that 'the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure that ... education and teaching is in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions'. Clearly the teaching or promotion of same-sex marriage in schools will conflict directly with the religious and philosophical convictions of many parents. There is clearly a potential conflict between the proposed legislation and religious belief, and contradicts the freedom of Christians and others to have their children educated according to their faith. Same sex marriage is not just a civil matter; it impinges directly on the religious beliefs of many parents and the wider population. Parents currently have the right to withdraw their children from religious education and observance, as well as from sex education, and many parents have deeply-held views about their children being taught about same-sex marriage in the classroom. The law should not undermine these views and protect te parents' right to withdraw their children. Many will be unaware what their children are being taught so they should have a legal right to know when such lessons will take place. It is unclear what the practical consequences of this legislation will be for schools and they could be highly disruptive. This conflict goes much wider than what is actually taught in schools. For example, any teachers with religious convictions about traditional marriage will find themselves with an issue of conscience around same-sex marriage, which, if expressed in any way, will be career damaging. It should be noted that while the law requires schools to provide religious education, it also protects, for example teachers who are atheists from being compelled to teach it. Similar provision should be made for teachers, who, for religious convictions or otherwise, do not feel able to teach about same-sex marriage. There will be many public servants in various other professions who may face a similar dilemma. Conscious objection, which has been long respected in this country, is in significant danger of being swept aside in this matter. Conscience clauses should be introduced in employment and equality laws to allow employees who believe in marriage as it is currently defined, not to be forced to promote or participate in same-sex ceremonies, teach it, or express approval for it. It is imperative that holding to the current definition of marriage must not be used by public sector employers to dispute or question the equality and diversity credentials of existing or prospective employees.

Would you like to comment on the wider issue of freedom of speech?

It is important that individuals have the freedom to disagree with same-sex marriage and engage in normal public debate about these matters without being vilified or harassed by legal or employment sanctions. Specific amendments are necessary therefore to protect the right of free speech and debate. These need to apply across the public sector and equality laws, including employment and goods and services. As a minimum, amendments need to make clear that merely discussing or criticising same-sex marriage is not, on its own, a form of discrimination for the purpose of equality law or a breach of public order legislation. Such changes would help those who believe in traditional marriage to feel free to discuss the issue with their colleagues or customers, employees and employers. It would send an important message to those who are quick to label any disagreement with same-sex marriage as 'bigoted'. 
Would you like to comment on any other wider issues in relation to the Bill that are not mentioned above?

Are you responding as...

a private individual

Dr Alastair Noble
23 August 2013