During the Report stage of the Equality Bill I committed to look again at the statistics on Catholic adoption agencies and, in particular, how many such agencies have closed since the introduction of the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007.

In replying to the debate I said that one Catholic adoption agency has closed, while you named two that you believed had closed.

The Government commissioned an independent panel to assess the impact of the Regulations on faith-based adoption agencies with a view to ensuring, as far as possible, that their expertise and services were retained. The independent panel engaged with all the Catholic adoption agencies in Great Britain and produced five reports to Government.

My understanding of the situation on the two agencies you named - the Catholic Children’s Rescue Society (Salford) and the Catholic Children’s Society (Westminster) - based on the information from these reports, is as follows.

The Catholic Children’s Rescue Society (Salford) is no longer operating as a Voluntary Adoption Agency, but still provides fostering and post-adoption services as it is now registered as an Adoption Support Agency. Its recruitment and assessment caseload was transferred to another agency which continues to meet the needs of the Catholic community in this area.

The Catholic Children’s Society (Westminster), which you believed had closed, we understand is still open. This agency applied to change its charitable instruments so as to provide adoption services in accordance with its Catholic ethos but had its application refused by the Charity Commission. The agency announced its decision to close once it had completed its current caseload. However, as far as we are aware, it remains registered with Ofsted as a Voluntary Adoption Agency and it remains open, although we understand that it is no longer accepting new applications from prospective adopters (regardless of their sexual orientation or marriage or civil partnership status).
Therefore, apart from Catholic Children’s Rescue Society (Salford), as far as we are aware, all the other Catholic adoption agencies in England remain open, and those assessing new prospective parents do so for both same sex and opposite sex couples and individuals regardless of their sexual orientation, with the support of the wider Catholic community, and operating within the law. We also believe the majority of the staff and trustees of these agencies have remained the same.

I would also like to add that, during the debate about her amendment, Baroness Butler-Sloss commented that it had the support of a founder member of Stonewall. Stonewall have made clear to me that they are opposed to the amendment.

I am copying this letter to Baroness Butler-Sloss who tabled the amendment. I am also placing a copy of this letter in the House Library.

Jan Royall