

FROM THE MINISTER/ÓN AIRE



AN ROINN

Oideachais

Department of
Education

MÁNNYSTRIE O

Lear

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10 February 2015

Mr Speaker a chaire

I wish to provide clarification on the issue of the Certificate of Religious Education.

During question time on the 9 February, Nelson McCausland MLA asked "*In view of the number of places to which trained teachers can apply, and if the Minister has the number who are being trained, will he tell us whether he would support the removal of the requirement that to teach in Roman Catholic maintained schools requires a special certificate, which is viewed by many people as a discriminatory practice?*"

The response I provided was "*that is a matter for the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to take on Board. I have written to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister on several occasions, and I am awaiting a response. Personally, i believe that it should be removed. However, it is up to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to carry that matter forward.*"

However, I misinterpreted the question, which resulted in the response I provided relating to Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998, commonly referred to as "the teachers' exception", rather than the main point in the question.

The requirement to hold the Certificate in Religious Education is a policy decision of some employers, namely the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and certain Grant Maintained Integrated Primary Schools. A teacher of any religious background, or none, can hold the Certificate in Religious Education. The policy and criteria for selection and recruitment of teachers is a matter for the relevant employers. The Department of Education does not employ teachers.

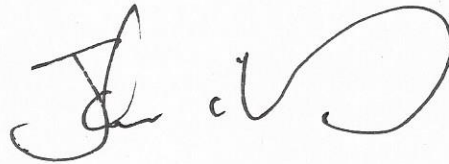
In order to provide clarification, the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (NI) 1998 (FETO) is the responsibility of OFMdfM. Article 71 of the FETO provides for "the teachers exception", which means that employers may recruit teachers on the basis of religion; however, it is my understanding that none of the employers currently do so. I

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do not believe that there is a need to continue with "the teachers' exception" under the FETO legislation; however, this is a matter for OFMdfM to take forward. I am of the opinion that any such change be subject to public consultation.

I am copying to this letter to all MLA's. I trust this clarifies the issue.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John O'Dowd', written in a cursive style.

JOHN O'DOWD MLA
Minister for Education