



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for Education

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Certificate in Religious Education:  
CCMS Briefing

29 May 2013

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

## Committee for Education

Certificate in Religious Education: CCMS Briefing

29 May 2013

**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Mervyn Storey (Chairperson)  
Mr Danny Kinahan (Deputy Chairperson)  
Ms Michaela Boyle  
Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson  
Mr Trevor Lunn  
Mr Sean Rogers

**Witnesses:**

Mr Jim Clarke	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
Mr Eugene O'Neill	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

**The Chairperson:** I welcome Mr Jim Clarke, chief executive of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), and Eugene O'Neill, head of HR, finance and corporate governance at CCMS. You are very welcome. Thank you for taking the time to come to see us today. Jim, I ask you to make your opening comments and then we will have questions.

**Mr Jim Clarke (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools):** Thank you for the opportunity to come to the Committee. Your invitation was probably inspired by debate in the Assembly. In responding to some of the issues that have been raised with us, the first thing that we want to do is clarify that there are two issues. One is about the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (FETO) exemption. The second is about the use of the religious education certificate in the appointment of teachers to primary and nursery schools.

Let me deal with the first issue, which is the legislative position of FETO. The origins of this go back an awful long time, and certainly to the 1930s when the Protestant Churches transferred their schools to the state. Part of the arrangement at that time was that they would continue to be able to appoint principals who would retain the ethos. Largely, that meant people of the religion that the original trustees of the schools represented. The Catholic sector was consistent with that approach. That was largely the arrangement that stayed in place in many situations until 1976, when the Fair Employment and Treatment Order introduced a restriction on discrimination in employment, but it gave teaching an exemption. That exemption was looked at again in 1998 as part of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order. Article 70 of that order identified teaching as a general occupational exemption, and that is the way that it has been since.

Article 71 required that that position should be kept under review. The Equality Commission reviewed it in 2004, but it reviewed it in light of decisions taken in 2003 for the European directive on employment, which narrowed the exemption from employment to recruitment only. In 2004, a piece of research, led by Gallagher and Dunn, was carried out to support the Fair Employment Agency. The

Equality Commission sought public views on this at the time. I think that there were only 12 responses, the majority of which were in favour of ending the exemption. That was the nature of it. It was generally regarded that there was no great groundswell of opinion on this matter. It was, I suppose, provoked at that time by the intention to produce a single equality Bill. That is essentially the FETO end of things.

The certificate in religious education has been a requirement in Catholic schools for as long as there have been Catholic schools, that we can recall. It is subject to the same kind of rigour as any other academic course of study. Eugene will outline some of the details of that. In recent times, CCMS has sought to regularise dimensions of that. We feel that it is time for a review of the providers of the certificate to ensure that they are consistent in their demands around learning outcomes.

We also wanted to increase access to the certificate. We acknowledge that the certificate in religious education is provided as part of a course for students who are studying in colleges that are essentially set up to provide teachers for the Catholic sector but that that is not necessarily the case for people coming to education from other sources. Although there have been courses that people could access, we felt that maybe those should be more easily accessible, part of which is perhaps about making them more generally known and understood.

We have taken two initial steps on that front. A few years back, we acknowledged that teachers being made redundant from Catholic secondary schools could be redeployed into Catholic primary schools and that we would give those who did not have the RE certificate a period of time to gain it. This year, we have extended that to teachers from any other sector coming into a primary school from a post-primary school. We are going through a piece of work that will, if accepted, allow teachers from any background to apply for a job in a Catholic nursery or primary school and to be appointed, whether or not they have the certificate, on the understanding that they will gain the certificate within three years of taking up appointment. Those are the two dimensions that it is important to distinguish between.

I should have said earlier that, despite the fact that the exemption has been in legislation, we have never sought to use it. We have never used it, and we have no intention of ever using it. With that, I will stop and ask Eugene to add anything that he wants before we take questions.

**Mr Eugene O'Neill (Council for Catholic Maintained Schools):** I want to emphasise that there are a number of things going on in the background as regards how we are approaching this matter. Over recent months, we have been preparing an equality impact assessment of our policy. We have been out to consult with various stakeholders. We hope to include in our policy a range of mitigations that might help to break down the perception that there is a cold house.

As Jim mentioned, we have been looking at our own redundancy management processes, the processes that we have applied over the past number of years and derogations — if I can call them that — from the policy for our own teachers. In April of this year, we were happy to bring to council a proposal that we should extend this derogation to any teacher facing redundancy, irrespective of their background. If they are happy to work in a Catholic maintained primary or nursery school, we would be happy to employ them, subject to them obtaining the certificate. We did that in response to a request from the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council, representing the five trade unions. We were quite happy to do that, and our council was quite happy to endorse that policy.

We are also undertaking an internal review of the policy. We have been doing that over two or three years. We have been looking at the validation of courses. There is a long list of courses that are on the recognised list. We wanted to look at how we would validate those and at who is responsible for validating them. We wanted to look at parity between courses: are the courses obtained through our institutions in Northern Ireland of similar rigour to those obtained elsewhere or vice versa? We want to create pathways for people to obtain the course. We need to provide people who are not studying or preparing for teaching as an undergraduate or postgraduate student with pathways to access the course in a way that suits their work. We are looking at all those things and we have opened up negotiations with the episcopal conference and the various providers of those courses.

**The Chairperson:** Thank you, Eugene and Jim. The difficulty that some of us have with this issue is that there has been recognition that there is an issue, but the steps that are being taken to address it compound the problem. CCMS has said that it will have a review and that it will change the policy. Let us be blunt about it and name it as it is. CCMS says that it is not a cold house for Protestants. However, it is saying that people are entitled to have a job but that in two or three years' time, they will still have to have the same requirement that has excluded them from having such a job throughout all the years that CCMS and the Catholic sector has been in existence.

Jim knows that this question has been asked repeatedly. I got the paper last night, which tried to explain it in some way. My difficulty is that I cannot understand why a person who teaches in a Catholic school is required to have a certificate to teach subjects other than religious education. I respect the position regarding the ethos and identity of a school, whatever that school may be. However, in the paper that you submitted to us yesterday, you state:

*"In Catholic schools Religious Education integrates the many branches of learning within the NI Curriculum into a multi-coloured mosaic."*

Is that not really a cover for trying to say that you still have justification for requiring someone to have a certificate to teach maths when the reality is that, as far as I am aware, there is not a Catholic way and a Protestant way of teaching maths? Two and two still make four in both types of schools.

**Mr J Clarke:** It does, and because two and two make four, I find your question hard to understand. RE is a subject that is taught by a primary teacher in the same way as maths or any other subjects are taught by a primary teacher. The primary curriculum is taught by one teacher, so in order for that teacher to embrace the entire curriculum, they need the certificate so that we, in the Catholic sector, are assured that they are committed to the ethos of the school as well as having an understanding of the religious education programme.

The notion of ethos underpins that. Yes, you are absolutely right: there is not a Catholic way or a Protestant way of teaching maths. None of the many minorities that we have in Northern Ireland now has its own way of teaching maths. However, the ethos of the school influences how people are developed and taught and how they engage in learning with the teacher and with each other. That is part of the ethos, and the certificate in religious education conveys that. We make absolutely no apology for that, and I am fairly certain, Mervyn, that you are not asking that the Catholic sector sets aside its ethos.

The question that I have to put back to you is this: other than through the certificate, do you have any suggestions as to how that ethos might be protected and maintained, bearing in mind that that ethos has contributed significantly to the improvement in outcomes for young people who have attended Catholic schools over the past number of years?

**The Chairperson:** Let us look at what seems to be the trajectory of education. If there is a buy-in for shared education, and your paper states:

*"The Catholic school is committed to the promotion of equality"*

— and if, as the deputy First Minister said in an answer to a question that I tabled a long time ago:

*"As Members may be aware, in effect, the exception allows schools to lawfully discriminate" — [Official Report, Bound Volume 44, p22, col 2].*

— that contradicts all the buzzwords and phraseology and everything that is talked about these days to do with equality and a shared future and all those things if you allow any element of the system to say that it is more than happy to be the promoter of equality but on the basis of the 'Animal Farm' version of equality that some are more equal than others. That is the difficulty.

It must be accepted, and I have no difficulty in doing so, that religious education is an important issue to be protected and to have in the ethos and identity of a school, as was the case when Northern Ireland was established and even Lord Londonderry did not want to have religious education and there was an issue around the Lynn report and the subsequent, eventual inclusion of RE. However, I still cannot reconcile that with there being a requirement to specifically have two things, the first of which is to have an exemption from fair employment legislation. I think everybody should be subject to fair employment legislation. The second is the requirement for everybody to have a certificate.

**Mr J Clarke:** At the very start, I tried to set out two issues. Based on what you said, Mervyn, I think that you have confused them again. The first thing is that we have had, through the law, the ability to, as you quote, "lawfully discriminate", but we have never used it and we have no intention of using it. We have no qualms whatsoever about that being taken away. However, we also must ensure that Catholics who are sending their children to a Catholic school will know that they will be developed

through the ethos of that school. For many generations, the RE certificate has been the means of guaranteeing the ethos, if you like, in the employment of teachers.

What we are trying to do, and I think that this is in keeping with the spirit that I think that you are promoting around a shared future and a shared community, is extend the access to that right. We acknowledge that people, while that right has been there, might not have had as much access to it or been as aware of it as they could have been. We are trying to improve that access, but it is always on the understanding that people coming into a Catholic school will understand, support and maintain the ethos of that school.

I repeat the question that I put to you: if it is not to be done through the certificate, what other means have we of doing that? You talked about the 'Animal Farm' aspect. We could possibly acknowledge that it is, at present, easier for a Catholic, because of the way in which many of them were trained through colleges that provide for the certificate, to access employment in a Catholic school with the certificate than it is for those without it. We are trying to modify that, and Eugene gave you the background to our intentions in that particular area.

**The Chairperson:** I have two other things. One of the conclusions of the long-awaited review that the Department carried out stated:

*"statistics would indicate that those who do not hold the Certificate currently have 50% less job opportunities than those who do".*

The review then tries to clarify that by concluding:

*"there is no statistical evidence to suggest that the Certificate requirement has resulted in inequalities in employment."*

No disrespect, but a blind man would see that there clearly is an issue. There are very few exceptions. There is one school in a constituency adjoining mine, which I believe has a good balance of non-Catholic and Roman Catholic staff, but the perception is that the majority of people who are currently employed in Catholic schools are Catholics.

**Mr J Clarke:** It is the perception and, for the reasons that I have given, the reality. I cannot defend that report, but perception carries a lot of weight in this argument. In recognition of that, we are trying to put some of the facts on the table, and we recognise that it is easier for someone who has gone through a Catholic college of education and had the certificate as part of their course to access schools. The report reflects that. However, we are also saying that we are perfectly prepared to give that opportunity to people who show their commitment to that ethos. Part of what CCMS is doing at the moment, with the agreement of bishops, is aimed at creating circumstances in which we can extend that access.

**The Chairperson:** Eugene, I want to ask you about access to the certificate. Do you think that more needs to be done about the cost, given the fact that, if you are a non-Catholic, it will cost you £2,000? Who has that amount of money? We create another barrier simply by saying to people that we will give them a job but that, within that period, it will cost them £2,000 to get the certificate. The school will not pay for it and neither will St Mary's; the individual has to pay for it out of their own pocket.

**Mr E O'Neill:** That is not correct. The students who engage in the course through correspondence courses or whatever do pay for it, but they are reimbursed by the Department for Employment and Learning, so they can claim those costs back.

**The Chairperson:** The full costs?

**Mr E O'Neill:** Yes. I am not aware of a figure of £2,000. The figure that I had in my mind was £600.

**The Chairperson:** OK.

**Mr E O'Neill:** We can do a bit of work there and look at what the actual costs are.

Access or accessibility is an issue, and it is one that we fundamentally recognised in our internal review. It is something that we would like to see being opened up. For my part, I do not understand

why students who attend Stranmillis have to access a course through a correspondence course in Scotland when we have two institutions here that provide it. I would like to work with those institutions to open up pathways for people to try to break down this notion of a cold house effect.

We hold the certificate to be a necessary professional qualification. We believe that it will empower teachers to teach in our primary schools and place them in a position where they can apply for jobs. If they do not have it, and if what we are proposing works so that they can get it, we want to see that that course does what it says on the tin. We would like to make sure that all courses are properly validated and assessed so that they deliver what we are asking them to deliver, which is the empowerment of our teachers.

We see this as a professional qualification that should not be an obstacle to someone's pathway into a job, but as something that should enhance the route to a job. Our business is about getting the best possible teachers, and I hold to that. We all have that view. We want our best possible teachers teaching in our schools here and delivering on raising standards for our children. We need to provide whatever pathways and support that we can for those people, rather than rely on obstacles.

**The Chairperson:** Are we any nearer to the council implementing the recommendations of the Equality Commission?

**Mr E O'Neill:** Which recommendations?

**The Chairperson:** The recommendations that the certificate should be done away with for post-primary schools and that it should be required in preparing children for the sacraments in primary schools.

**Mr J Clarke:** First, I am not aware that those are the recommendations. In the case of secondary schools, we require the certificate only for a small number of posts, such as RE teachers and heads of RE or pastoral care. It is not a requirement in post-primary education. That is one of the reasons why our first move was to make this certificate available over a three-year period to teachers in Catholic post-primary schools who had been made redundant and might then be redeployed into the primary sector.

**Mr E O'Neill:** To draw the association with preparation for the sacraments is not right either. It is about more than that. A limited number of teachers in a primary setting will prepare children for the sacraments. It is not a point-in-time experience that our teachers are expected to have; it is an understanding of the Catholic faith throughout the whole of a child's life in a primary school.

**The Chairperson:** This just keeps going round and round, because it depends on the terminology that is used. Your paper states:

*"In Catholic Schools, the Religious Education Programme is taught in a manner that complements other curricular areas such as History, Geography, Science, Visual/Art, Music, Drama, Literature and PHE."*

Very little is left out. It goes on to state:

*"It also seeks to acquaint pupils with the inclusive, ecumenical and interreligious perspectives of the Second Vatican Council."*

I am not having a go at the Catholic Church. It is quite entitled to have whatever councils it wants, but I cannot see why that should be used as a barrier to employing people to teach in a school, with the exception of, as Jim said, head of pastoral care and teaching RE. Why could there not be the same provision for primary schools?

**Mr J Clarke:** The way in which primary schools are organised is that a single teacher takes a class for a year. They are not like post-primary schools in which pupils have a different teacher for history and all the rest of their subjects. The point in the paper about these subjects is that it is the ethos of the school that infuses the learning of all the subjects on the curriculum.

Mervyn, I do not see it as an impediment. We are talking about following a course with learning outcomes; that is, the religious education certificate. The education is about understanding the

influence of teaching and learning on the development of the whole person and the values base that a faith-based education gives them. I imagine that all schools, particularly faith-based schools, would want to develop that.

Part of the argument in Northern Ireland, which again gets confused among the many perspectives, is that some schools set out not to have a religious or faith-based dimension at all, while others do. I am not talking just about Catholic schools here. There is a secular, faith-based dimension as well. Whether it is the Catholic sector or any other faith-based group, we believe that parents want a values, faith-based dimension to education. They want that as part of the experience of learning and not just as a taught subject, certainly in primary schools.

**Mr Kinahan:** Jim and Eugene, thank you very much indeed. I very much take on board your points about FETO and the certificate, but we are moving into a different world in which we are trying open it up so that everyone has an opportunity to teach in any school. I understand the ethos, but, at the back of all this, we are trying to move towards shared education. We are trying to open it up, and there will always be this clash. We know from statistics that some 80% want integrated education. They want to move away, but I think that everyone wants their religion in the background.

I am struggling with this next point. One of the reports talks very clearly about the chill factor. It then states that the certificate requirement may not increase the number of Protestant applicants, but it may. That can be read both ways. You also said that it is not a check on people coming to work at the schools. The mere fact that the school is a Catholic school run by the Catholic Church or the council will put off Protestants —

**Mr J Clarke:** Danny, we are running a Catholic education system. Would you expect us to do anything different?

**Mr Kinahan:** I understand, but let me finish. We have to find a way of opening up to the two. If you go down the review route, which is to make sure that everyone can get the certificate easier, you are shutting the door to opening it up to everyone. That may be the right thing for the ethos, but do you see what I am getting at? We will always have this battle.

**Mr J Clarke:** The argument could be applied to any professional capacity; take the medical profession, for example. There are people who are GPs but may aspire to being psychiatrists. They have to go down certain routes to prove their competence. It is the same thing here. I really struggle to understand why people think that we should set aside the ethos of Catholic education on the basis that it should be open to everyone, whether or not they are capable or committed. It seems counter-intuitive.

You mentioned the shared education dimension. I hope that you can see that, whatever this step is, it is a step towards opening up to and embracing more people, but it also requires people to have views and to develop those views. They have to have a free will to decide that they wish to have the opportunity to teach in a Catholic school. Some people do not, and we will not force them into that situation. However, we are opening up the opportunity for those who do.

You talk about 80% wanting integrated schools. We have had to challenge that finding time and again. That is based on an aspirational response. I do not know what the question was at any particular time. People will say, "Yes, integrated education is a great idea." However, what do they actually do? They make choices on the basis of the schools that they regard as being high quality, that are convenient to their home, and that, in the case of not just Catholic schools but others, have an ethos that they see as valuable. We are not diminishing any of that. We are simply saying that the qualities that we have in our system are worth preserving. The community, by virtue of their decisions to send their children to those schools, reinforce that position. We want to maintain the high quality of Catholic education, but we equally accept that we should take down whatever barriers there are to those who want to play a part in that system. That is what we are trying to do here.

**Mr Kinahan:** I cannot see how we get through it unless we change the proportions of people who need the certificate.

**Mr J Clarke:** Again, Danny, it is about free will. If people want to apply, we will create the circumstances in which they can do that.

**Mr Kinahan:** I hope that that will be the case. One of the integrated schools advertised for the job of a PE teacher. I rang the school and asked about the role. None of it related to religion. I thought, "Why does that person need a certificate to teach PE in integrated school?"

**Mr J Clarke:** I am happy to answer for the Catholic sector. The integrated sector is for another day.

**Mr Kinahan:** Do you realise that it is a barrier that we have to find a way of breaking down? You are going down the route of reviewing it, but you are reviewing it only within your own ethos. We have to find a way to break it down in Northern Ireland.

**Mr J Clarke:** Why? Do you want us to give up our ethos?

**Mr Kinahan:** No, but you have to find a way of opening up the ethos so that other people can come in.

**Mr J Clarke:** That is what we are doing. We are not going to dilute the ethos. I made the point about people having free will. There are people who will not have any association nor want to have any association with the ethos of Catholic education; that is fair enough, but there are those who might. We are saying that the door will be opened wider for those who wish to go down that route. Some people may simply want to get a job at any cost and will, therefore, get whatever qualification is required. You could argue that it is the same for many Catholic teachers. Or, there are some people who genuinely feel that there is something in the Catholic ethos that appeals to them and they think that they would like to be part of that. Our view is that the door should be opened in a fair and open society, and that is what we are trying to do. However, it is not at the expense of diluting what we stand for. I do not think that the Committee would want us to do that.

**Mr Kinahan:** If you open the door but only to —. In time, it will be to the detriment of the —

**Mr J Clarke:** How will it? If you open lots of doors, people will choose to go through some and not through others. The free will to make that choice is there.

**The Chairperson:** I do not think that it is an issue of free choice. You have no choice: you either do it or you do not do it. You either have the certificate or you do not have it.

**Mr J Clarke:** That is a choice, Mervyn.

**The Chairperson:** I have never been a great supporter of the Equality Commission and some of the things that it has come out with. However, an Equality Commission report stated:

*"The Equality Commission has given consideration to the impact of the removal of the teachers' exception on Protestant teachers while the general occupational exception is in place. The Commission is aware that there are concerns that the removal of the exception will open up the possibility that Roman Catholic teachers will be able to make complaints of religious discrimination against controlled schools but Protestant teachers will not be able to make complaints of religious discrimination against maintained schools."*

Hence, you have another inequality.

**Mr J Clarke:** We are back to this confusion. We are in agreement with that. FETO should go. We are not defending FETO; that is what that is. We are not defending FETO; let it go.

**The Chairperson:** So, what steps are being taken to remove FETO?

**Mr J Clarke:** Eugene pointed those out. I will let him speak for himself.

**Mr E O'Neill:** Our council finds the notion of discrimination on the grounds of one's religion abhorrent. It is on record as saying that. We do not believe that, in 2013, there is a place for that exemption of teachers from fair employment. We, as a council, are quite happy for that exemption to be removed, but we are not responsible for that. That exemption is contained in the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998. That is a legislative thing, which, I suppose, is the Assembly's business.

I could put it like this: we would not obstruct or seek to obstruct any removal of that exemption. Instead, we rely on our argument that, in order to empower teachers to be able to do what we require of them in a Catholic maintained primary or nursery school, we believe that they should acquire the certificate. Our current policy is that they have to have acquired it before they take up post. We are looking at that requirement and that policy. Our view is that that should, perhaps, be changed, so that we look, first, at the teacher and whether they are the best teacher for the post and, secondly, whether they are prepared to work in the sector by obtaining the certificate afterwards. That is what we are proposing. We think that it is a reasonable response and measure to take. We will also keep that under review.

We propose to do a range of other things with regard to our equality impact assessment of the policy. Because that exemption from the Fair Employment and Treatment Order exists, we do not gather any information on the religious composition of the teaching workforce. None of the employers does. I think that, even without the removal of that exemption, we should do that because we should inform our long-term strategic employment issues with sound data. We do not have that at the moment. We are not required to gather that information; therefore, we do not. None of the employers does.

We are really shooting in the dark here: we just do not know how many non-Catholic teachers we have in the system. Anecdotally, I can tell you that we have a significant number, but it is a minority. If we had data on how many we have in the system, we might better be able to inform, I suppose, a review into what we need to do in the longer term.

**Mr Lunn:** Good morning. My point relates to Danny's comment on the integrated school. I am not speaking for the integrated movement. However, I speculate that perhaps it needed a PE teacher and also had a slight deficit in the number of teachers who could prepare pupils for the sacraments and take on a religious education role in schools, so it took the opportunity to fill both gaps. I doubt that there was anything sinister to it. I have not heard of integrated schools, as a policy, demanding a Catholic teaching certificate as a qualification.

If a Catholic student arrives at St Mary's to do a three-year course, how much of that time is devoted to obtaining the certificate?

**Mr J Clarke:** In any undergraduate course in which the certificate is offered, 120 hours is spent on the course. Postgraduates spend 50 hours on the course.

**Mr Lunn:** Doing what? It is not the certificate that entitles them to teach religious education in the school.

**Mr J Clarke:** That is what it does, yes.

**Mr Lunn:** It is?

**Mr J Clarke:** Yes.

**Mr Lunn:** It goes as far as that? Does it not just give them a background knowledge that would enable them to pursue and maintain the Catholic ethos?

**Mr J Clarke:** It does both.

**Mr Lunn:** I am glad that you are loosening the restrictions to some extent. If it is just an add-on qualification, as I see it, to what the same teacher would learn in Stranmillis, and the only difference is 120 hours over three years —

**Mr J Clarke:** It is a four-year course.

**Mr Lunn:** That is 30 hours a year. Is the solution not to make it easier to access? I think that you referred to the correspondence course as the only available way to do it. Surely we need some sort of active co-operation between training institutions to make it possible and desirable.

**Mr J Clarke:** Eugene has been involved in that.

**Mr E O'Neill:** I have been working with representatives of the episcopal conference to look at how we might provide access for people. When I first looked at this, I could not understand why we force our own students here to obtain a certificate overseas. I just cannot understand that. So, I believe that the institutions here have a role to play in providing a pathway, irrespective of whether it is for their students, and irrespective of whether the certificate is at undergraduate, postgraduate or post-employment level. I think that is a third pathway that we need to develop.

There are currently two ways to obtain it: as an undergraduate or as a postgraduate student. We need to develop a third route and a course that reflects, I suppose, a person's position in their profession. We talk about learning outcomes; a student at 18 going into one of the institutions perhaps needs more course content than an undergraduate coming in at 21 does. Both will need more than a teacher who may come in after five or six years in employment; an understanding about how to obtain learning outcomes is required. So, we need to develop a third pathway, but we need to do that locally. I would like to open up that discussion with our institutions here, our recognised providers, those being the University of Ulster and St Mary's University College. They should provide for all.

**Mr Lunn:** If I was an 18-year-old non-Catholic student arriving at Stranmillis and knowing the situation around teacher employment to be what it is these days, knowing that we train too many teachers and have done so for years, I would want to explore every avenue. It would not just be a Catholic teaching certificate; I would want to go for any other additional qualification that I could obtain during or just after my student days to enhance my prospects of getting a job. So, if there is some way to make the Catholic certificate much more easily available to non-Catholic students, you really have to go that way. If it is going to be an asset rather than a requirement, you have to make it something that everybody can aspire to.

**Mr J Clarke:** That is precisely what —

**Mr Lunn:** I do not particularly see the desirability of having a qualification in religious education as being too big a burden for a student. I agree that it would enhance their overall learning experience. The slight problem that I have with all this is that you expect teachers in a Catholic school to maintain and promote the school's Catholic ethos. That is quite difficult for a Protestant teacher, even one who has a Catholic teaching certificate. Can you assure such people that they will be treated exactly the same around their employability? If a Protestant wants to teach in a Catholic school, and if they are equipped with the full range of qualifications, including the certificate, will they have equal opportunity to be employed?

**Mr E O'Neill:** I will give an example. My wife was a teacher, and her first teaching job was in England. She was one of those who had to go. She taught in a Catholic school. She was the only teacher in that Catholic school who was a Catholic. They all had certificates in religious education, but she was the only Catholic teacher in that Catholic school, and they were all perfectly capable of delivering the Catholic ethos.

**Mr Lunn:** It may not be the only area where England is a wee bit different from Northern Ireland.

**Mr E O'Neill:** I accept that, but the principle is that you did not necessarily have to be a practising Catholic or otherwise to do the job. They relied on the acquisition of the certificate to measure that.

**Mr J Clarke:** Being a Catholic is related to FETO; having the certificate in religious education is open to anyone, and we are not supporting FETO.

**Mr Lunn:** We have been bouncing around this for years. It should be equally possible for all students to obtain that certificate.

**Mr J Clarke:** That is correct.

**Mr E O'Neill:** Yes.

**Mr Lunn:** As you rightly say, if they do not want to go for it; if they think that it is not for them and that they would, to put it frankly, not like to teach in a Catholic school, that is their choice. That is it. I am glad to see that you are exploring these things a bit more openly now.

**Mr J Clarke:** It is a prerequisite to further engagement through shared education as we move through the area-planning process. There will be, and have been, engagements with the transferors. We believe that the faith-based dimension of education in Northern Ireland is very strong. We believe that by working with all the religious groupings in Northern Ireland, we will strengthen our education system.

**Mr Lunn:** Well, we will see where it goes. You and I were at the opening of a Catholic school recently, at which there was a heavy religious feel to the whole thing, including children doing the prayers and all the rest of it. It really was a very nice occasion and a nice ceremony, which illustrated to me exactly what you are talking about in relation to the Catholic ethos.

I was sitting beside a Protestant minister that day, who made the point that if the ceremony had been in what he called a Protestant school — I had to correct him on that and say "controlled school" — there would have been one prayer and that would have been it. It is a different approach, and he was right.

**The Chairperson:** There must be a change. I know that you said that it is an issue for the Assembly, Eugene, but when the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1976 came in, the Catholic Church reacted very strongly. I will quote Tony Gallagher, who is a reasonably reliable source, so that I cannot be accused of picking my sources, who said that the:

*"Roman Catholic educational interests were concerned that, without an exception for teachers, the 1976 Act could eventually lead to a system of non-denominational education, with a resulting loss of Catholic ethos."*

Is it not the case now that the Catholic Church is saying that it can, without fear or qualm, when it comes to the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (FETO), set all that aside? The cynic would say that, given the fact that there has been a discriminatory process in place since 1976, it could well afford to do it in 2013 because everyone is in place and it will take years, unless we bring in what we did in policing with 50:50 recruitment to redress the imbalance in the workforce?

**Mr J Clarke:** One of the great conundrums of Northern Ireland is that we manage to turn things upside down. This issue of exemptions —

**The Chairperson:** I am not turning anything upside down; I am just stating facts, which are very stubborn things, whether you turn them upside down, inside out or any way.

**Mr J Clarke:** I am not challenging your facts, Mervyn. I am challenging the argument. What finally became known as FETO was actually inspired by the Protestant Churches, not by the Catholic sector at all. Yet, here am I, trying to defend it. That is always the way that this appears to be. We are taking it from the wrong angle —

**The Chairperson:** Well, they had a different concern.

**Mr J Clarke:** You mentioned the 1976 Act, so let me deal with that. In 1976, as I recall, Mervyn, your party supported the ending of academic selection, so we have all moved on a bit, have we not?

In truth, the Church has moved on. In 2001, a document called 'Building Peace, Shaping the Future' made it very clear that Catholic education was not education for Catholics. The implication of that — perhaps it has taken us a little time to get there — is to suggest that Catholic education does not necessarily always have to be taught by Catholics. That is what we are recognising here.

We are moving on. We can quote all kinds of history, but surely the whole purpose of societal development is that we put some of those things from the past into the past and move forward with a different agenda. We are moving forward with a confident agenda now.

We have not had FETO in use. Why it is in legislation is, as Eugene said, a matter for the Assembly. We have no difficulty with living in a world where the full rigours of the 1976 Act are in place.

**Mr Rogers:** You are very welcome, gentlemen. First, I wish to declare an interest as a former principal of a Catholic school and as a chair of a board of governors of a Catholic maintained school.

I am alarmed by the term "cold house". I had non-Catholic children and non-Catholic staff at my school. I could take you to those staff, and you could ask them whether the school was a cold house. It certainly was not a cold house. The other thing that was mentioned earlier was that the Catholic Church runs our schools. That is certainly not the case. Yes, there are trustees' representatives on the board of governors, and they have an input to the board of governors like anybody else, but it is the board of governors and the principal who run the school.

As for the ethos, there is a particular tripartite relationship, particularly in a Catholic primary school, between home, church and school that is very important. It is not just teaching RE or just sacramental preparation. It is all those things pulled together. For example, we have a programme in primary schools called Growing in Faith Together, where the teacher takes a lead role but works along with the priest and with parents, who come in for meetings, etc, associated with that. I certainly would not want the perception out there that Catholic schools are a cold house.

In preparation for the sacraments, with contracting numbers, we sometimes now have joint classes. We might have up to three different classes, particularly in some of our small, rural primary schools. That has to be kept under consideration as well. Depending on the make-up of the school, some schools in their pastoral arrangements perhaps keep the teacher with the child as well. That is my comment.

I really want to get on to the idea of accessibility, which you mentioned, Jim. I am quoting from focus group findings:

*"There was again some frustration expressed that it was part of the course at St Mary's but Stranmillis students had to shoulder the extra time commitment."*

I think that is a key point. It is not just a matter of accessibility to an RE certificate. It has to be an integral part of a qualification. If you ask any BEd student who has gone through the first year of their training, you will hear that that has been quite a shock for them or whatever, and to expect them to have to do something additional to that is a problem. I am encouraged by what Eugene said about the work that is going on, but the key point here is the integral part of it. That certainly has to be addressed. The genuine concerns of students from Stranmillis have to be taken on board. As Trevor said, maybe some of them do not want to do it anyway, but if they want to do that to widen their options or whatever else, it has to be an integral part rather than an add-on.

The other reservation I have, coming from my teaching background, is that, for the teacher who comes out of Stranmillis and is appointed into a Catholic school, it is a very onerous task to do an added qualification — an RE certificate — during your first two years of teaching. Teaching practice has been fine, and you have just had a few classes to teach over a period, but you are then into a 100% timetable, early professional development and all of the other things that you have to do, so the first couple of years are an extremely challenging time for our young teachers. How can the certificate be integrated into that? I think that is a bit of an issue.

**Mr J Clarke:** There are two points. A student going through St Mary's, a Catholic college of education, does those 120 hours in addition to the course that is common to other institutions. If a student in Stranmillis decides to do the course, it is not additional work. It is just adding on to what the students in St Mary's are already doing. There are 120 fewer hours in provision outside of St Mary's. Part of what we are saying — and I think Eugene has been very strong on this — is that young people going into Stranmillis or any other college who wish to teach should have the option to do that alongside their main course so that they do not face the trauma of an additional qualification in the first two years.

We also need to be clear that that is not just an issue for Protestant young people; it applies to Catholic young people who do not get into a Catholic college of higher education that provides the RE certificate. The exclusivity, if you like, has been through the colleges that offer the certificate as opposed to those that do not. What we are trying to do is equalise that access for everyone. However, I accept the point that, in the main, certainly in Northern Ireland, Catholic young people aspire, in the first instance, to go through courses at St Mary's College. If they are in St Mary's, the course is there; it is part of what they do day and daily. If they do not get in and have to go elsewhere, then, yes, they have to access the course and do what might be additional work to what their colleagues are doing.

**Mr E O'Neill:** You raised the issue of the two years. With regard to their early professional development in two years, I suppose that having to do another course on top of that would be difficult. We recognise that. When the unions came to us and asked us to consider that for redundant teachers and give them two years, we thought, no, we will give them three years. We think that three years is a reasonable period during which people could acquire a certificate that requires around 50 hours' commitment. Three years is, probably, a fair position to take.

Jim has already mentioned that we want to see accessibility. We do. We are quite strong on that. We want to see accessibility, not as a burden but as a way to empower all teachers, no matter what their religious backgrounds are, to acquire a certificate that will assist them to work in the Catholic-maintained sector.

**Ms Boyle:** Thanks for the presentation. Sean made the point about the whole ethos. I speak as a Catholic parent, and I sent my children to a Catholic faith-based school. The reasons why I did that were, I suppose, to help me to assist my children and promote the ethos and understanding of my Catholic faith. We talk about exercising parental choice: that is what I did. Another reason why I chose to do that was the sacraments. It would not have occurred to me at the time that the person who prepared my child for the sacraments was Catholic, Protestant or other. As long as that person had some level of understanding of my faith, I never questioned that in the school. It goes back to what Sean said about this element being integral. With regard to students at Stranmillis, yes, it should be looked at as a whole, as opposed to a part. I welcome the review that CCMS is doing. I also welcome the comments that you made, Eugene, about engagement with the colleges.

I do not want to make this political in any way. However, I know of a school in the controlled sector that wrote to parents to say that it would not provide the Catholic children in the school with any preparation for sacraments. Obviously, that is a matter for that school. Personally, I thought that it was not the way forward if we are to provide pathways to get the best for children educationally and with regard to faith. At times, I wonder how the controlled sector deals with that. I have to say that many schools in the controlled sector help to prepare children for the sacraments. They have to be commended for that. I still have concern that some controlled-sector schools have Catholic children and do not help in the preparation for sacraments. I think that there is a balance to be applied. We talked about pathways to educational outcomes for children. I welcome what you are doing. I look forward to hearing of your engagement with the colleges and the transferors, and so on, around this, perhaps at a later date. Thank you.

**Mr J Clarke:** I cannot comment on the controlled sector.

**The Chairperson:** To conclude, you mentioned in your paper, Jim, other potential mitigations to ensure that the final policy requirement will not be regarded as an impediment to gaining employment in a Catholic school. Perhaps, when that is concluded, you could give more detail to the Committee on how you are progressing on the equality impact assessment of that.

**Mr J Clarke:** Yes. That process is under way.

**Mr E O'Neill:** We are consulting with all the political parties on that as well, Mervyn, so they will get a direct consultation on it.

**The Chairperson:** The Ballykelly ruling, in respect of a fair employment issue that was raised back in 2010, found that the practice in the school was wrong and illegal, and a settlement was secured. Is CCMS happy that lessons have been learned from those particular processes to ensure that it is not happening de facto? The headline on the article about that in the 'Belfast Telegraph' read:

*"Sectarianism in any guise is plain wrong".*

**Mr E O'Neill:** That was in relation to a redundancy decision that was made in a controlled school, where they protected two Catholics, I think, on the basis that they thought they had a certificate. It turned out that there were non-Catholics in the school who had the certificate as well. I can only give you my experience. I have been in CCMS for 20 years this year. I have worked across appointments panels at every level, across every one of our diocesan offices. I have been directly involved in perhaps 200 principal and vice-principal appointments directly, and I have never once heard a governor express an opinion that they wanted to appoint a Catholic. Certainly, I would find the notion that they would say something like that abhorrent. What we are engaged in is trying to open up a

process that sees us appoint the best possible teachers who want to work in our system and try to empower them to be able to do that.

**Mr Hazzard:** Apologies; Pat and I had to pop out as we had a meeting with a principal, so I missed your entire presentation. I just wanted to concur with colleagues that it is great to see that you are opening up the process for those very reasons. I just have one question, which is for clarification on an issue that I was dealing with lately around processes. When students, for example, from St Mary's, are engaged in work placements, are they allowed to teach in a non-Catholic school as part of that placement? Equally, if someone in Stranmillis wants to do their placement in a Catholic school, is that permitted? What is the accessibility around that?

**Mr J Clarke:** I certainly know, having been a principal, that Stranmillis students are placed in Catholic schools. I taught in the post-primary sector. I think students can go where they apply and where the school is prepared to accept them. In the case of special needs, for instance, special-needs student teachers would go to a controlled school because there are not very many Catholic special schools. However, that is not really a question for us. It is a question primarily for the teacher educators. We are only reflecting a view.

**Mr Hazzard:** It was just that it was put to me that the accessibility was not there. Thanks.

**Mr Lunn:** Can you clarify one wee thing? The paper that was in our brown pack, that is your paper?

**Mr E O'Neill:** Yes.

**Mr Lunn:** Paragraph 14 states:

*"The Catechetics Council currently recognises the following providers of this programme in Religious Education in Northern Ireland."*

**Mr E O'Neill:** There are two bullet points missing there. It should say The University of Ulster, Coleraine and St Mary's University College. Those are the two local providers.

**The Chairperson:** OK. Jim and Eugene, thank you very much. I look forward to engaging with you in the future.