

Vetting in Scottish Catholic schools 'putting off non-Catholic teachers'

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The leader of Scotland's biggest teachers' union has said fewer non-Catholics are teaching in the country's Catholic schools because teachers can be vetted according to their religious views.

This weekend Larry Flanagan, the general secretary of the Educational Institute of Scotland, criticised the Catholic church's right to approve teachers' appointments. "We are not in favour of the current operation of approval by the Catholic church," he said.

And speaking to the [Sunday Herald](#), Flanagan said a ruling which reaffirmed the Church's position had "absolutely" made the situation "worse". "There were probably more non-Catholics working in the Catholic sector before that (case) than after it," he said.

In 2006 David McNab, a teacher in Glasgow, was told he required the Catholic church's approval to apply for a promotion. He took the city council to a tribunal, won the case and received £2,000 in compensation.

But the tribunal ruled that the church could approve all teachers' appointments in denominational schools under the 1980 Education (Scotland) Act. The National Secular Society has argued that the provision, which allows church officials to consider appointees' "religious belief and character", is discriminatory.

In 2014 the European Commission [dismissed](#) an NSS complaint against the rule. The commission also decided to take no further action against the UK government over NSS claims that legislation relating to faith schools breached European employment law.

Last year Seamus Searson, general secretary of the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association, called for the Scottish policy to be reviewed. "We are concerned that teachers don't always know what is expected of them in a Catholic school," he said.

And in 2014 Anthony Finn, the former head of teaching watchdog the General Teaching Council for Scotland, said Catholic headteachers believed the approval policy was being implemented inconsistently.

He cited anecdotal evidence from teachers. One said she had been asked if she was "still living with her boyfriend". Another claimed a same-sex relationship counted against him. But other staff said they had not faced questions about their lifestyle.

Critics also say the rules and uncertainties put teachers off from applying to Catholic schools. Last year the Archbishop of Glasgow, Philip Tartaglia, called on Catholic teachers to "seek an appointment in a Catholic school" amid claims of a recruitment crisis.

Alistair McBay, NSS vice-president and spokesperson in Scotland, said: "Our schools should choose teachers who are best placed to educate our children, not those who jump through hoops to pass muster with the religious authorities."

"Larry Flanagan is correct to say the Catholic church's effective veto on appointments should be rescinded. And ultimately there should be no place for discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in state education."

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