

EHRC to investigate gender segregation at Islamic faith school

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The Equality and Human Rights Commission has been asked by the Department for Education to investigate an independent Islamic school that segregated its staff by gender.

The Rabia Girls' and Boys' School in Luton was [found by Ofsted inspectors to be segregating staff during meetings](#), with women forced to sit in a separate room during staff training with sessions then broadcast to them. During a meeting with inspectors the school "insisted" on using a dividing screen to separate male and female staff.

Commenting on the school after the case was referred to the EHRC by the Department for Education, the [Commission's Chief Executive Rebecca Hilsenrath said](#) that "Gender segregation of school staff is totally unacceptable in modern Britain."

She added that "All schools have a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 to prevent discrimination against their staff and students.

"Outside of acts of religious worship, segregating male and female staff at school meetings or training sessions is likely to amount to unlawful discrimination because it puts individuals at a disadvantage because of their sex."

The Commission will now decide "what action to take to ensure this Luton school ends its practice of segregating male and female staff."

In light of the Commission's investigation into segregation at the Rabia school the National Secular Society has written to the EHRC asking it to also consider the conduct of the London School of Economics (LSE) after learning that the university failed to properly investigate gender segregation at a recent university Islamic Society event.

In their response to the Luton school controversy the Equality Commission said that their "guidance to universities on gender segregation makes it clear that gender segregation, such as seating men and women separately at an event, is not permitted outside of religious worship."

The LSE Islamic Society's gala dinner featured a 7 foot barrier across the room to separate men and women. They claimed that it was a religious event and therefore did not fall foul of equality laws.

The National Secular Society rejected this argument and asked the Equality Commission's view on whether the addition of a religious element to a social event makes the imposition of gender segregation at a social event beyond reproach.

One LSE student told the [Daily Mail](#) that gender segregation has "been going on for quite a while" at the LSE. They added that some students were "really intimidated" because they don't "believe in gender segregation at all". This was putting students off attending events, the student added.

In a letter to the EHRC's chief executive the NSS said that the LSE did not appear to have taken steps to prevent further incidents of gender segregation and questioned whether LSE had fulfilled its responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

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