

Statement: our commentary on inclusion of 'religious staff' as key workers during coronavirus outbreak

Yesterday we commented on the government's inclusion of 'religious staff' as a specific category of key worker in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

We raised the concern that the government's listing of 'religious staff' was too broad and could hinder efforts to fight coronavirus by increasing the number of children placed in school.

Our position, read in full, made explicitly clear that some of the work done by religious staff in response to the coronavirus outbreak is vital and should qualify staff for inclusion as key workers.

Our argument was that the test for inclusion as a key worker should be secular. Our position was then and is now that the state should treat religious personnel caring for the vulnerable on the same terms as someone doing the same thing in a secular context.

Our position was misrepresented by some. But on reflection we also think we were subject to some valid criticism.

We understand how our commentary could appear insensitive at a time when many religious staff are supporting the vulnerable in our communities and preparing for a particularly challenging period ahead. We should have paid more regard to this, and apologise for any offence we caused by not doing so.

We'd like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to everyone - religious or not - who is working to support the vulnerable and those worst affected by the coronavirus pandemic.