

Catholic Public Policy digest

promoting the common good in public life

volume 03 issue 02

October 2006



News from the Catholic Education Service (CES)

The official education agency of the
Catholic Church in England and Wales.
39 Eccleston Square, London, SW1V 1BX
email: general@cesew.org.uk
web: <http://catholiceducation.org.uk>

Education & Inspections Bill (2006)

School Admissions

There are currently two serious challenges to the Church's rights as the admissions authority for Catholic schools.

Admissions Quotas

Lord (Kenneth) Baker will table an amendment at Report Stage, requiring that one third of pupils admitted to new schools with a religious character should not 'practise the religion of the school'.

The CES robustly opposes this move which would require Catholic schools, at times, to turn away Catholic pupils. Where two existing schools were replaced with a single institution, the new governing body would be required to reserve 30% of places for pupils who were not baptised Catholics. In areas of Catholic oversubscription, this could mean that 30% of Catholic applicants were denied a Catholic school education.

Lord Adonis has said the Government will resist the amendment but we need the support of Catholic parliamentarians to reject it.

Code on School Admissions

The Government intends to introduce two significant changes to its Code on School Admissions.

In a consultation to be issued shortly, the following will be outlawed:

- oversubscription criteria which give priority to applicants who have named the schools as their first preference on their Common Application Form – **first preference first arrangements**;
- oversubscription criteria which give a higher or lower priority on the basis of other schools applied to on the form – **conditionality**.

These admissions criteria are used by some schools to ensure that those most committed to Catholic

education stand the highest chance of getting such a place.

These changes would have serious implications for some Catholic parents and for schools and could work against community cohesion.

The CES has already met with Schools Minister Andrew Adonis and is urgently seeking to meet Opposition Education spokespersons. The CES seeks the support of all Catholic parliamentarians on this important issue and will be issuing further briefings and requests for assistance.

Home to School Transport

This continues to cause concern. Statistics show many pupils who attend Catholic schools travel further to attend both primary and secondary school.

The drop-off at secondary level from faith schools of pupils eligible for free school meals who live outside statutory walking distance, is significant, with only 16% of children on FSM travelling more than 3 miles in comparison with 28% of other children. There is a clear continuing need for discretionary transport.

Statistics also show that the extended offer of free transport for the poorest children to attend faith schools should be increased above 6 miles. Less than 2% of children on FSM make a 6+ mile journey at present compared to more than 6% of other children.

Quality & Performance: a survey of education in Catholic schools

This forthcoming survey based on OFSTED data, includes these key findings:

- Numbers of pupils in Catholic schools eligible for free school meals is in line with other schools nationally.
- The proportion of ethnic minority pupils in Catholic schools is above the national average: 20% compared with 15.6% in secondary schools and 18.2% compared with 16.7% at primary level.
- The proportion of pupils in Catholic schools gaining at least 5 GCSEs at A*-C level has again exceeded the national average; in 2005 the figure was 62.1% compared to a national average of 55.1%.

Contact: Laura McCann, lmccann@cesew.org.uk or
Oona Stannard, ostannard@cesew.org.uk



**News from the Secretariat of
the Catholic Bishops' Conference
of England and Wales**

39, Eccleston Square, London, SW1V 1BX

tel: 020 7901 4815

email: secretariat@cbcew.org.uk

web: www.catholic-ew.org.uk

**Catholic Parliamentary
Internships 2007/8**

[see notice on back page](#)

Discrimination law review – consultation on regulations to outlaw discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of goods and services

The Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales and Scotland, alongside the Church of England and other faith communities have called for wider exemptions than the Government has proposed in new regulations likely to be debated in Parliament this autumn. For the Catholic community one of the major concerns is the future of Catholic adoption societies which are a significant provider across Great Britain. These adoption agencies need sufficient safeguards to be able to continue to operate with fidelity to their Christian values and without finding themselves thereby discriminated against by local authorities.

The consultation response was submitted in July 2006 and the Government is likely to lay draft regulations before Parliament in the autumn.

For a copy of the Bishops' Conference response see: www.catholic-ew.org.uk/citizenship/documents/FINALSubmissiontoDTI_9606__2_.pdf

Contact: Richard Zipfel, 020 7901 4831, richard.zipfel@cbcew.org.uk

Response to the Law Commission review of cohabitation law

The Bishops' Conference is responding to the Law Commission consultation 'Cohabitation: the financial consequences of relationship breakdown'. The Commission's consultation canvasses a range of possible legislative changes to provide more rights to the parties on separation, recognising that the numbers of cohabiting couples are rising and that there is still a widespread myth that 'common law' marriage confers rights. The Bishops' Conference argues strongly that more should be done to support the institution of marriage – including publicising and promoting marriage as the obvious remedy for the lack of rights enjoyed by cohabiting couples. The response argues against conferring any new legal status on cohabitation *per se*, and recommends that any reform is limited to giving the courts a wider direction to remedy manifest injustice in exceptional cases.

For the Bishops' Conference response to Law Commission consultation see www.catholic-ew.org.uk/citizenship/CRCBriefingPapersPubsSubs.htm

Contact: Charles Wookey, 020 7901 4812, charles.wookee@cbcew.org.uk

Opposing euthanasia and assisted suicide; promoting palliative care

The Bishops' Conference fully supports the Care not Killing Alliance, which brings together healthcare, disability and religious groups and many others united in their opposition to the legalisation of assisted suicide or euthanasia. The Alliance is seeking to promote the wider availability of better palliative care in England and Wales and will be supporting the Palliative Care Bill to be introduced by Jim Dobbin MP.

For further information see the Care not Killing website: www.carenotkilling.org.uk

For the overall work of the Department for Christian Responsibility and Citizenship please see: www.catholic-ew.org.uk/citizenship/index.htm

International Affairs

For the current work of the Department for International Affairs, please see:

www.catholic-ew.org.uk/international

Refugee Policy

On 11 September the Bishop of Lancaster, the Rt Rev Patrick O'Donoghue, Chairman of the Office for Refugee and Migration Policy of the Bishops' Conference, met a delegation from the Polish-British Mission for Employment led by Polish charity, the Barka Foundation, (www.barka.org.pl/index_eng.htm) which was visiting London to find out at first hand about homelessness among Polish migrants. Representatives from homelessness charities, Housing Justice, The Passage, the Simon Community and The Upper Room, were also present. For the statement issued after the meeting see: www.catholic-ew.org.uk/international/12.09.06ORPonHomelessPolishMigrants.htm

Contact: John Joseet, 020 7901 4865, john.joseet@cbcew.org.uk



News from CAFOD

The official development agency of the Catholic Church in England and Wales.
Romero Close, Stockwell Road,
London, SW9 9TY
email: hqcafod@cafod.org.uk
web: www.cafod.org.uk

Companies Bill

The Companies Bill (formerly titled Company Law Reform Bill) is the biggest reform of UK company law for 150 years. The Bill will set out the terms of reference for UK companies in the 21st Century and the broad legal framework within which they operate. CAFOD, as a member of both the Trade Justice Movement and the Corporate Responsibility Coalition (CORE), urges MPs and the Government to seize the rare opportunity presented by this major reform to create a legal framework which would ensure that UK companies combine successful enterprise with ethical and responsible corporate behaviour.

CAFOD recognises that many UK companies already take their social and environmental responsibilities seriously, and that on a global scale business is often a major force for good. CAFOD acknowledges that voluntary initiatives and the promotion of best practice have an important role to play in bringing about better corporate social and environmental performance. However, it cannot be left to choice and voluntary initiatives to ensure that companies respect the rights of people and the environment where they operate. Legislation is needed to create basic minimum obligations on companies and ensure that progressive companies are not undercut by the minority of businesses that have a disregard for the social and environmental impacts of their business operations. This is vital in addressing major global challenges such as poverty, climate change, trade justice and sustainable development.

CAFOD, in coalition with CORE and the Trade Justice Movement, is calling for amendments to the Companies Bill so that:

1) Companies are legally required to report on their social and environmental impacts

Corporate transparency is the critical first step towards achieving more ethical and sustainable business performance. Alongside their annual financial reports, all companies should be legally required to report on their social and environmental impacts in a manner proportionate to their size and complexity. There should also be clear guidelines on what these reports should include and adequate audit requirements to ensure the information included is correct.

2) Directors are legally obliged to take reasonable steps to minimise any significant damage done to workers, local communities and the environment

The current draft of the Bill places a primary duty on company directors to promote the success of the company for the benefit of its shareholders. In fulfilling this duty, directors are required to 'have regard' to other factors such as the interests of the company's employees and the impact on the community and the environment.

CAFOD is concerned that this obligation is insufficient to lead to any practical improvement in the performance of negligent companies. The Government must create a broad incentive for company directors to be proactive in this area through a duty to take reasonable steps to minimise significant negative impacts on workers, communities and the environment.

3) People overseas who are harmed by the activities of a UK company are able to take action against them in a UK court

CAFOD believes there should be protections under UK law for affected communities abroad so they can seek compensation for human rights or environmental abuses committed by UK companies or their overseas subsidiaries or affiliates if they are unable to access justice in their own country. CAFOD calls for clarification on the Government's position on this and to provoke debate as a matter of urgency on whether this can be addressed through changes to company law or, if not, by what other means it can be achieved.

The Bill's third reading in the Commons will take place on 19 October. CAFOD urges MPs to support the above amendments to the Companies Bill.

Contact: bburrows@cafod.org.uk

PFOC AGM: Does British Business Help the World's Poor?

The All Party Parliamentary Friends of CAFOD AGM will be held on 10 October from 6.30pm in Committee Room 20 at the Houses of Parliament. Anne Lindsay, CAFOD's Private Sector Policy Analyst will be speaking on this important and fascinating issue.

Contact: anowakowska@cafod.org.uk

International Development (Reporting and Transparency) Bill

CAFOD congratulates Tom Clarke MP and member of the Parliamentary Friends of CAFOD (PFOC) on the successful passage of his Private Members' Bill through Parliament. The Bill legally obliges the UK Government to report annually to Parliament on its aid spending, especially the 0.7% target.



News from Caritas—social action

An official agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, and an umbrella body of the Catholic Diocesan Care Agencies.

39 Eccleston Square, London, SW1V 1BX

email: caritas@cbcew.org.uk

web: www.caritas-socialaction.org.uk

Proposals to outlaw sexual orientation discrimination in the provision of goods and services

Caritas-social action has submitted a response to the DTI consultation on the proposed Regulations to accompany the Equality Bill 2005.

While we welcome the commitment from Government to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, we also welcome the recognition in the consultation paper of the impact these Regulations may have in the provision of goods, facilities, services, in education and in the exercise of public functions.

Caritas-social action's submission is focused exclusively on the specific issue of a voluntary body exercising a public function on a public authority's behalf. It looks at the likely impact of these Regulations on Catholic adoption and fostering agencies in particular. We wholeheartedly welcome the Government's willingness to consider exceptions to these Regulations to ensure that the protection they provide are effective and appropriately targeted.

However, we believe good grounds exist for granting a specific exception in relation to the work of Catholic adoption and fostering agencies, whose practice is based on Catholic teaching, particularly in regard to the sacrament of marriage. The impact of these Regulations could mean therefore that, in the worst case scenario, without an exception being granted, Catholic adoption and fostering agencies would close. This would also mean a loss of other services they currently provide to socially excluded children and families.

Not only would this open a huge gap in service provision for many of the most vulnerable children in the UK and be at variance with Government policy to find placements for children in care who cannot live with their birth families. As a direct consequence there would be less choice in the adoption and fostering sector as a whole for both children and prospective adopters, especially when we consider the ability of the Catholic fostering and adoption sector to tap into resources offered in the diverse Catholic population.

Caritas-social action's submission is therefore a pragmatic argument based on the need to respect the faith-based values of Catholic service providers in order to ensure that the high quality adoption and fostering services that they provide are enabled to continue. We would very much welcome the opportunity to have further dialogue with Ministers and Members of Parliament on this particular matter.

Contact: philippa.gitlin@cbcew.org.uk

Catholic Parliamentary Internships

Since 2003, in collaboration with Members of Parliament and Heythrop College, University of London, the Bishops' Conference has been running a Catholic Parliamentary Internship scheme for exceptional Catholic graduates who are considering a career in public service. At the moment the scheme places three interns each year with Christian MPs from different political parties. If you are interested in taking an intern from October 2007 to July 2008 please contact Charles Wookey, 020 7901 4812, charles.wookey@cbcew.org.uk.

For more information see www.catholicchurch.org.uk/internships

catholic public policy digest

Published for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and its agencies

by Quantrill Media www.quantrillmedia.com

email: editorial@quantrillmedia.com

The Catholic Trust for England and Wales, Registered Charity Number 1097482, 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX