Employment Mobility of Teachers and the FETO Exception

Three factors restrict teachers from moving freely between school types; trainee teachers are separated - i.e. at St Mary’s and Stranmillis University Colleges; Catholic Maintained primary schools require all teachers to complete a special RE certificate; and teachers are excluded from Fair Employment laws (FETO 1998) - it is perfectly legal to use a teacher’s religion to discriminate in appointments.

It had been thought that a ‘chill factor’ also stopped teachers from moving across sectors - but new research has identified that there is increasing movement between sectors - particularly in grammar schools.

There is still a significant number of teachers who have had no experience of education outside of their own community at any stage; they have followed a community consistent path from primary school to post primary to teaching college in NI, have undertaken no teaching practice outside their community and have never been employed in a school that wasn’t compatible with their identity.

This is the case for 33% of Catholic teachers (48% of those employed in Maintained primary schools) and 22% of Protestant teachers (38% of those employed in Controlled primary schools).

Whilst many teachers are not deterred from looking for posts across the divide, a significant proportion of teachers still stay rigidly within their own communities (particularly in primary schools). Teachers are in a unique position to build community bridges - Shared Education policy and legislation requires it! Yet many teachers have had very limited professional experience of working with the ‘other side’.

The FETO exception allows ‘institutional sectarianism’ and separation that would be unacceptable in any other job! FETO exception removal would provide a signal of change.

Report 01
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