

## New GTC Code of Conduct

# Help protect Christian teachers from the new 'equality' code

The General Teaching Council for England (GTC) is consulting on a new Code of Conduct and Practice which determines standards for the teaching profession. Principle 4 of the code imposes a duty on teachers to “promote equality and value diversity in all their professional relationships and interactions”.

If words had their ordinary meaning this would cause no problems for Christian teachers. But a string of high profile cases has shown that ‘equality’ and ‘diversity’ can mean promoting values contrary to the Christian faith and Christian freedom.

It is vital Christians respond to the GTC consultation, urging them to amend the code to protect freedom of religion and freedom of speech.

### The draft code

The GTC is the professional regulatory body for teaching. No person may teach in a state school unless they are on the GTC’s register of qualified teachers. Those who wish to register must sign the declaration, “I understand that as a registered teacher I am required to comply with the code of conduct and practice for registered teachers.”<sup>1</sup>

The draft code issued by the GTC consists of eight principles. It claims to set out the “expected norms of teacher practice” to “guide everyday judgements and actions”.<sup>2</sup> Below is an extract from Principle 4:

*4. Promote equality and value diversity*

Registered teachers...

Act respectfully towards all children and young people, parents, carers and colleagues, regardless

of their socio-economic background, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion or beliefs...

Proactively challenge discrimination, stereotyping, and bullying, no matter who is the victim or the perpetrator; promote equality and value diversity in all their professional relationships and interactions<sup>3</sup>

The first paragraph above simply requires teachers to treat people respectfully. This is what Christians believe in any event. The Bible teaches the inherent worth and dignity of every person – regardless of their background or conduct – because they are made in the image of God. Christ taught that we must love everyone, even our enemies,<sup>4</sup> and “do good to all people”.<sup>5</sup>

But Principle 4 also requires teachers to “promote equality and value diversity in all their professional relationships and interactions”. This has enormous potential to be used against Christian teachers.

### ‘Equality and diversity’

‘Equality’ and ‘diversity’ are concepts which can be used as a tool for promoting secularism and gay rights, as these cases demonstrate:

- When nurse **Caroline Petrie** offered to pray for a patient North Somerset Primary Care Trust suspended her. It cited the Nursing and Midwifery Council Code that says “you must demonstrate a personal and professional commitment to equality and diversity.”<sup>6</sup>
- **Lillian Ladele**, a Christian working as a marriage registrar for Islington Council, was disciplined for refusing to conduct

homosexual civil partnership ceremonies.<sup>7</sup> The Employment Appeal Tribunal ruled that Islington was justified in disciplining her because to do otherwise “would send the wrong message to staff of the council about its commitment to equality”.<sup>8</sup>

- Brighton Council withdrew funding from **Pilgrim Homes**, a Christian care home, because it refused to question elderly residents four times a year about their sexual orientation.<sup>9</sup> Brighton claimed the home failed to comply with “fair access and diversity” policies.<sup>10</sup>

## What the code might mean

The code is used by the GTC itself to assess cases of serious misconduct by teachers or trainee teachers.<sup>11</sup> However, it will also be used by:

1. Governing bodies and LEAs in recruitment and disciplining of teachers;
2. Universities in assessing candidates for teacher training;
3. Employment tribunals assessing claims of unfair dismissal;
4. Campaigners who want to make trouble for Christian teachers. (Allegations of misconduct can be made direct to the GTC by members of the public.<sup>12</sup>)

## Examples

- A university department of education asks all applicants for teacher training courses to affirm their willingness to promote gay rights, citing Principle 4.
- A Christian woman applies to teach Personal, Social and Health Education. At interview

she is asked if she will use lesson materials designed by gay rights groups. When she says no she is told this breaches Principle 4. She does not get the job. The woman takes the school to an employment tribunal for religious discrimination. The tribunal refers to the code of conduct and finds in favour of the school.

- Pupils ask a Christian RE teacher if he believes Christ is the only way to salvation. He says yes. An atheist parent complains to the GTC and to the school, citing Principle 4.
- A teacher known for his Christian faith is asked for advice by a troubled pupil. After a conversation he tells the pupil he will be praying for him. Another staff member reports the teacher who is suspended pending investigation into an alleged failure to “value diversity”.
- An OFSTED inspector criticizes teachers of sex education in a church school for teaching that cohabitation and homosexual practice are wrong, claiming it breaches the GTC’s equality and diversity requirements.
- A Christian teacher, returning to the profession after a career break, applies for GTC registration. However, she cannot sign the declaration about complying with the code because she cannot, in good conscience, agree with the modern definitions of ‘equality’ and ‘diversity’. She is therefore unable to return to teaching.
- A homosexual group writes to schools claiming that Principle 4 means all schools must use materials designed to promote acceptance of homosexuality.

*The Christian Institute*  
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## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> General Teaching Council for England, *Application to Register Form*, section 3, see [http://www.GTC.org.uk/shared/contentlibs/107419/104518/gtc\\_registration\\_form.pdf](http://www.GTC.org.uk/shared/contentlibs/107419/104518/gtc_registration_form.pdf) as at 12 February 2009
- <sup>2</sup> General Teaching Council for England, *Code of Conduct and Practice – Draft for Consultation*, November 2008, page 3
- <sup>3</sup> General Teaching Council for England, *Code of Conduct and Practice – Draft for Consultation*, November 2008, page 14
- <sup>4</sup> E.g. Luke 6:27-36; Matthew 5:43-48
- <sup>5</sup> Galatians 6:10; see also 1 Thessalonians 5:15
- <sup>6</sup> See <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/20090202/diversity-rules-see-nurse-suspended-for-prayer-offer/> as at 12 February 2009
- <sup>7</sup> See <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/20081219/lillian-ladele-ruling-is-overturned-on-appeal/> as at 12 February 2009
- <sup>8</sup> *London Borough of Islington v Ladele* [2008] UKEAT 0453\_08\_1912, para. 100
- <sup>9</sup> See <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/20090207/funding-restored-to-christian-care-home/> as at 12 February 2009
- <sup>10</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 7 February 2009, see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/4548761/Christian-care-home-victorious-in-gay-dispute.html> as at 12 February 2009
- <sup>11</sup> General Teaching Council for England, *Code of Conduct and Practice – Draft for Consultation*, November 2008, page 24
- <sup>12</sup> General Teaching Council for England, *Code of Conduct and Practice – Draft for Consultation*, November 2008, page 24