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Inspecting churches for 'British values'

The Government is proposing that Ofsted inspect church youth work to see if it complies with the vague 'British values' test. These deeply troubling plans are alarming Christians.

The plans would apply to any institution in England which provides instruction to under 19-year-olds for more than 6 hours in any week. This would catch various forms of church youth work, such as holiday Bible clubs, church weekends and summer camps, as well as a vast number of different voluntary groups.

The Prime Minister referred

particularly to madrassas when he announced the new approach in October 2015, but said it will apply to an institution "whatever its religion" and added, "if you are teaching intolerance, we will shut you down".



There will be a nationwide register for out-of-school settings with local authorities and Ofsted overseeing the regime. But Ofsted inspectors have repeatedly shown hostility to teachers and pupils with socially conservative beliefs.

We believe the proposals represent an unparalleled attack on religious freedom in our country.

Ofsted inspectors to question young people behind their parents' backs

Ofsted is to be given legal power to assess whether teaching in out-of-school settings complies with 'British values'.

This could mean Ofsted questioning children from Christian families about their beliefs during church youth work without their parents present, as has already happened in some schools.

The Department for Education's consultation stated that any "undesirable" teaching which is incompatible with 'British values' will be prohibited.

This broad-brush



approach has already seen Ofsted inspectors demonstrate hostility towards Christian and Jewish schools. Over the past 18 months they have been caught out questioning school pupils about their views on same-sex marriage and transsexualism.

It is likely that teaching that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ would qualify as 'intolerance' in the minds of some inspectors. Ofsted could demand that the alternative viewpoint is given. A holiday Bible club could be told to explain that

other people believe salvation is possible without faith in Jesus.

The nationwide registration scheme will be administered by local authorities, some of which can be very opposed to Christian beliefs. A hostile council could ask Ofsted to inspect Evangelical churches in its area.

In effect Ofsted would become the state regulator of religious beliefs. The proposed sanctions include closing a group's premises and banning its leaders from working with children in future.

Christians are the law-abiding victims and not the perpetrators of extremism

Churches do not radicalise children and do not need to be monitored for extremism. In fact, Christians are most likely to be the victims of extremist actions around the world. Up to 10,000 people are killed each year for believing in Jesus Christ, according to expert analysis.

Christians are law-abiding citizens who support democracy and are taught to love their neighbour (Matthew 22:39).

Churches are



Provided by MEMRI JTMM

IS turn a captured church into a mosque in Iraq.

activities run by the local parish church as a madrasa run by an Imam who advocates Sharia law. There is clearly a case for focusing resources instead on where the problems are known to arise.

David Cameron has told the UN that “the biggest problem we have today is that Islamist extremist violence that has given birth to ISIL”. Why then is the Government’s counter-extremism policy not focusing on this problem?

already regulated by the Charity Commission, which requires them to have a safeguarding policy in place for

their children’s work and to carry out criminal records checks on those involved. There is no need for further

regulation.

The Counter-Extremism Strategy encourages public bodies to be just as suspicious of

Ofsted looking for ‘emotional harm’

The consultation paper says that Ofsted will be looking for any ‘emotional harm’ to children.

But this is subjective and liable to misuse. Employing vague terms like ‘emotional harm’ or ‘tolerance’ renders churches wide open to false accusations.

This aspect of the plans seems to include the ‘safe space’ concept which has been so damaging to free speech in universities.



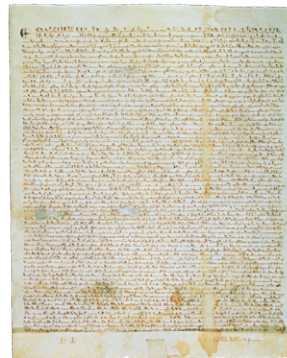
George Muresan

The Govt’s proposals breach longstanding legal freedoms

The proposals drive a coach and horses through longstanding legal freedoms.

It is easy to envisage an avalanche of court cases by affected Christian youth groups, seeking to defend their religious liberty. No doubt this would involve big legal bills for churches.

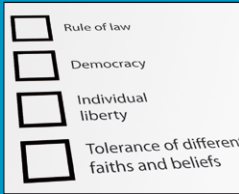
Ofsted inspectors questioning children in secret about their beliefs could easily breach fundamental human rights and harassment laws.



Clause 1 of Magna Carta, which remains on the statute book, says: “the English Church shall be free, and shall have its rights undiminished, and its liberties unimpaired”. Magna Carta is very clear: it is not the proper role of governing authorities to interfere in Church teaching.

◀ Since 1215 Magna Carta enshrined church freedoms in the law. Pictured: 1297 version.

Vague 'British values' test



Ofsted inspectors will assess church teaching to see if it complies with 'British values'.

But the Government's definition of fundamental 'British values' is very vague and subjective: "democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs."

Too often state officials fail to distinguish between respect for people and respect for their beliefs.

The Bible clearly teaches that everyone is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) and so Christians respect and love all people, whatever their background or beliefs. But expecting people to show "mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs" is very different.

In fact, when a person rejects a particular belief they can respect the believer but do not respect the belief – an atheist does not respect belief in God and a capitalist does not respect Marxist beliefs.

True tolerance allows people freedom to disagree.

How your church would be required to register

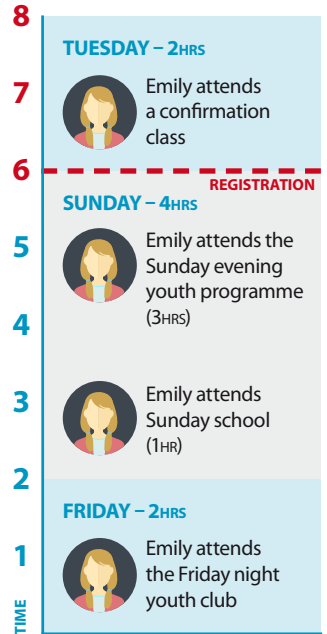
The proposals cover "anything which entails an individual child attending a setting for more than between 6 to 8 hours a week". This will often apply to church youth activities.

A child doesn't have to attend one long session once a week – a few shorter sessions could reach the 6-hour threshold under 'time aggregation'. For example if a teenage girl goes to her church's youth group for 2 hours on a Friday night, then to church on a Sunday morning for 1 hour and again in the evening for 3 hours.

Any additional teaching at special events or baptism/confirmation classes makes it still more likely that churches will be drawn into the scheme. Even church family services could end up being inspected by Ofsted.

It's not the total number of hours of all a church's youth activities which counts, but whether or not any one child experiences 6 hours of teaching in a week.

St Paul's Church



Combating extremism needs a targeted approach not indiscriminate monitoring

The Government says it needs to monitor "extremist" teaching. But these plans will be counter-productive: rather than help the authorities tackle those Islamic madrassas which radicalise children, they will create a monumental bureaucracy which diverts resources from the real problem. A targeted, intelligence-led approach is surely a better solution.

Groups working



with children are currently required to conduct DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks. This system could be improved to enable

better background checks to prevent individuals who have been involved in radicalising children from teaching in out-of-school settings.

MPs speak against the plans in Parliament



"Why does tackling abuse and radicalisation in a very tiny number of madrassas mean that every voluntary group in England that instructs children for six or more hours a week has to register with the state? ...it unleashes a whirlwind of destructive over-regulation on the voluntary sector."

1 Sir Edward Leigh, Gainsborough (CON)

"We risk passing massive powers to Ofsted to define extremism and what constitutes British values."

2 Sir Gerald Howarth, Aldershot (CON)



"We should be promoting the teaching of the Bible to our children, not seeking to restrict it."

3 Steve Double, St Austell and Newquay (CON)



"The proposals are disproportionate and likely to be ineffective, and pose a real threat to freedom of speech, conscience and belief."

4 Fiona Bruce, Congleton (CON)

"Should we go down the path of these sweeping authoritarian measures – that is how they appear to me – we will be letting terrorists win by sacrificing precious, hard-won freedoms."

5 Caroline Ansell, Eastbourne (CON)



"This proposal seems to me a gross infringement of so many rights".

6 Graham Stuart, Beverley and Holderness (CON)



"I know the difficulties teachers have in recruiting people to help with out-of-school clubs and activities, and adding a further layer of bureaucracy will simply

close those down, with all the benefits to our young people being lost in one foul blow."

7 Carol Monaghan, Glasgow North West (SNP)

"A serious re-evaluation is needed of whether it is worth eroding such civil and religious liberties in the name of those so-called British values."

8 Jim Shannon, Strangford (DUP)



"Making religious instruction subject to a state-controlled version of values is deeply problematic."

9 Stephen Timms, East Ham (LAB)

"The Government are using a sledgehammer to crack a nut, tying up many voluntary organisations and faith groups in more red tape that makes it look as if the Government are doing something."

10 Nic Dakin, Scunthorpe (LAB)



"The best thing that the Government could do is to bury the consultation once and for all."

11 Rob Ffello, Stoke-on-Trent South (LAB)

▼ Westminster Hall, Wednesday 20 January 2016



What groups would Ofsted inspect?

The Government proposes to regulate any institution in England which provides more than 6 hours of teaching in a week to under 19-year-olds. A vast array of organisations will be covered, including certain church youth work. Possible scenarios could include:

Holiday Bible club

St Thomas' Church has run a holiday Bible club for a week in August for many years. However, a complaint is made to Ofsted about leaders teaching that only people who believe in Jesus go to heaven (from John 14:6) and the inspector seeks to close down the holiday Bible club for causing 'emotional harm' to children.



Cookery class

A chef runs weekend cookery classes for those over 16. However, he refuses, on animal welfare grounds, a request from a Muslim enquirer to use only halal food. The enquirer asks Ofsted to close down the course for failing to show tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.



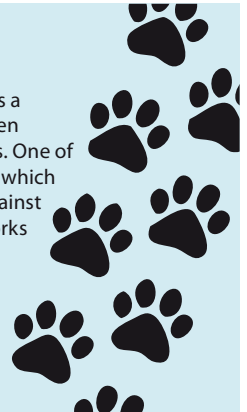
Church youth group

A 15-year-old attends Christ Church's youth group on a Friday evening for 2 hours 30 minutes, on Sunday morning for 1 hour 30 minutes, and Sunday evening events for 2 hours. His over-cautious schoolteacher knows that the pastor of Christ Church is a prominent opponent of same-sex marriage and tells Ofsted that teenagers in the church are at risk of being indoctrinated with hateful opinions contrary to equality laws.



Wildlife charity

A local wildlife charity runs a week's activities for children during the school holidays. One of the organisers gives a talk which supports local protests against fracking. A parent who works in the engineering sector complains to Ofsted that the charity is radicalising children and an investigation is launched.



Humanist Association conference

An interested 17-year-old goes to a Saturday day conference run by her local Humanist Association. The event uses materials from the national 'Exploring Humanism' course which says: "Religious authority has been, and still is, used to justify oppression, discrimination and injustice". The mother of the 17-year-old later complains to Ofsted that the course is promoting intolerance.



RAF Air Cadet training

National RAF Air Cadet training weekends study the bombing campaign in Syria and Iraq. Co-ordinated anonymous complaints are made to Ofsted that the Air Cadets' course is promoting hatred and violence against minority groups.



Ofsted head seeks power to inspect Sunday schools for radicalisation

In January 2016 the head of Ofsted, Sir Michael Wilshaw, explained on live radio why Ofsted wants the power to inspect out-of-school settings.

Sir Michael said that the Government is concerned about the radicalisation of children in unregistered schools, and therefore Sunday schools, madrassas and after-school clubs should be registered.

Government Ministers say they do not intend to cover Sunday schools, but Sir Michael Wilshaw is



Sir Michael Wilshaw, Head of Ofsted.

correct that the plans in the consultation paper will do so. This is because of 'time aggregation' with other church events, e.g. when time at Sunday school forms part of 6 hours of church activity for an

individual child.

The Government has also now said that one-off residential weeks like a summer camp will not be affected. But where does this leave non-residential activities like holiday Bible

clubs? Or a residential weekend away that happens two or three times in a year?

When Sir Michael Wilshaw was asked on-air why he could not just focus on madrassas, he said there needed to be an "even-handed" approach.

This fulfils a warning given in 2015 by Lord Evans, ex-head of MI5, that Christians could fall victim to the counter-extremism agenda because authorities don't want to appear to focus on one religion alone.

Ofsted could follow English youth groups across the border



Churches in England which run weekend activities in other parts of the UK could potentially have Ofsted inspectors examining their teaching.

This would mean Ofsted travelling into Scotland or Wales to police church activities or summer camps, even though the scheme is only meant to apply to England.

Huge new bureaucracy to check thousands of groups

A vast range of organisations would be forced to register under the proposed scheme.

Many different groups provide instruction during evenings, weekends or school holidays.

Political parties, atheist groups, sports clubs, wildlife summer schools, driving instructors and cookery classes would all have to register if they instruct or train someone under the age of 19 for 6 hours in any one week. Church youth work would undoubtedly be covered. There are about 40,000 churches in England.

This is surely a massive distraction from targeting those places where children are known to be at risk of radicalisation.

Many voluntary groups would close in the face of burdensome regulation.



Even driving schools could meet the registration criteria.

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