

**Speech by Mr Thomas Byrne T.D. Minister of State with Responsibility for
Sport and Physical Education**

to the

**Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research,
Innovation and Science**

28th March 2023

in relation to the

**proposed Employment Equality Act 1998 (section 12) (Reservation of
Vocational Training Places) Order 2022,**

a draft of which has been laid before the Oireachtas for approval.

Thank you, Chair and members.

I am very pleased to attend the Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science for the first time since my appointment as a Minister of State at the Department of Education.

I am also glad to have this opportunity to discuss this draft Ministerial Order, and the proposed resolutions for the Dáil and Seanad to approve it, as required by legislation.

This order will allow Dublin City University to reserve 32 places on its primary Bachelor of Education (initial teacher education) programme for entry for the next five academic years, under a derogation allowed by section 12 of the Employment Equality Act.

The B.Ed programme has academic accreditation from DCU and also accreditation from the Teaching Council for teacher registration purposes.

The order has been prepared following a request made to the Minister by DCU, which is linked to commitments made as part of the incorporation of the former Church of Ireland College of Education into DCU, in 2016.

Its purpose is to ensure the availability of teachers to primary schools with a Church of Ireland and reformed Christian ethos in order to maintain the religious ethos of such primary schools.

Similar orders were made in 1999, 2003, 2008, 2013 and 2018. The most recent order expires on 31 August 2023.

The incorporation of the former Church of Ireland College of Education (CICE) into DCU, along with St. Patrick's College and the Mater Dei Institute of Education, took place in 2016.

This action was a direct response to policy recommendations, set out in a key 2012 report for the Department of Education, titled: *The Report of the International Review Panel on the Structure of Initial Teacher Education Provision in Ireland*.

That Report examined the capacity of the initial teacher education landscape to contribute to excellence in education.

Its key recommendation was a move to consolidate initial teacher education programmes in six new, “centres for teacher education”, which would represent a reduction on the number of institutions involved.

These new centres would facilitate high quality teacher education in a university setting where there would be a critical mass in terms of research capacity and scope for better engagement across different levels of education.

This incorporation is a very significant achievement and a major contribution to the teacher education landscape in Ireland.

The DCU Institute of Education has a staff of more than 150 full-time academics and a student body in excess of 3,800.

It provides, on a unified campus, Initial Teacher Education across the full continuum including early childhood, primary, post-primary and further education.

It provides specific education programmes for prospective primary teachers for Catholic and Church of Ireland schools as well as for multi-denominational schools.

A follow up Report on the initial teacher education landscape was commissioned by the Higher Education Authority in 2018.

Its findings recognised the strong research culture, and the significant and growing reputation of excellence, of the new DCU Institute of Education.

Commitments were made, as part of the incorporation, to ensure that that the distinctive identity, values and learning that the Church of Ireland College of Education protected would be maintained in teacher education.

This draft Order is being made under the Employment Equality Act 1998, Section 12.

The Act prohibits discrimination on a wide range of grounds, including religion.

While the primary focus of the Act relates to employment, it includes a provision relating to discrimination, when offering courses of vocational training, including teacher training.

However, section 12, subsection 4, of the Act provides that, for the purpose of ensuring the availability of teachers to primary schools, which are under the direction or control of a body established for religious purposes or, whose objectives include the provision of services in an environment which promotes certain religious values, and in order to maintain the religious ethos of those schools, a derogation from the prohibition of discrimination may apply.

This order has been prepared to facilitate such a derogation, following an application by DCU.

In October last year, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O'Gorman TD, indicated his consent to this order, as is required by the Act.

I fully acknowledge that the place of religion in education is changing.

However, it is important that, against this backdrop, the particular needs of minority religions of the State are recognised.

Deputies will be aware that this is also reflected in the approach taken in the Admissions Act 2018.

In conclusion, renewal of the derogation is consistent with the commitments made as part of the creation of the DCU Institute of Education and also, with Department and Government policy in relation to protection of minority religions.

I thank the Committee for its consideration of this important issue.

ENDS