

The Church of England Appointment Process

The paper "Towards Good Practice in the Appointment of Clergy" on the Church of England website stresses the importance of equal opportunities in the appointment of clergy. Selection criteria should be objective and related to genuine (not just perceived) needs of the post concerned. This is a commendable principle that Amicus would wholeheartedly endorse as representing best practice in recruitment and selection of personnel.

Equal opportunities training stresses the importance of this principle being used as a yardstick when planning every stage of the recruitment process. There are questions on the Common Application Form which seem irrelevant, certainly during the selection process, or which seem intrusive and contrary to the principles which underlie the Data Protection Act.

- Date of birth. The Employment Equality (Age) regulations prohibit discrimination on the basis of age. Consequently a number of employers have removed this question from their application forms. However it has to be recognized that listing dates elsewhere on an application form also indicate age. This information should be supplied on a separate form which can be held once appointed, and date of birth recorded on a recruitment monitoring form which does not go to the interviewees, but is sent elsewhere separately.
- Sections 6 and 7 seem particularly problematic on a number of grounds, including the gathering of excessive personal information during the recruitment process. Some of it may well be sought as part of a diocese's pastoral concern for the family but should be regarded as irrelevant at this stage. This information gathered at this stage could be used to discriminate. There is no objective justification as to how this information would inform the parish as to the suitability of the applicant towards the post.
- It seems strange that the section asking about health allows more space for a response than does the one seeking details of the applicant's present appointment. All information about health should be gathered on a separate monitoring form. In secular employment this is done and the form goes direct to occupational health.
- As well as the referees that the applicant selects the form states that a confidential reference will be sought from their area or diocesan bishop. Presumably this reference is to cover what the paper referred to above describes as the applicant's efficiency and reliability. The Amicus submission regarding Ministerial Development Reviews raised doubts as to a bishop's ability to report objectively and reliably on a priest's ministry. Bishops may well lack a full appreciation of the context and constraints within which that ministry is exercised. When bishops pass information to each other in confidence, and the subject of the information has no effective means of ensuring the completeness and accuracy of that information, it is hard to see how the trust that should underlie the appointment process can be developed. As an individual under Data Protection has the right to access their reference, we cannot comprehend why this part of the process should be shrouded in secrecy. If a bishop is used as one of the referees, then before the reference is written, the office holder should have the opportunity to meet with the bishop to discuss it with the bishop, and to see the reference prior to it being used.

In the interests of equal opportunities and a process which, as far as possible, produces the best result for applicant and parish, it would seem desirable to change the content and layout of the Common Application Form (and those diocesan and other forms derived from it). This would make it clear that only relevant information was being sought, deter the gathering of excessive information and promote greater confidence in the process. All monitoring information, i.e. on age, disability, ethnic origin, etc should be gathered on a separate monitoring form which is sent to a separate source and does not form any part of the application process.