

March 2021

Faith-Based Admissions Criteria: a checklist for dioceses

Checklist	Notes
Strongly recommend that attendance at public worship is the sole measure of religious activity used.	This measure is simple to understand, can be objectively measured and is compliant with the Admissions Code.
<p>Other forms of religious activities may only be used where they are compliant with the Code but can be problematic.</p> <p>Only those religious activities specified in diocesan guidance, as 'the representative religious authority' may be used by schools in their admissions arrangements. Use of activities not included in diocesan guidance is automatically invalid.</p> <p>Activities may breach the Code (1.9(i)) where they are not clearly defined and laid out and so we recommend that they are not generally used.</p>	<p>Some activities are potentially permissible within the Code but are complex and difficult to define clearly.</p> <p>Those with a purely social purpose unless clearly defined may not be compliant and others often involve a subjective element, such as the frequency or scale of activity (leading a music group; being a PCC member and so on).</p>
Both the duration and frequency of attendance at public worship must be clearly defined and provide an obvious threshold.	<p>Duration: express this in terms of the period for which attendance is required, e.g. <i>not less than 12 months prior to the closing date specified on which the application is submitted</i></p> <p>Frequency: ensure this is explicitly defined e.g. <i>'not less than 8 times in ...'; 'not less than monthly/ fortnightly'</i></p> <p>Do not use subjective and undefined terms such as <i>'usually attend'; 'regular attendance'; may take part in activities with an element of worship'; occasional worshipper'</i></p>
Ensure the frequency and duration of attendance at public worship is reasonable and proportionate.	Consider the age of the children seeking admission and the school calendar, so that it is reasonable to expect applicants will be generally able to meet the requirement.
Check for and remove previous approaches to defining religious practice in admissions.	Do not continue to use terms previously found in admissions guidance, such as <i>'at the heart of the church / attached to / known to the church'</i> , as these no longer meet the objectivity and transparency requirements of the Code.
Ensure that attendance at public worship is sufficiently defined.	Whether attendance at worship is acceptable in admission arrangements would need to be tested against: (a) whether it had been laid out

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	<p>as an activity by the diocese and (b) whether it was clear, objective and reasonable.</p> <p>This criterion means physical attendance at an act of public worship. Online worship and private prayers in the church building do not meet this requirement.</p> <p>Whilst the pattern of church worship naturally varies, the routine weekly services (morning and evening prayer and celebration of the Eucharist) meet this criterion, as do the many other forms of public worship found in the Church of England.</p> <p>Note that there is no requirement for attendance to be only on a Sunday in order to count. In fact, to seek to insist on this is almost certainly discriminatory, for example for those families where shift work precludes this.</p>
<p>Wherever possible, avoid restricting church attendance to only one or a small number of named churches.</p>	<p>Whilst there is nothing in the Code to preclude this and it is not unusual to see individual churches named (often where there is a particular historic link) it can create difficulty for families who may not be able to attend that specific church. The reasons for this may vary, including work, family and caring commitments, or even their preference for a particular ethos or tradition. This makes things more complicated if people have re located.</p> <p>In addition, as pastoral reorganisations increase in number and scale, it may be wiser to broaden the range of churches that are within the criteria, for example to 'any Church of England church'.</p>
<p>Ensure there is a clear definition of 'churches' in any criteria.</p>	<p>It is advisable to use the definition included in the variation guidance, namely '<i>Christian church means any church which is designated under the Ecumenical Relations Measure nationally by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York or locally by the diocesan bishop, or is a member of Churches Together in England, or the Evangelical Alliance, or a partner church of Affinity</i>'</p>
<p>Check whether a priority is to be given to those of other faiths.</p>	<p>Admissions authorities are not obliged to make this provision under the Code, but many do so. If doing so, the rationale for including only some faiths needs to be carefully explained. It is also crucial to frame the attendance criteria for these faiths so that their adherents are not unintentionally excluded from fulfilling them e.g., by not specifying that attendance at worship must be on a Sunday.</p>
<p>Check that the wording on faith-based criteria of the admissions policy, the SIF and any clergy reference form is identical.</p>	<p>This is essential. Also ensure that open clergy references are replaced by a template, as they will otherwise almost certainly not meet the requirements of the Code. The template may be an additional proforma alongside the SIF itself or in the form of a letter. Using a template also</p>

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	removes the risk of the clergy including information which it is impermissible to mention, or the reference being made using subjective judgements.
Check if a SIF is required	<p>A SIF must only be required to obtain essential information not included on the Common Application Form. It is not therefore required in every case. The two principal reasons it can be required are if the school uses faith-based criteria or takes account of social or medical need within its criteria (for which additional evidence is normally required).</p> <p>Check that the Local Authority Common Application Form does not already include information that the school is intending to put on the SIF: if on the CAF, then the same information must not be sought via the SIF.</p>
Check if faith-based criteria are still appropriate.	In addition to compatibility with the school's ethos, where the school is regularly undersubscribed to a significant degree retaining faith-based oversubscription criteria appears pointless and may be thought by some possible applicants to be a barrier to admission (however mistakenly).

- It cannot be required that all applicants complete a SIF. Please note that as well as any faith-related criteria, a SIF can be used for other elements in your criteria that are not faith related, for example exceptional need provisions, unless this is already covered by the CAF.
- We recommend that a useful focus for responsible bodies when reviewing admissions issues should be the 'crunch point' in the criteria, which is the point at which the criteria is most frequently applied. Providers may consider streamlining criteria that are never or very infrequently applied to make the application process as transparent and straightforward as possible.
- Further consideration may be required as to what extent the criteria specified is essential for the authority to come to a fair lawful and objective decision on the application, for example gender or ethnicity.

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