

# Government to force gay youth workers on church

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The Government says its new Equality Bill will force churches to accept practising homosexuals or transsexuals in youth worker posts and other similar roles.

Equalities minister Maria Eagle said religious believers should push 'gay rights' in their communities, but in the meantime the state would do it.

The move has been met with a strong response from Christian groups who have accused the Government of secular intolerance against the church.

The Bill dramatically narrows exemptions in sexual orientation employment laws which protect the religious liberty of churches and other faith groups.

Under the current law, religious groups can restrict posts to Christians whose private conduct is consistent with the Bible's teaching on sexual ethics. These posts must be for the purposes of organised religion, which could include jobs like a youth worker.

But under the Equality Bill the Government is specifying that this protection can only apply posts that mainly involve leading worship or explaining doctrine.

The Bill's explanatory notes make it clear that this protection "would not apply to a requirement that a church youth worker or accountant be heterosexual".

At the weekend, Government equalities minister Maria Eagle said that "while the state would not intervene in narrowly ritual or doctrinal matters" it would tell churches what to do in other areas.

She also said "members of faith groups have a role in making the argument in their own communities for greater LGBT acceptance, but in the meantime the state has a duty to protect people from unfair treatment."

A spokesman for the Church of England said the proposed change in the law "was inserted in the Bill without our receiving any prior consultation or warning.

"It represents a substantial narrowing of the exception relating to employment for the purposes of an organised religion.

"It would have the effect that many of those employed in senior posts that involved representing the Church either locally or nationally (e.g. the posts of Secretary General of the Archbishops' Council, or diocesan secretary) would not, for the purposes of this exception, be employed 'for the purposes of an organised religion'."

The spokesman added: "We shall be raising the issue with the Government and are likely to support the tabling of amendments that would preserve the status quo."

The Christian Institute's Mike Judge said: "The Government's own explanation of the Bill clearly says churches must accept homosexuals as church youth workers.

"The Bill says nothing about the difference between an active homosexual and someone who has left the lifestyle but still experiences some same-sex attraction. This distinction is crucial for Christians."

<http://www.christian.org.uk/news/20090520/government-to-force-gay-youth-workers-on-church/>