

Diocese of Arundel & Brighton Education Service

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March 2019

Dear Colleagues,

I write at a time of almost unprecedented uncertainty in peace time. Brexit looms large with no agreement currently in place and a backdrop of political disagreement both in the UK and with the EU. It is said that the UK is now one of the most unequal societies in Europe, with the Brexit debate only further deepening political and social divisions.

Notwithstanding this, Catholic schools have always been havens in which children flourish in an environment rooted in Christian virtues and values, welcoming of all faiths and none. Yet our own school communities have been deeply affected by the debate raging all around.

What is certain is that life will go on regardless of the outcome in the coming weeks and months. It is, of course difficult to advise exactly how to plan for the unknown. However, I have endeavoured to set out below some areas schools might want to consider so that together we can weather the storms which lie ahead.

Staffing

With the current teacher shortages and low levels of unemployment it is proving difficult to recruit suitable new staff. The government has admitted its post-Brexit immigration policy could hit teacher recruitment. While immigration may be restricted to those with higher skill levels in future, it is unknown if the proposed £30,000 earnings threshold for workers wanting to come to the UK will impact on teachers. So planning how to recruit, train and retain staff now is important.

As an idea of the potential impact, teachers from Europe currently equate to around 2.6% of primary school teachers and 3% of secondary school ones.

- Are there any other ways that you can incentivise and retain staff? Consider what you provide in terms of skills training and benefits in kind
- You may need to think differently to attract and recruit new staff. Are there any channels for advertising for staff which are not already being used, and can you offer flexible working arrangements?
- Under a “no deal” scenario, EU, EEA EFTA and Swiss citizens will need to apply to stay in the UK if they plan to continue living in the UK after 2020 – you may need to ensure staff who fall under this criteria are aware and do so before the 31 December 2020 deadline
- In the event of a “no deal” workplace rights are likely to be affected, guidance on this can be found at GOV.UK

Pupils

Schools are dependent upon pupil numbers. Therefore it is pleasing that children living in the UK will be able to apply and access a school place regardless of migration status after our exit from the EU. However, in a “no deal” scenario, EU, EEA EFTA and Swiss nationals will need to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme by 31 December 2020 to remain beyond that date. Therefore as mentioned previously regarding staff, schools should look to encourage this to enable continued funding and places being taken.

Safeguarding

In a “no deal” scenario, the requirement for EEA professional regulating authorities to share details of any sanction or restriction imposed on teachers will no longer apply. This means the Teaching Regulation Agency will no longer maintain details of those teachers who have been sanctioned in EEA member states. Keeping Children Safe in Education statutory safeguarding guidance will be updated shortly to advise schools and colleges about how an EEA regulator’s assessment of a teacher’s professional competence can be checked in future.

Travel disruption

We are regularly reminded on the News that the potential for increased border checks at the Channel ports and Eurotunnel could easily result in a build-up of traffic from freight transport in the surrounding areas. Although the above is likely to mainly affect Kent, there will be a knock-on effect to surrounding counties and it is therefore likely that part of the diocese may be affected. In addition, it is possible that schools in close proximity to Gatwick may face some disruption.

In view of the continuing uncertainty, you may find it helpful to look in more detail at government advice for schools in the event of a no deal : <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/eu-exit-no-deal-preparations-for-schools-in-england/eu-exit-no-deal-preparations-for-schools-in-england>

However....

In spite of the gloomy messages above, we have so much to be thankful for and to celebrate. As a Catholic community, we are able to live, educate and worship in peace in the UK. As world events show us all too regularly and painfully, this is a blessing which we should never take for granted. And as a community, we place great importance and value on the education we provide for all in our care. For us, whilst there are a range of alternatives to Catholic education, there is no substitute. I hope that whatever happens in the weeks and months to come, we will continue with our commitment to helping our young people to view themselves as caring, global citizens of God’s world – proudly rooted in their local communities, but also excited at the opportunity to step out into a bigger world, undaunted by the Brexit debate.

Thank you for all you are doing to support, promote and protect Catholic education across our Diocese.

Best Wishes,



Marie Ryan