

REPORT for CIDAC Panel

James Bland (JB)

CIDAC hearing date:	21 November 2023
Year of events:	2022-2023
Issue	Enrolled on SCITT teacher training course
Was there a final outcome?	Yes
Period of outcome	2023
Sex:	Male
Denomination:	Catholic
Use of data	Restriction on citing name of college and staff
Evidence supplied	Emails, 18 & 19 January 2023, subject line: SCITT Course. (pdf, 4 pages)

Background before course enrollment

In the few years leading to JB's enrollment on a SCITT teacher training course, he "felt a strong vocation" for teaching. For six months, he volunteered as a teaching assistant at a Catholic primary school which he "thoroughly enjoyed". He saw teaching as a vocation, feeling he could "change lives" for children, and aspired to work in Catholic schools, one day starting his own school. The headteacher encouraged him to enroll on a teacher training course. JB was told by teachers at the Catholic school and during the SCITT course that he would be "snapped up" as a teacher due to a shortage of male teachers.

The course

He enrolled in August 2022 on a nine-month course with the goal of becoming a primary school teacher. JB recalls that student ages ranged from recent graduates to those in their early fifties. The gender ratio was unequal with about 5 males out of 55 students. The course was a mix of lectures and school-based experience. Course fees were loan-based and JB was expected to pay back a portion of fees upon his resignation.

Course ethos

JB felt the teaching of maths was done well but there was little else he could commend about the course because it was, he explains, "very heavily influenced by modern progressive ideology." He says that books were chosen to "advance a social purpose: "We've got to have

a book about two dads ... about a gay penguin.” Books were “picked to promote a specific progressive ideology, whether a book contained an interesting story was irrelevant.”

On two occasions, JB was corrected when using the phrase, “boys and girls”, first by an assessor, and in a second incident, a course trainer explained that children may be gender-fluid so these words should be avoided.

JB observed that there was a single day devoted to phonics, which he believes showed a lack of priorities, given the course’s wider ideological ethos. He felt the course “didn’t encourage free thought,” and was “designed to turn out certain individuals and “weed out” people who held a different mindset.

When safeguarding matters were addressed, one lecturer said that parents should never smack or discipline their children. In another instance, it was said that if a child suggested that an adult had sexually abused them, a child’s permission had to be acquired before sharing an allegation with the safeguarding officer or police.

“Diversity Equity and Inclusion” Day

A former primary school teacher and “transgender activist” (biological male) oversaw the Day. Of nine protected characteristics he looked at, JB reports that the focus was “transgender and sexuality”. It felt, he says, “like an indoctrination session” and was “all about his personal story.” The Day was “sold as an important part of the course.” Knowing what he felt on these matters, JB believes his fellow students were “quietly supportive” and were themselves “scared” to speak out. JB told CIDAC that his Christian beliefs informed his conscience about biblical teaching on the creation of male and female.

Subsequent events

At the end of the Day, JB made a “throwaway comment” to three or four fellow students to the effect that “wasn’t today a load of nonsense or wasn’t this transgender stuff a load of nonsense.” JB believes that agreement of students took the form of: “at least we don’t have to do it again.”

In the following week, JB was emailed by a course director and asked to attend an interview at the office to be attended by both course directors.¹ At the meeting, he was told his private comments about transgenderism had been reported to them by one of his fellow students. JB was told his views were “completely unacceptable” for a teacher and that if this had been a “live case”, he would be dismissed almost immediately from a school. It surprised him when they said they were treating this as “extremely seriously”.

The questioning approach during the meeting was “inquisitorial”. When JB was asked if he would treat a child as the opposite sex, he replied that he would respect the child but not go along with their “fantasies” that affirmed them in their chosen gender. JB believes that doing so would make him partially responsible for the possible long-term damage done to the child.

He was asked if he would say to a transgender child that “being transgender was nonsense”? He explained that he wouldn’t use this exact phrase or disrespect a child but neither would he agree that they were the opposite sex. JB was told that as he wouldn’t disrespect a Muslim’s beliefs, which he said he wouldn’t do, why would he disrespect the beliefs of a trans person? He believed these cases were not comparable. As part of his refusal to recant his views, JB explained that treating a child as the opposite sex has “wider implications” for other children too.

He was told that unless he would give a firm undertaking to accept their stance, he would fail the professional standards part of the course and effectively be prevented from graduating. JB said they were eager to keep him on the course and he was given an option to talk to a Catholic headteacher whom they would find, to see if he or she would deal with these issues. The goal, JB believes, would be to find someone who could persuade him that he had misunderstood this issue.

JB was “annoyed” when told that if he attended school the following day, the headmaster may view him as a “safeguarding risk”, so he would need to be notified about discussions of the meeting. JB said he would need time to consider what was said to him. Two days later, his “devastating” decision to withdraw from the course dashed his hopes to qualify as a teacher. He says: “I didn’t want to work in an environment where I couldn’t say what I thought was actually true.” He had completed almost half of the course.

JB recognises the importance of teaching about safeguarding on the course, a subject that was given much time but explains: “There’s a completely warped view as to what safeguarding means.”

¹ According to JB, one of the directors was gay.