



**The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith
Minister for Skills**

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25th February 2025

My Lords,

I am writing to you with a correction following debate on the Education (Assemblies) Bill on 7 February 2025.

In my response to this Private Members Bill, when talking about the age at which pupils may withdraw themselves from collective worship, I was incorrect in referring to 16 as being the age at which a person can consent to get married or enter a civil partnership. Since the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act 2022, this has been age 18.

I would also like to take this opportunity to clarify the point I made when referencing English case law and the European Convention on Human Rights. It is the Department's view that it is appropriate for sixth form pupils (i.e. those over the age of 16) to be able to exercise the right to withdraw from collective worship. I believe that enabling such pupils to make this decision for themselves (as opposed to that decision being reserved to their parents) is appropriate in this context and that this is consistent with case law and the European Convention on Human Rights.

I accept that the position for pupils under the age of 16 is more complex, but I believe that current legislation strikes the right balance, and I believe the interests of younger pupils are best protected by their parents who themselves have an unconditional right to withdraw their younger (pre-16) children from collective worship. I would expect parents to take account of the views of their child in exercising the parental right to withdrawal.

Thank you again for taking the time to engage on these matters. I hope these clarifications have been useful and I will place a copy in the House libraries.

Yours sincerely,

**The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith
Minister for Skills**