

PE1623/A

Clergy Letter Project letter of 19 October 2016

I am writing in reference to “PE01623: Unelected church appointees on Local Authority Education Committees” and in my capacity as the Executive Director of The Clergy Letter Project. The Clergy Letter Project is an organization of more than 15,000 ordained members of the clergy who believe that religion and science can be fully compatible. Additionally, our members believe that religious doctrine should not influence the content of secular education.

The underlying premises of The Clergy Letter Project are two-fold. On the one hand, many of those who are promoting a religious presence in secular educational institutions are doing so on very narrow grounds. In other words, in almost every case, the specific educational goals being promoted are completely at odds with the religious beliefs of many other individuals. On the other hand, many who are promoting a religious presence in secular educational institutions believe that their religious beliefs trump science when they see the two in conflict. The thousands of religious leaders who comprise The Clergy Letter Project understand that the importance of religion lies in its spiritual value rather than in any particular pronouncements about the material world.

Mandating that three religious leaders must be appointed to each Local Authority Education Committee privileges religion in a manner that is likely to do damage to the educational opportunities open to students. Let me hasten to say that there is absolutely nothing wrong with any particular religious leader serving on a Local Authority Education Committee, if that is the will of the community. As citizens, religious leaders should have all the rights that every other member of the community has. But mandating seats on the Committees for religious leaders simply because of their religious beliefs is unfair and runs the risk of severely compromising the very nature of the education the Local Committees were established to protect.

I urge you to take this petition very seriously and take steps to ensure that Scottish students receive the highest quality of education possible.

Michael Zimmerman
Executive Director
The Clergy Letter Project