

## PE1623/D

Megan M Crawford Letter of 21 November 2016

I would like to take this opportunity to offer evidence in support of petition PE01623. I am a researcher in the field of Decision Science within the Department of Strategy and Organisation at the University of Strathclyde, consultant on the RCUK Future Cities programme, as well as the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity BARD Future Forecasting programme, member of the Equalities and Human Rights Advisory group to Audit Scotland, the present Chair of the Scottish Secular Society, and a concerned parent of two school aged children.

The requirement that Church representatives be granted positions on Education Committees, *without regard to the wishes of the elected members*, is a violation of democratic principle, in contrast to the position of parents' and teachers' representatives, who are present at the invitation of the elected Members. The requirement has also presented major problems in practice.

The arrangement is, by any reasonable definition, institutionalised privilege. It violates the principle of equality, since only members of the nominating Churches are eligible for these positions. Further, it violates the human rights of all others, since they are excluded from positions of power which determine how their tax monies are to be spent and how their children's schools are to be administered. As it stands, these other are now an actual majority among parents and young adults.<sup>1</sup>

*“Since the harmonised religion question was introduced to the SHS in 2009, there has been an **upward trend in the proportion of adults reporting not having a religion**, from 40 per cent in 2009 to 50 per cent in 2015 (Figure 2.1). There has also been **a corresponding decrease in the proportion reporting 'Church of Scotland'**, from 34 per cent to 25 per cent.”* (sec. 2.2; emphasis added)

In addition, the present arrangements take power away from the regions represented by the Councils, and have proved in other ways unworkable. Indeed, the Church of Scotland itself, in its submission, agrees that reform is needed. Two of the three appointees are chosen by the Church of Scotland and the Catholic Church, from offices in Glasgow or Edinburgh, rather than from within the Region concerned. The choice of third representative places an improper burden on the elected Council Members, who are required to select one religious body out of the many represented in their region. This situation leads to further anomalies. 15 Councils have resorted to newspaper advertisements, and in 8 such cases there was only one applicant; in two regions the Church of Scotland has two representatives, in violation of the law; in one region, a Councillor defeated at the ballot box successfully nominated himself as representative (!) of the Boys Brigade; and in four cases, positions remained unfilled for lack of response from the Church invited to nominate. If it is the will of the statute to supply a representative voice on our Education Committees, then it is clear that this not being achieved.

Defenders of such ecclesiastical privilege commonly describe attempts at reform as attacks on religion. This is a strawman argument, as shown, in the present case, by the support the petition has received from the Clergy Letter Project, an organisation of some 15,000 ordained clergy worldwide. Many Christians prefer their church to take no formal role in government; there is in fact Scriptural support for this view (Matthew 22:21). Individual believers, and the Churches that represent them, can and should take part in all normal democratic processes, and there is nothing in the spirit of the letter of the petition to discourage this.

If it is the case that a religious voice is desired on an Education Committee, then democracy and the will of the community will ensure its presence. It is not for the Church to decide whether parents and Committees need them, but for the people to decide for themselves. That is what democracy looks like. And upholding the democratic system for Scotland is what this petition is about. In fact, the Church has repeatedly agreed with this claim, not only in their letter<sup>2</sup> to the Petitions Committee,

*“...help expand Scotland's collective understanding of what real civic democracy can and should look like. Such a democracy enables people of*

*faith and no faith to build a cohesive and tolerant community in which all our citizens flourish,”*

but in their 2014 General Assembly<sup>3</sup> as well,

*“...affirm the belief that the Church appointed representatives provide a model for an expanded understanding of what is meant by democratic decision making that is truly participatory and rooted in communities.”* (pg. 3/6 section 64)

It is not possible to support democracy, but maintain the opinion that undemocratically appointed seats for religious representatives with full decision-making privileges is correct.

The Church of Scotland correctly points out that there are often unelected representatives of teachers and parents of these Committees. But there is a crucial difference between them and the Church appointees. The teacher and parent representatives are co-opted by the elected members, from whom they derive their authority and voting powers, if any. We trust our elected representatives to decide whether or not to co-opt parent and teacher representatives. Why should we not trust them to decide whether or not to co-opt representatives of the Churches?

I share the Church of Scotland's view that education is benefited by a breadth of experience among committee members. The elected members, like the elected members of the Scottish Parliament, already show such breadth, whereas at least a third of the Church appointees are professional clergy, as shown by their titles.

The Church of Scotland cites the McIntosh Report<sup>4</sup> in favour of participatory democracy. However, the presence of the Church appointees does not broaden participation beyond the small circle directly involved in the appointment process.

As an active member of the community, a scientist, and a concerned parent of two school age children, I respectfully ask the Petitions Committee to strongly consider petition PE01623, and solicit input from stakeholders including parent-teacher associations, with a view to forwarding the matter to the Education and Skills Committee for more detailed consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> Scotland's People: Results from the 2015 Scottish Household Survey (sec. 2.2)

<sup>2</sup> PE1623/B Church of Scotland Church and Society Council letter of 16 November 2016

<sup>3</sup> The Church of Scotland General Assembly 2014 Report (pg. 3/6 section 64)

<sup>4</sup> Report of the commission on Local Government and the Scottish Parliament (pg. 12)