

**PE1623/H**

Dr Graeme Campbell Email of 22 November 2016

I am writing to you as a former doctor, board member at The Glasgow Skeptics, and most importantly as a Scot, to express my dissatisfaction with the status quo regarding the appointment of unelected religious representatives on educational committees. As such I am writing to you to express my heartfelt support for petition PE01623.

There are three reasons why I think that such appointments are unbecoming for a modern democracy, and un-Scottish. These are that it undermines the sovereignty of the demos, is divisive, and introduces conflicts of interest in Religious Education (RE).

Before I expand upon these I would like to make one thing clear. I am not against representation of or by religious people per se. I, like most Scots, believe that the best society is one where a plethora of identities can be accommodated and represented on an even playing field - a free marketplace of ideas and cultural exchange. Indeed, I value all contributions within our culture from people of all faiths and none and recently took part in a panel discussion at Glasgow University Christian Union despite myself being an atheist, humanist and skeptic.

Therefore, I am more than keen for Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Bahais and every other cultural tradition that makes our great Scottish tapestry to seek representation for their views in our shared country. However, only in so much as the people of Scotland choose to elect representatives running on these cultural platforms.

In April of this year the Scottish Social Attitudes survey found that 52% of Scots identify as non-religious. Given this demographic backdrop I contend that even the hand waving defense that privileging a few faith traditions on each committee is an heuristic way to ensure representation of local people is intellectually vacuous. Rather, to me and the majority of Scots, it is the imposition of petty monarchs within what is otherwise a fair and democratic system. It is a practice that undermines the sovereignty of every Scot as a voter - even if it succeeds in privileging a few as members of a faith tradition.

The capricious and undemocratic nature of these appointments is also, at its core, why it can only be divisive in a modern, plural and thriving society. If we are to continue forcing these appointees on the people, then the only just solution is to have an appointee for every faith group that a given committee purports to serve and represent. This is obviously a standard that is unachievable and not just due to the diversity of religions coexisting in Scotland.

In a very real sense some faith traditions do not admit of such narrow representation.

This is even an issue for the Church of Scotland (CoS) - the principal beneficiary of these appointments. The CoS are proud that they respect "liberty of opinion on matters not affecting the substance of faith". I believe this a laudable position, however we must ask ourselves what this means when a single CoS representative is placed on an educational committee. Can they really be said to be representing the local faithful on any matter other than the "substance of faith"? What about biology? Or Sex Education? Or the status of varying genders and sexual orientations?

The undemocratic appointment of religious representatives is divisive not only in so much as it indicates that some religious persuasions are more important, while others are 'less than'. It is divisive within religions as it implies that something as deeply personal as your faith can be represented by anyone who goes to the same building as you on your sabbath or holy day.

These appointments become problematic in a whole new way when we consider that religion is a topic which is taught in schools. It concerns me for the quality of the RE curriculum in the same way that unelected appointments for Conservative, Labour and the Lib-Dems would concern me for the future of Modern Studies in our schools. It is simply inappropriate for privileged faiths to be allowed unearned power in a system that is supposed to provide education on all faiths, for all Scots.

I am proud to be Scottish. I am proud that we are a nation that voted to live in a world that was bigger, and more diverse, on June 23rd. While this was a referendum on the EU, and not religion, I believe Scotland sent a clear message to the world that we are an outward looking nation. A nation keen to share our history and our culture with others; a nation keen to be enriched by what others can bring to us. I believe that clinging to this unjust historical practice violates wholesale this very Scottish notion of pluralistic beauty.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter, I trust that the Scottish Government will ensure that every Scot, of every religion and none, is represented fairly and democratically by their Education Committees.