

David Stewart MSP  
Convener, Public Petitions Committee  
By Email: [petitions@scottish.parliament.uk](mailto:petitions@scottish.parliament.uk)

24 January 2014

Dear Mr Stewart,

**PE01487 on religious observance in schools**  
**Joint statement from Church of Scotland & Humanist Society Scotland**

The Church of Scotland and Humanist Society Scotland are grateful for the opportunity to make representations to the Public Petitions Committee on the progress of petition PE01487 'Religious Observance in schools'.

This petition has stimulated a wide-ranging debate about the role of religious and other belief groups in Scottish education.

Many organisations have written to the Committee to express their support for the opportunity for schools communities to experience shared community acts of reflection and collective exploration of values and beliefs that are at present called Religious Observance. For some people however, the nomenclature "Religious Observance" hinders their participation.

The Church of Scotland and Humanist Society Scotland would like to propose an alternative option, which will maintain the positive aspects of current practice, and introduce a greater sense of equality for all beliefs. We propose that the Public Petitions Committee advise the Scottish Government to bring forward legislative proposals to remove reference to 'religious observance' in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, and insert 'time for reflection' instead.

This change would echo the 2011 Scottish Government guidance, and send a clear message that no one particular belief system is valued over any other in Scottish education.

The change to a more equal and inclusive 'time for reflection' would echo the current practice of the Scottish Parliament, and bring legislation into line with modern views. It will also remove the current focus on 'religion', with which many non-religious people struggle.

The examples of bad practice, which the petitioners rightly raise, show the need for a closer scrutiny of current practice by Education Scotland and HMIE. Both the Church of Scotland and the Humanist Society Scotland also believe that requiring external visitors to schools to agree with the equality and diversity policy of the school, or local educational authority, would ameliorate situations which have arisen in the past.

This suggestion reflects a desire of both the Church and the Humanist Society Scotland to celebrate diversity rather than see it as a problem and a willingness to search for common ground on which they can journey together. We hope that the Public Petitions Committee will give due weight to our consideration, in the spirit of tolerance and compromise.

Yours sincerely,

Rev Sally Foster Fulton  
Convener  
Church and Society Council  
Church of Scotland

Douglas McLellan  
Chief Executive, Humanist Society Scotland

Scottish Charity Number SC011353

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