

Scottish Episcopal Church

General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church
Scottish Charity No SC015962

General Synod Office
21 Grosvenor Crescent
Edinburgh EH12 5EE
Tel: 0131 225 6357
Fax: 0131 346 7247

email: office@scotland.anglican.org

website: www.scotland.anglican.org

email: secgen@scotland.anglican.org



PE1514/I

Mr Ned Sharratt
Assistant Clerk
Public Petitions Committee
T3.40
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

27 June 2014

Dear Mr Sharratt

Petition PE 1514 – Time for Reflection

This submission is made on behalf of the College of Bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church regarding Mr Norman Bonney's above petition regarding Time for Reflection.

The College would, firstly, like to affirm the place of Time for Reflection within the life of the Scottish Parliament and appreciates the fact that those who have acted as contributors during Session 4 of the Parliament reflect not only the diversity of Scotland's faith communities but also those who would not profess faith.

Mr Bonney's petition suggests that 25% of all sessions should be presented by atheists. It is difficult to see that any such allocation could be regarded as fair or proportionate. The list of contributors to Time for Reflection in Session 4 suggests that approximately 13% already come from a non-faith background. Also, the 2011 Scottish Census figures suggest that only 0.05% of the Scottish population recorded themselves as "atheist". Accordingly, it is difficult to see how a 25% allocation could be regarded as appropriate.

The suggestion that there should be a percentage quota in any event raises other issues. We believe that it would be inappropriate for any particular quota to be allocated to any specific sectors of society. As we understand the current system, invitations are issued by the Presiding Officer on advice from the Parliamentary Bureau. This allows a degree of flexibility and would also enable the Bureau to reflect any changing patterns, over time, which might take place in society. If quotas were to be introduced, it could also be very difficult to arrive at individual quotas among the very many faith groups represented in Scottish society and, indeed, among the wide range of non-faith interest groupings.

In submitting this response, the College of Bishops would, therefore, invite the Public Petitions Committee to refuse the petition on the basis that its current mode of operation is sufficiently geared to enable the breadth of Scottish society and its cultural, historical and religious traditions to be represented in Time for Reflection.

Yours faithfully,

John F Stuart
Secretary General
On behalf of the College of Bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church