

PE1498/H

Scottish Secular Society Email of 21 February 2014

Petition 01498, Religious Representatives on Local Authority Education Committees

I am Professor Paul Braterman and I am responding on behalf of the Scottish Secular Society.

The Scottish Secular Society welcomes and supports Petition 01498 to remove the statutory requirement in law for religious representatives on Scottish Education boards; indeed, it is our view that this petition does not go far enough.

The petition calls for the repeal of Section 124 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended by Section 31 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994, which places a statutory obligation on local authorities to have one representative from the Church of Scotland, one from the Catholic Church and one other on every education board in Scotland, with a requirement for two others in the northern isles.

This outdated requirement, which calls for no qualification other than a position within a religious organisation and excludes all others from holding those posts regardless of their skills or suitability, is in our opinion anti-democratic and a form of religious privilege to which we are opposed.

The petition gives no option for how these places would in future be allocated, which leaves the local authorities free to appoint them as they wish. In essence, while there is no legal requirement for the appointment of religious representatives, nor is there anything to stop the council arbitrarily appointing such representatives. It is our view that if there are to be any places not filled by councillors, they should be filled through democratic process, either by election or by interview and appointment of the most qualified and worthy candidates.

We support this petition. These places should be open to all interested parties regardless of faith, not reserved for the few because of their faith.

Respectfully,

Paul Braterman
(on behalf of the Scottish Secular Society)