

PE1623/M

Interfaith Scotland letter of 8 December 2016

Interfaith Scotland is the National Interfaith Body for Scotland whose key remit is to ensure good relations between people whatever their religion or belief background. We primarily promote dialogue, understanding and cooperation between faith traditions but also engage with wider society and the non-religious on a regular basis, good relations in Scotland requires, among other things, an understanding of the needs of over 50% of our population who are religious.

Responses to a similar petition, lodged in 2013, were received from diverse faith traditions including, the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities, the Muslim Council of Scotland, the Church of Scotland, the Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church and as far as Interfaith Scotland is aware the views of these national religious bodies has not changed and the general indication is that these diverse traditions support having a religious voice on Education Committees to ensure a balanced and nuanced approach to education in Scotland which includes an understanding of the potential religious needs of an increasingly religiously diverse Scotland.

It was also indicated that where there are diverse religious communities in a Local Authority Area some consideration should be given to ensuring that religious representation on the Local Authority Education Committees reflect that diversity. This has already begun to happen with Muslim and Baha'i representation being acknowledged on two Local Authority Education Boards.

Our First Minister has stated clearly that 'the contribution of faith groups is **essential** in transforming lives and building a stronger, fairer and equal Scotland' and education plays a key role in the lives of all our young people, therefore it would seem perfectly reasonable to include the voice of people who often work at the heart of communities, on Local Authority Education Committees.

It is pertinent to note that COSLA, having sought views from their member councils, state clearly that '*they did not feel that non-elected representatives had the power to change decisions nor did they feel lobbied by these representatives on behalf of their organisations*' – showing clearly that the religious representatives have no personal agenda and are indeed only concerned with the education and welfare of our young people.

Additionally, given the lack of evidence that the wider Scottish Public wishes to remove religious representatives from Local Authority Education Boards this petition should be dismissed.

N.B. Those present at the Board Meeting of Interfaith Scotland on 8th December ratified this response and included members of the following communities: Baha'i, Sikh, Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist and Christian.