

PE1623/N

Muslim Council of Scotland letter of 8 December 2016

We are strongly in favour of the present law giving a *role of Religious representatives on the local Education Committees.*

These representatives do represent a majority of the population and they do make an invaluable contribution to the Education Committees.

The First Minister stated that the “Contribution of faith groups is essential in transforming lives and building a stronger, fairer Scotland”

We believe that it is vital that the views of all faith and belief groups, are taken into account to inform committee decisions. Therefore, we would like to see wider representation where views of all faith groups are considered.

Recently there has been a rise in prejudice from certain groups in the Society leading to discrimination and hate crimes. It is well documented that a major reason for this prejudice is ignorance by many of the true nature of the different faith groups. The more opportunities we have in knowing about each other's' beliefs and practices, the less prejudice and hatred there will be. The involvement of Religious representative in drawing policies for education, with input from all groups will help improve the building of a better integrated society.

The contribution of the Religious representatives will assist the Local Council in adhering to Human Rights in their policies, not the other way as the petition assumes.

Although we live and work in an increasingly secular society we should remain a society that honours the importance of the very human values adopted by the Scottish people, over the years such as wisdom, compassion, integrity and justice. all of these values and more are historically rooted in religion.

REPRESENTATION:

First we state the fact that Councillors are elected as representatives, however practice shows that even if they have as individuals any faith affiliation, some still vote according to their political persuasion not faith, even in cases where free voting is allowed.

As to the proposal of giving local councils the power to appoint the religious representatives, we prefer the present system because it creates a uniformity of representation across the country.

Although the petition has stated that religious representatives are unelected they are in effect elected by their own bodies that represent a large cross-section of Scottish society, larger in many cases than those who turn up for council elections.

This petition singles out religious representatives on Education Committees. Other Local Authority Committees, in fact the practice of the committee system as a whole, invariably include unelected voting members representing other bodies.

Religious representatives are not the only appointed/unelected representatives on Education Committees, there are two parent representatives and one pupil representative. We do not suggest reducing this wide representation practice.

CONTRIBUTION

Religious representatives make an invaluable contribution their input to the local democratic process is often greatly appreciated by education officials and by elected representatives.

Members of faith communities do take their role in governance very seriously and they contribute to the discussions bringing their own unique spiritual and pastoral dimension to the local contextual implementation of policy that is made by the Scottish Government ministers who instruct the Local Education Committees to implement them locally.

The role of religious representatives is one of service rather than privilege and reflects the historic role of the faith as the source of the human values we adopt in our everyday life.

Religious representatives' contribution to the work of education committees is the product of their life experiences in the local community. Most are lay people and many have significant experience of working in senior education posts.

Their contributions are focussed on the needs of the local community and are influenced by their own particular expertise.

CONCLUSION

We therefore believe that it is vital that the views of all faith and belief groups are taken into account to inform committee decisions. We would also like to see wider representation where views of all faith groups are considered.

This does not necessarily mean appointing representatives from every faith group. The appointed representatives should be able to do this in discussions with others not represented and express an interfaith view as much as possible.