



PE1487/LL

Petition PE1487 – Response to CofS / HSS proposal for Time for Reflection

The Scottish Secular Society welcomes the proposal to change the name of Religious Observance to Time for Reflection, and the spirit in which it has been put forward. This proposal forms part of an emerging consensus that the present situation is unsatisfactory, and that legislative change is required.

We would make the assertion that a simple change of nomenclature would not in itself have any effect on the content of Religious Observance which causes concern to many parents, or the abuses which gave rise to this petition. We welcome the suggested removal of religious components from Religious Observance / Time for Reflection, a positive step for those who do not share the Christian faith.

The joint proposal expresses some interesting principles, many of which we heartily approve of. However, without a firm framework guiding the content of Religious Observance / Time for Reflection, such principles could only ever be advisory. We strongly agree that Inspectors must have a role in ensuring that practice does not stray from the principles defined in any new legislation. In addition, Church of Scotland and Humanist Society Scotland are only two stakeholders among many. It is not clear how new legislation would be enforced in denominational schools, and consultation would be needed to address this.

Under Opt In, the providers of Religious Observance or its successor would, for the first time, have to earn the active consent of participants. This in itself is a major step along the path of reform that Church of Scotland and Humanist Society Scotland are advocating. In addition, Opt In will promote an exchange of ideas and information between home and school that is always a good in itself, and would contribute greatly to the development of a meaningful and broadly accepted replacement for Religious Observance, of the kind that Church of Scotland and Humanist Society Scotland are now suggesting.

The Scottish Secular Society view the change from opt-out to Opt In as even more essential if the change from Religious Observance to Time for Reflection is adopted. Without it, parental confusion would be exacerbated by a name change, and the element of compulsion with its attendant implications for Human Rights would remain. The implementation of Opt In as a part of any legislative change would address the need for clear, concise communication of any changes, while at the same time the element of compulsion would be removed. We see the two proposals as complementary, and together they provide a welcome opportunity to reshape a Time for Reflection worthy of modern Scottish education. We note that both could readily be included in the same piece of legislation, and that is something that Scottish Secular Society could whole-heartedly support.