

**PE1487/R**

Andrew Howlett  
Assistant Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee  
Public Petitions Committee  
Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

11 October 2013

Dear Andrew

**CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE 1487**

I am writing in response to your request relating to the above petition.

You asked Education Scotland for “views on what the petition seeks and the discussions that took place at the meeting on 3 September.”

Please find attached Education Scotland’s response.

Yours sincerely

Susan Waugh  
Business Manager – School Years  
Education Scotland

**Reference: CONSIDERATION OF PETITION [PE1487](#)**

*Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to amend the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 by making Religious Observance (RO) in public schools an “Opt-In” activity rather than an “Opt-Out” one.*

**Public Petitions Committee Question:**

- What are your views on what the petition seeks and the discussions that took place at the meeting on 3 September?

**Education Scotland response**

**Background**

In 2005, the S.E.E.D. set out governmental policy on the provision of Religious Observance (RO).

In 2004, the Religious Observance Review Group produced a report on Religious Observance.

Scottish Government advice was updated on 22 February 2011 ***Curriculum for Excellence – provision of religious observance in schools*** setting RO within the context of Curriculum for Excellence. This advice was communicated to all local authorities and head teachers. This advice sets out the core principle of RO which: *“...should be sensitive to our traditions and origins and should seek to reflect these but it must equally be sensitive to individual spiritual needs and beliefs, whether these come from a faith or non-faith perspective”* (p1)

Also, in this advice:

*“Scottish Government Ministers also accept the definition and aims of religious observance proposed by the [Religious Observance] review group as being: ‘community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school’s community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community”* (p2)

The advice notes that RO has:

*“...an important part to play in the development of the learner’s four capacities”* (p2)

And clearly states that:

*“It is of central importance that all pupils and staff can participate with integrity in forms of religious observance without compromise to their personal faith”* (p2)

It is also clear that:

*“The precise form of religious observance will be determined by each school’s policy within the local authority’s framework...”* (p2)

It notes too that RO:

*“...needs to take place sufficiently frequently to have an impact on the spiritual development of the school community. It is, however, the quality of such occasions which is of greatest importance”* (p3)

Finally, the advice indicates that:

*“Where a child is withdrawn from religious observance, schools should make suitable arrangements for a child to participate in a worthwhile alternative activity. In no circumstances should a child be disadvantaged as a result from withdrawing from religious observance”* (p3)

The right to withdraw from RO is upheld in Section 9 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

### **Education Scotland’s role in the delivery of high quality RO**

Education Scotland works within this statutory framework and within the context of Scottish Government advice in this respect. Bearing in mind the advice which notes that it is:

*“the quality of such occasions which is of greatest importance”* (p3), Education Scotland’s role is in supporting schools in the planning and delivery of high quality RO in line with the advice contained in the February 2011 note outlined above.

While the planning and delivery of RO is the responsibility of head teachers in conjunction with local authority policies, Education Scotland’s support may take a variety of forms:

During the course of inspections, and in the related context of the schools’ process of self-evaluation, engagement with the school’s leaders will be facilitated concerning national expectations in RO.

Professional dialogue between Education Scotland and key stakeholders in this area is facilitated - using, for example, the ‘conversation days’ model developed by Education Scotland.

Education Scotland’s website, which can be accessed by all local authorities and individual schools, includes a variety of materials designed to support the delivery of high quality RO. For example:

There is background documentation to support school leaders in planning RO which can be found here:

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/howdoyoubuildyourcurriculum/curriculumplanning/creatingaplan/religiousobservance/keydocuments/index.asp>

Specific learning and teaching resources to support school leaders in the delivery of RO can be found here:

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/howdoyoubuildyourcurriculum/curriculumplanning/creatingaplan/religiousobservance/assemblyresources/index.asp>

Sharing practice items with exemplars of RO in specific contexts can be found here:

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/howdoyoubuildyourcurriculum/curriculumplanning/creatingaplan/religiousobservance/sharingpractice/index.asp>

Education Scotland is committed to supporting practitioners in Scotland's schools through career long professional learning, professional reflection and self-evaluation in all contexts within which practitioners are required to operate, including RO, and will engage with key partners to facilitate this process.