

## **PE1530/SS**

Andrew Strachan Email of 23 January 2015

Dear Committee Members,

I have previously made a submission regarding petition PE1530 on creationist presentations in Scottish school. This is shown as submission R on the list of written submission and can be read here for any new members who are not familiar with it

[http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4\\_PublicPetitionsCommittee/General%20Documents/PE1530\\_R\\_Andrew\\_Strachan\\_09.11.14.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_PublicPetitionsCommittee/General%20Documents/PE1530_R_Andrew_Strachan_09.11.14.pdf)

The points made in my previous submission still stand. In addition to this, the petitioner (Spencer Fildes on behalf of the Scottish Secular Society - SSS) has made a final submission to the committee which makes mention of my original submission. Their final submission can be read here

<http://www.scottishsecularsociety.com/sss-release-final-submission-to-parliament-on-creationist-presentations-in-scottish-schools/>

I therefore wish to present a response to their final submission for your information and consideration.

Their final submission starts with a misleading graphic showing a poster from the National Center for Science Education (NCSE) stating that “evolution is being ripped out of the science curriculum”. The NCSE is an American organisation and probably has little understanding of the Scottish education system. Their header is not a truthful representation of the current situation because, as far as I am aware, evolution is not in the process of being removed from the curriculum for excellence. Using this inaccurate material obviously calls into question the petitioners honesty and credibility.

Moving on to the text of their submission, the petitioner boasts of international support for their petition. This may be in part due to the petitioner’s scientific adviser, Prof Paul Braterman making a global appeal for help:

<https://paulbraterman.wordpress.com/page/2/>

This appeal to his over 67,000 readers in 146 countries led to only 13 written submissions around December 28<sup>th</sup> 2014 to 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2015. Among them, one appeared to come from a resident of New Zealand who claimed they had a right to have a say on my children’s education because his in-laws hailed from Glasgow!

(submission QQ). I look forward to having my say on New Zealand's education system because I once watched the All Blacks play Scotland.

Therefore the international support is maybe not as strong as they'd have you believe. In any case, if the petitioner wishes to cite international support it must also be willing to accept that there is international opposition to the petition as well. Indeed Prof Braterman has helpfully compiled a list of press comment on the petition, a link to which is included within their final submission, and this confirms that there is international opposition to their aims.

As a parent of 4 children going through education in Scotland I feel I have more authority to speak than the NCSE and many of the international contributors. Most, if not all, of the international signatories of the petition and contributors of written submissions are unlikely to be fully aware of the aims and scope of the curriculum for excellence. Their involvement should therefore be questioned – indeed the same could be said for any contributor from outside Scotland who like me opposes the petition.

In the final submission Mr Fildes stresses “NB “presentation” rather than “teaching”, since the problems generally arise from non-teacher visitors”. (I assume that the “problems” are that views other than those acceptable to the SSS are being considered)

To respond to this claim I'll point you in the direction of Education Scotland who on 4th December 2014 published the following document

[http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/UsingVisitingSpeakersUpdate2\\_tcm4-845592.pdf](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/UsingVisitingSpeakersUpdate2_tcm4-845592.pdf)

Included in this report is the following statement “Involving visiting speakers allows learners to understand the role beliefs can play both in their community and in wider society. Supporting learners in engaging with a range of visiting speakers provides learners with lived examples of diversity. Using visiting speakers in a discussion forum can reinforce this awareness of diversity and provides a powerful model of respecting differences as well as stimulating interfaith and philosophical dialogue.”

This document also presents practical guidance on managing visiting speakers.

Given the benefits provided by involving visiting speakers in our children's education and that guidance already exists this petition should be closed. Just because the petitioner disagrees with the views of others should not mean that our children should be denied access to hearing other opinions, thereby losing awareness of diversity.

As I pointed out in my original submission the founder of the petitioner organisation openly states that “as a secularist, I hate religion”

<http://www.scottishsecularsociety.com/about-the-scottish-secular-society/a-history-of-secular-scotland/>

Their website also confirms that the SSS supports the Secular Charter which states in section f that they campaign for a state where “Religion plays no role in state-funded education”

<http://www.scottishsecularsociety.com/about-the-scottish-secular-society/constitution/>

Despite their claims that they are not attacking religion the truth is that they are. Nowhere in their final submission do they deny that they hate religion and as already mentioned their founder is quite open about saying this. An occasional scan of their twitter feed and facebook page will also confirm the extreme views often presented by them. In my personal opinion a group with extreme aims such as theirs should have no place being involved in setting education policy for Scotland’s children. However, their worldview should be able to be discussed within schools along with other extreme viewpoints. If Scotland is to continue being a diverse and tolerant society this petition should now be closed so that our children can continue to experience diverse views and build tolerance within our communities.

If this petition is allowed to proceed it could end up with pupils who hold creationist views being stigmatised and being silenced in our schools. While this may suit the petitioner, it is no way to support diversity.

The petitioner continues to say that they are not asking for much. However, an examination of this claim shows this is far from the truth. Given the fact that curriculum for excellence involves work across curriculum subjects the entire curriculum would need to be re-written if this petition proceeds. At a time when education in Scotland has already gone through much change, and when resources are already scarce, diverting time and resources to an unnecessary re-write of the curriculum to include the guidance the petitioners seek should be avoided.

The responses provided by the Scottish Government and the education organisations written to by the committee also confirm that there is no appetite for Government interference on this issue. I feel it is far more important to listen to these professional organisations with their wealth of knowledge and experience in the field rather than bowing to the demands of a small group with extreme aims. Indeed by their own admission in their submission the SSS is a “handful of amateurs”.

In the notes to editors section of their submission they describe my original submission as hostile, an off topic ad hominem attack and garbles the science. I trust that after reading it you will see that the points made were relevant to the petition. The points I made regarding the science came in part directly from the SSS education officer-so if his science does not conform to Mr Fildes that is something for them to discuss themselves. In any case there is clearly not the universal acceptance of the SSS position that they claim there is and again Prof Braterman's helpful list of comments on the petition confirms this.

The SSS may feel I am attacking them potentially because I hold a different view. However, before dismissing my points they should put their own house in order as they are very familiar with hostile attacks including the one shown here

<http://www.scottishsecularsociety.com/creationist-manoeuvres-in-the-dark/>

If they are able to point out the background of opponents of their petition then they must be willing to accept a concerned parent pointing out the extreme views that their organisation holds. Some members of SSS come across as very eloquent individuals in their presentations but you don't need to dig very far until you see their true attitudes and aims.

During his presentation to your committee on 11<sup>th</sup> November Mr Fildes stated just before 10.15 on the official report of the meeting that "it just should not be discussed in the science class".

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=9635&i=87504#.VMGSBRFyb4g>

However, Prof Braterman lets the cat out of the bag in his blog of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015 when he states their true intentions as "no distinction between science and non-science classes"

<https://paulbraterman.wordpress.com/2015/01/01/creationism-petition-scotland-press-coverage-to-end-2014-still-just-time-to-help/>

In conclusion the following extract from Education Scotland's curriculum for excellence practices and principles provides a more concise summary of why the presentation of creation should not be banned in Scottish schools:

[http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/rme\\_principles\\_practice\\_tcm4-540203.pdf](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/rme_principles_practice_tcm4-540203.pdf)

"Children and young people must become aware that beliefs and values are fundamental to families and to the fabric of society in communities, local and global.

There is an intrinsic value in learning about religion as well as learning from religion, as children and young people develop their understanding of diversity in our society and their own roles in it. The skills of reflection and critical thinking and an enhanced understanding of the beliefs and values of others are all crucial in assisting in this process.

Learning through religious and moral education enables children and young people to:

- recognise religion as an important expression of human experience
- learn about and from the beliefs, values, practices and traditions of Christianity and the world religions selected for study, other traditions, and viewpoints independent of religious belief
- explore and develop knowledge and understanding of religions, recognising the place of Christianity in the Scottish context
- **investigate and understand the responses which religious and non-religious views can offer to questions about the nature and meaning of life**
- recognise and understand religious diversity and the importance of religion in society
- **develop respect for others and an understanding of beliefs and practices which are different from their own**
- explore and establish values such as wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity and engage in the development of and reflection upon their own moral values
- develop their beliefs, attitudes, values and practices through reflection, discovery and critical evaluation
- develop the skills of reflection, discernment, critical thinking and deciding how to act when making moral decisions
- make a positive difference to the world by putting their beliefs and values into action
- establish a firm foundation for lifelong learning, further learning and adult life.

Religious and moral education is therefore an essential part of every child or young person's educational experience"

**(Bold emphasis added by me)**

Given the benefits of continuing with the current situation along with the views of the Scottish Government and professional education organisations I encourage the committee to close the petition.

Andrew Strachan