

SUNDAY HERALD

Former chief scientist backs call to end church education committee role



Former Chief Scientific Adviser for Scotland, Professor Anne Glover

Judith Duffy , Reporter

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SCOTLAND'S first chief scientific officer has backed calls to stop unelected religious representatives sitting on council education committees.

Professor Anne Glover has signed a petition calling for the scrapping of legislation which means councils must appoint nominated church members.

A US clergy group, which supports the teaching of evolution, has also backed the Scottish Secular Society (SSS) petition.

It comes as the Scottish Government reviews religious observance in schools following a legal challenge.

The Humanist Society Scotland secured a judicial review at the Court of Session over rules which do not allow pupils to choose to opt out of religious observance. The hearing will be shelved for three months while the Government review is carried out.

The SSS petition argues councillors should be free to decide what role – if any - to grant church representatives on education committees, which decide on matters such as the opening and closing of schools and whether they should be non-denominational.

Michael Zimmerman, founder of the US Clergy Letter Project, said its members believed that as scientists should not have a privileged voice on public policy matters, neither should religious leaders.

Glover, who was Scotland's chief scientific adviser from 2006 to 2011, was unable to provide any further comment on the petition.

But the SSS welcomed her support for their call, which they said was about “democratic accountability”.