

Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP
Secretary of State for Education and Skills
Department for Education and Skills
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

Friday 29 September, 2006

Dear Mr Johnson,

As you may be aware, a new campaigning organisation and website calling itself 'Truth in Science' (<http://www.truthinscience.org.uk/site/>) has been established by a group of religious 'creationists' with the aim of attacking the teaching of Darwinian theory and evolutionary biology in the classroom. This group has recently sent a letter and 'teaching pack' to all secondary school heads of science. They are perpetuating the view that 'creationism' and 'Intelligent Design' should be taught in science classrooms as part of the National Curriculum (which they cite on their new site).

Your department earlier this year (in a statement from Jacqui Smith as schools minister to the British Humanist Association, April 2006) made it clear that creationism and 'Intelligent Design' should not be taught as science in science lessons and that, 'Creationism cannot be used as an example of a scientific controversy, as it has no empirical evidence to support it and no underpinning scientific principles or explanations... Intelligent Design is sometimes erroneously advanced as a scientific theory but it has no underpinning scientific principles or explanations supporting it and is not accepted by the international scientific community.'

On behalf of the British Humanist Association (BHA) and the UK Christian think tank Ekklesia we are writing to you to ask that you take action to counter the actions of 'Truth in Science', either by instructing Ofsted or the QCA to issue guidance that creationism and 'intelligent design' cannot be taught in school science and be explicit in requiring teachers to maintain a wholly scientific perspective on the matter of the origin of species by evolution, and to confirm publicly that this is the case. In view of the fact that the material being provided to schools by Truth in Science is directly contradictory to what your Department has said should and should not be taught in science, we also urge you to take whatever steps necessary (for example, through the QCA or Ofsted) to inform science teachers in schools that this material is not suitable for science lessons.

BHA and Ekklesia are taking the unusual step of writing to you jointly to make it absolutely clear that the issue of the integrity of evolutionary theory as a cornerstone for teaching modern biology is not one of religious or non-religious conviction (as groups like Truth in Science falsely claim), but a matter of straightforward scientific truthfulness. The claim by TiS and similar ideologically motivated bodies that science education in the UK is 'biased' in teaching evolution should be firmly rejected. Thoughtful people of all persuasions reject the use of religion to undermine truthfulness in education. Reputable scientists and reputable theologians are clear that the anti-evolutionary ideas propagated by groups like this are in no way comparable to scientific theories of origins.

As organisations representative of both mainstream humanist and Christian convictions, we believe it is vital that the government should be able to assure parents that our children will be taught proper science and proper investigative methods, not wild ideas with no theoretical basis.

We look forward to your response on this matter, and we would be happy to converse further on the issues we raise.

Yours sincerely,

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cc. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, Ofsted
Science Curriculum Team, QCA