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Most Scots believe in the power of prayer, survey reveals

Most Scots believe that prayer can change the world, that there is life after death, and not everything can be explained by science.

A new report of attitudes towards faith and belief in Scotland also warns of a potential “new sectarianism” as a gap appears to be opening between religious and non-religious people.

Experts recommend setting up a national advisory board to address areas of concern.

The University of Edinburgh report, *Faith and Belief in Scotland*, was commissioned by the Scottish Government to help councils provide services for people of religion and belief.

More than 1400 people from across the country were asked questions relating to current ethical issues. The major faith groups and the philosophical belief systems of secularism and humanism were represented.

Of the respondents 66 per cent said there were things in life that science cannot explain. Some 58 per cent said that prayer can have a real effect on the world, and 54 per cent believed in life after death.

Almost half (48 per cent) said that same-sex couples with no religious affiliations should not be allowed to marry in a religious place of worship. Less than a quarter (23 per cent) believed they should.

However, if same-sex couples had a religious belief, half (50 per cent) thought they should be allowed to marry in a place of worship. Only 29 per cent objected.

The majority (63 per cent) said that a nurse should be allowed to opt out of performing an abortion on the grounds of their faith or belief, with 18 per cent stating that abortion is wrong in all circumstances.

Most Scots (59 per cent) felt that their own beliefs were misunderstood by the wider community, with three-quarters (76%) saying that it was important people learn more about their world view.

Professor Mona Siddiqui from the University of Edinburgh’s School of Divinity said: “The issues around religion in public life are creating a new tension and dynamic in Scotland and it

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is important that we minimize unnecessary division for the sake of a more inclusive Scotland.”

Dr Anthony Allison, the project’s lead researcher, said: “The study revealed a relationship between polarised social attitudes and poor understanding which raises some fundamental questions about the current nature of public discourse. Further research needs to be carried out to better understand this.”

An interactive map showing how the social attitudes of people of religion and no religion varies across Scotland is available online: www.faihandbeliefscotland.co.uk

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