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The Scottish Conservatives are seeking clarification from education secretary John Swinney on allegations his government proactively lobbied witnesses due to give evidence to a Holyrood committee.

The Education and Skills Committee was taking evidence from organisations regarding the controversial Named Persons scheme in October 2017.

Freedom of Information responses show that the Scottish Government sought out specific witnesses after they have submitted written evidence but before giving oral evidence to the committee.

When questioned at a previous committee John Swinney said that these were just “routine meetings”, adding: “I have seen organisations come here and express their concerns. I have then gone away and had various discussions with people so that I can better understand their perspective.”

The organisations included Police Scotland, Colleges Scotland, Aberlour, Action for Children and Includem. Subsequently Aberlour, Action for Children and Includem changed their submissions.

The committee has now written to Mr Swinney asking him to explain this strategy and asked for a response prior to the next meeting on the February 7.

Scottish Conservative MSP Oliver Mundell, a member of the Education and Skills Committee, said:

“The education secretary must provide full answers to the allegations that his officials have been seeking meetings with witnesses prior to committee evidence sessions.

“These were clearly not routine meetings and several organisations changed their submissions as a result.

“Anyone reading those emails will think that the Scottish Government has been

lobbying organisations to change testimony that they don't like.

"John Swinney now has to prove that this is not the case.

"The Named Persons policy is badly thought out; sending the Scottish Government attack dogs to coerce witnesses will not change the public's mind."