

Present: Tamar Ghosh (TG, Chair), Patricia Rogers (PR, Vice Chair), John Adams (JA, Treasurer), Michelle Beckett (MB), Ewan Main (EM), Guy Otten (GO), Naomi Phillips (NP), David Pollock (DP), Jeremy Rodell (JR), Alom Shaha (AS), Amy Walden (AW, from 24/16).

In attendance: Andrew Copson (AC, Chief Executive and Company Secretary [excluding 22/16]), Jessica Layfield (JL, minutes [excluding 22/16]), Catriona McLellan (CM, Head of Operations [for 27/16]).

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 08/16/22 – AC advised that a mailing group has been set up for TG, JR, and MB to work on private sector engagement. | TG, JR, MB |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 10/16/1 – AC confirmed that once the new ACE is in post, the updated trustee handbook will be made available on the Trustees Area of the BHA intranet. | AC |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 10/16/4 – AC has updated the process for review of the risk register to include this being sent to trustees for review at the same time as the senior management team receive it. | |
| 16/16/8 – AC advised that Teddy Prout is working with the chairs of all the Sections on development plans, which will include (where necessary) looking at how to ensure a representative committee. | |
| 16/16/11 – The Board voted thanks to Jessica Layfield for her time at the BHA and wished her well for the future. | |
| 16/16/23 – AC has started to look into the potential of twinning the BHA with a humanist organisation in Africa and will report back on progress at the February meeting. AC will review the mailing group to ensure this is working as PR reported that she had not received the email that was sent to the group. | AC |
| 16/16/24 – AC confirmed that the legal action against Birmingham City Council will not be going ahead. | |
| 17/16/7 – The Board were asked to send any requests for training to PR. PR has circulated a training course since the last meeting. | |
| 18/16/2 – JA and AC discussed this and agreed that a measure of variance will be included in the budget. | |
| 18/16/13 and 18/16/14 – Working groups have been set up for the new office project and the humanist retreat project. AC will review the mailing groups to ensure they are working. The property working group have a meeting scheduled and there will be one scheduled for the venue group in due course. Under 18/16/14 DP asked for the property working group to bear in mind that the Rationalist Association may want to consider being tenants - requiring 2 desks | AC |
| 18/16/16 – PR requested that in future the minutes have more detail than that provided here. AC will ensure this is discussed with the next ACE when they start. | AC |
| 20/16/1 – AC confirmed that once the new ACE is in post, the risk register will be made available on the Trustees Area of the BHA intranet. | AC |

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| | 20/16/2 – AC has spoken to Callum Brown about the potential of writing a humanist history, and Callum has put together a proposal. He believes there will be interest from publishers in this. | |
| 22/16 | <u>Report of Appraisal of Chief Executive (Confidential)</u> | |
| 22/16/1 | The Board received a confidential report from TG on the annual appraisal of the Chief Executive, which was approved. | |
| 22/16/2 | Confidential minute. | |
| 23/16 | <u>Management (AC)</u> | |
| 23/16/1 | The Board received the management report for Q3 2016 from AC. | |
| 23/16/2 | The Board noted that this has been a successful quarter of activity now that new staff are settling into their jobs and beginning to make progress in their areas of work. | |
| 23/16/3 | AC reported the events series has been particularly successful, with all lectures selling out. | |
| 23/16/4 | The Board noted that improvements have been made to the school speakers administration that mean we are better able to record the numbers of children we are reaching, and that the number of children being reached is also increasing. | |
| 23/16/5 | AC reported that Facebook has changed their policy on promotion which means we are now having to buy promotion more shrewdly, as our organic reach is not as successful. Our Twitter promotion has been very successful. | |
| 23/16/6 | The Board noted the improvements to the Understanding Humanism website and the success of the relaunch. AC advised that, although the number of Twitter followers Understanding Humanism may seem low, the quality of the contacts is high so we are able to participate in various RE teacher conversations on Twitter. | |
| 23/16/7 | The Board enquired about the data protection and what this means for new contacts. AC advised that new BHA contacts have to opt in to receive future communications from the BHA. | |
| 23/16/8 | The Board received an update on the local groups work. Currently a pilot project is ongoing with a new group in Chester to determine how the BHA can best support groups in future. AC reported that combining the community services into one team has already been providing benefits, and the groups work will also benefit from this. | |

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| 23/16/9 | The Board received an update on the celebrant network. Numbers of celebrants are increasing and the network seems to be responding well to the case for change. A lot of planning and thought has gone into communications with the network about these changes, which has worked well. Nett Furley's project has been very positive and has allowed celebrants to provide their views as part of the restructure. | |
| 23/16/10 | The Board noted that our pastoral support work is going very well. We have received NHS funding and progress has been made on developing the distance learning qualification. We have had support from minority religious groups for our hospitals work. We are also making progress with our programmes in Northern Ireland and with the Ministry of Justice. | |
| 23/16/11 | AC provided an update on the legal letters we have sent to NHS trusts advertising chaplaincy posts with a religious restriction. All have been asked to complete an equality impact assessment prior to advertising, but we don't think this is being adhered to. AC advised that we may have to proceed with a judicial review at some stage. | AC |
| 23/16/12 | The Board enquired about the situation with potential groups who were removed from our lists. AC confirmed that there was no progress at all with the Liverpool local group and therefore there was no reason to consider it a potential group any longer. | |
| 23/16/13 | The Board noted that the REC Commission on Religious Education has now begun, and that this will report in two years' time. | |
| 23/16/14 | AC provided an update on the situation with regards to the government lifting the cap on admissions to faith schools which would allow schools to select up to 100% of their students based on religion. The government is not consulting on the cap, so it is almost certain that it will be lifted. However, they are consulting on how to mitigate any negative effects of the cap, and we have responded to that consultation. If an education bill is brought to parliament in the future, we will look to have the cap added to that and made statutory. Currently the government is free to change this without any changes to legislation. | |
| 23/16/15 | The Board enquired about our current strategy for engaging parliamentarians on this issue. AC reported that the Public Affairs team have met with and briefed a number of MPs, who we know would be sympathetic to a change in the law if and when an education bill is proposed. In addition, schools have been receptive to our guidance on including Humanism in their RE curriculum at GCSE level. | |

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| 23/16/16 | DP reported that he has been in touch with the Office for National Statistics about the census question on religion, and does not think there is any chance of the wording on this being changed. However, this will mean that the data will be consistent from one census to the next and we anticipate the percentage of those identifying as Christian to be less than 50% for the first time. | |
| 23/16/17 | AC reported on the party conferences, and that our stand was moved to a really poor location at the Conservative conference. However, lots of people there were very receptive and we got some good support. The Public Affairs team are considering whether a stand at the Labour or Lib Dem conferences in 2017 is worthwhile, and may prefer to have a larger stand at the Conservative conference instead. | |
| 23/16/18 | The Board noted that we intervened supporting an appeal to the Supreme Court in the Northern Ireland abortion case. There was some hesitation from the new Northern Ireland committee members, but our policy position on this issue is very clear. | |
| 23/16/19 | AC reported that the BHA had a meeting with the faith and engagement team at the Department of Communities and Local Government, and that they will be having another meeting with Lord Bourne before the end of this year. | |
| 23/16/20 | AC provided an update on the new Director of Communications and Development role and how the new postholder is settling in. There is still quite a bit of work to be done in terms of transitioning media work from the Public Affairs team, and also in taking over some work that the Communications Manager was previously handling. | |
| 23/16/21 | AC reported that the new ICT Officer is getting off to a good start, and that the ICT Manager has begun handing some work over to him and getting used to the new structure. | |
| 23/16/22 | The Board noted that the cash appeals have done well this year and that we have also engaged new members and supporters as a result of the current political and social environment. | |
| 23/16/23 | The Board enquired about whether there could be an opportunity for them to meet staff annually, to ensure they know who everyone is in the team. AC confirmed that they should have received an invitation to staff and volunteer reception in December. AC also confirmed that Sarah Gilliam, new Director of Communications and Development, will be invited to present at the December Board away day. | |
| 23/16/24 | AC advised that the current members and supporters number is 55,000. This still needs to be updated on the website and in other materials. | AC |
| 23/16/25 | The Board received the 2016Q3 and YTD accounts from JA. | |

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| 23/16/26 | JA reminded the Board that the agreed budget was for a deficit. | |
| 23/16/27 | The Board noted that subscriptions, events, and community services income is higher than anticipated, which is positive. Gift Aid is low at the moment, but JA expects this to all have come through by the end of the next quarter. | |
| 23/16/28 | JA advised that the numbers for 'What is Humanism' distribution are net figures for the quarter and the year. Earlier in the year this was predominantly income while we were fundraising, and now it is predominantly expenditure because the project is underway. | |
| 23/16/29 | The Board noted that membership subscription is now a key income stream, as well as allowing us the opportunity to engage with more people. Subscription income now falls below £30k for only one month of the year where this was 11 months of the year in 2014. | |
| 23/16/30 | JA advised that we have additional figures since the report was written and that the projection is looking even more positive than in the report. Given the strategic projects that the Board is working on, and the plans to relocate the office, it is good to have this coming in. | |
| 23/16/31 | JA provided an update on the position of our investments with Barclays, which have been very successful, and confirmed that we are expecting a 17% return over the course of the year. | |
| 23/16/32 | AC advised that we are expecting the consistently higher monthly income from subscriptions and regular donations to continue. Attrition levels of members have ranged between 7-12%. AC confirmed that the fundraising group will be starting to look into this and implement an exit survey. The Board also requested data on the number of unsubscription requests being received in response to the eBulletin. | AC |
| 23/16/33 | AC provided an update on recent changes at the International Humanist and Ethical Union. They have received a large donation and have been able to appoint a full-time Director of Advocacy in Brussels. They have also created a Growth and Development Officer post, which is being recruited for. The Administrator has been made redundant to fund that post, and will be leaving at the end of the year. In addition, the current Chief Executive will be leaving at the end of the year and recruitment of a successor is underway. AC confirmed that they are planning to keep their main staff team in the UK. | |
| 23/16/34 | The Board received a verbal update on the BHA's fundraising strategy for 2017 from AC. | |

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| 23/16/35 | AC advised that the fundraising model is not changing hugely, other than if the Director of Community Services is successful with grants funding. He is currently making a number of applications for various community services projects and is receiving some useful feedback. | |
| 23/16/36 | The Board noted that we will be continuing with the same fundraising methods, but on a larger scale in 2017. We will be sending some cold mailings, which have proven successful in previous years. Facebook and Twitter advertising has proved successful and will continue. There will be four cash appeals and the one online appeal for the Faith Schools Campaigner again next year. There will also be additional small appeals on Justgiving for very specific asks. | |
| 23/16/37 | AC reported that we continue to remove supporters from the cash appeal distribution if they have not responded to an appeal in three years. There is some cost saving from that, but this is offset by the increasing numbers of supporters we have. AC advised that we are planning another telephone upgrade appeal, but may move this to 2018 if supporter recruitment goes well in 2017. | |
| 23/16/38 | <p>The Board received an update on the work being done with major donors. The Blackham Society has done well in terms of income, and in helping us develop relationships with major donors. AC and Rick Holland (fundraising consultant) have been meeting with several of them and have received some donations for our strategic projects. This work is very time intensive for AC but this will be an increasing focus next year, with other senior staff being engaged as appropriate. TG noted that the early returns in this area of fundraising are very encouraging given the current environment</p> <p>The Blackham Society events will be made smaller rather than larger next year, and senior staff will also be participating in those.</p> | |
| 23/16/39 | The Board was asked to bear in mind if they have any contacts that could be potential donors, or who may open doors for meeting potential donors. For example, AC will be speaking to Winton Capital through a university friend who works there. | BOT |
| 23/16/40 | The Board enquired about whether we might apply for social enterprise funding in relation to our prisons work, if this is shown to reduce reoffending. AC will ask Teddy Prout (Director of Community Services) to investigate this. | AC |
| 23/16/41 | The Board noted that we do have statutory funding from the NHS for the first time this year, so potentially this income stream could increase next year too. | |
| 24/16 | <u>Budget (AC)</u> | |
| 24/16/1 | The Board received the paper on the 2017 budget from AC. | |

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| 24/16/2 | AC reported that we have done better than expected this year, which has allowed us to increase the projected deficit in the 2017 budget. |
| 24/16/3 | AC reported that we expecting a significant legacy donation in 2017, and that if that comes through as expected then this will result in increased spending on some items as noted in the budget paper. |
| 24/16/4 | AC advised that the budget is now very much led by the strategic direction set by the Board and will continue to be closely aligned in future. |
| 24/16/5 | The Board enquired as to whether monthly projections of income and expenditure could be provided that reflect when we expect items to hit the budget. JA currently provides quarterly profiling, and feels this is a sufficient level of detail. |
| 24/16/6 | The Board enquired about the plans for regional development in other parts of the country. AC confirmed that there are programmes being developed regionally in community services, but that these are stand-alone initiatives rather than one cohesive project at present. This will be reviewed as part of the strategic initiatives in 2017. |
| 24/16/7 | The Board noted that some of the income targets are challenging, particularly subscriptions income, which is projected at a 40% increase on the 2016 budget. This is ambitious, but there is also a tripling of expenditure planned for supporter recruitment. AC confirmed that they will be reviewing this in August to assess how successful this has been. |
| 24/16/8 | The Board was reminded that legacy income is never budgeted, since we never know if or when this might be received. AC advised that the legacy campaign has been postponed to February 2017 to avoid clashes with all the other fundraising campaigns this quarter. |
| 24/16/9 | The Board noted that there are significant increases in the amounts we will be spending on legal action, in light of the challenging political environment. |
| 24/16/10 | The Board approved the budget as presented. |
| 25/16 | <u>Governance</u> |
| 25/16/1 | The Board received an update on the current situation with CFI UK. CFI in the US have recently merged with the Richard Dawkins Foundation and have expanded their activities. Currently it is not known what effect this will have on CFI UK. |
| 25/16/2 | The Board appointed Patricia Rogers to the CFI UK Management Committee for a three-year term. |
| 25/16/3 | The Board agreed the changes to Ceremonies Board section of the BHA Byelaws as appended. |

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| 25/16/4 | The Board received a paper from TG on the vacancy on the Board for an appointed trustee. There are currently no vacancies for co-opted Board members and there are two appointed Board members (TG and JA), so one appointed vacancy is available. Given that we may need specialist advice on the Board next year to take the strategic initiatives forward, and we don't currently know what we will need, TG recommended that the Board keep the vacancy open so that it can be filled when we know more about what expertise we will need. | |
| 25/16/5 | The Board agreed to leave open the vacancy on the Board for an appointed trustee. | |
| 25/16/6 | The Board discussed increasing the number of appointed vacancies on the Board to five to allow us to bring in this specialist knowledge more easily in future. The number of elected trustees would remain at 12. The Board agreed to this. AC will bring a paper on this to the February meeting and prepare a resolution for the Charity Commission, so that this can be included in the AGM materials for 2017. | AC |
| 26/16 | <u>Strategy</u> | |
| 26/16/01 | The Board agreed the BHA Policy document (as appended) as BHA policy, and were asked to confirm by email any spelling or grammar corrections that were needed. | BOT |
| 26/16/02 | The Board enquired about the reference to the Chief Rabbi being given a Knighthood on retirement. AC believes it was previously announced that the Chief Rabbi would be given a peerage by convention. He will speak to the Public Affairs team to confirm this. | AC |
| 26/16/03 | The Board agreed that consultation with local groups is not needed for these changes, since they are not material. However, a copy of the new policy will be sent to each group for information. | AC |
| 26/16/04 | The Board received an update from AC on the ongoing Brand Review. The agency Spencer Dubois have been appointed and have been doing an excellent job so far. The working group, which TG and IS are on, has been making good progress. The Board will be asked to contribute at the December away day as part of a workshop. | BOT |
| 26/16/05 | AC advised that the agency's recommendations for the organisation name will come through over Christmas, and the Board will be consulted by email on this. TG asked Board members to let her and AC know if they are not going to be available by email over the Christmas period so that they can be contacted by another suitable method. Suggested changes to the BHA logo will be brought to the February Board meeting. Following agreement by the Board, these ideas will go out for further market research before implementation. | |

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| 26/16/06 | AC confirmed that the agency are currently going out to focus groups as part of their initial research. AC shared the full timeline document with the Board. As part of the brand positioning work that has been done so far, it has been decided that Humanism or Humanist must feature somewhere in the name. The agency will be coming back to us with suggestions based on that brief. | |
| 26/16/07 | AC confirmed that if there is a name change then this will involve a public announcement, and that we plan to announce this alongside some research on Humanism in the UK. The website and stationery would need to be redesigned, but this will take longer and has been budgeted for. They will consider search engine optimisation as part of the process. | |
| 26/16/08 | The Board confirmed they are happy with the level of information provided at this stage and don't feel they need anything further from Spencer Dubois. | |
| 26/16/09 | The Board received an update from AC on ongoing initiatives. | |
| 26/16/10 | The Board noted that the property working group will be meeting for the first time in early December. They will be considering whether the BHA should stay in London or relocate, and whether or not the BHA should buy or build its next office. The search agent may be commissioned following that meeting. | |
| 26/16/11 | AC reported on meetings he has had with key donors who have expertise in this field. This have been very helpful and it seems at the moment that building a property would be preferable to buying one. One donor has also offered to loan us the deposit payment if necessary. We are contacting some local authorities in London to see if any sites are available on which we could develop an office alongside affordable housing. AC confirmed that senior staff are not necessarily averse to moving outside London, but this won't be decided until the group meets. | |
| 26/16/12 | The Board noted that the 'Humanist retreat' project has provoked some interest, but not as much. Philip Pullman has offered to support a public fundraising campaign for this as he is very keen on the idea. AC is in touch with a donor who has a contact in property, who will keep an eye out for somewhere suitable. | |
| 26/16/13 | AC reported that those he has spoken to are genuinely interested in the idea of a 'Centre for Humanist Studies', and that there is a possibility of having a publisher's imprint as part of this. | |
| 26/16/14 | AC confirmed that he will include any relevant updates in future management reports as the projects progress. | |
| 27/16 | <u>Presentation from Director of Operations (CM)</u> | |

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| | The Board received an update from the BHA's Director of Operations, Catriona McLellan, on the development of a knowledge management framework. | |
| 28/16 | <u>Any Other Business</u> | |
| 28/16/1 | Confidential minute on current position with President. | |
| 28/16/2 | Confidential minute on allocation of new cheque signatories. | |
| 28/16/3 | Confidential minute. | |
| 28/16/4 | NP gave an update on the current situation with regards to fundraising legislation, which she has been monitoring on behalf of the Board. The new fundraising regulator has been set up, but there is not much information available at the moment and it is unclear whether the BHA would have to or would want to register with them. There is also some concern about the new fundraising preference service which would allow people to opt out of all fundraising communications. This is due to launch in 2017, but again there is not much information about this yet. NP has registered to receive updates on these initiatives and will keep the Board updated. NP will share the new guidelines for Trustees – which don't contain any substantial changes – and will let PR know of any particular risks in relation to this situation that the risk subcommittee should bear in mind when they meet in January. | NP |
| 28/16/5 | It was agreed that TG will contact the Board to arrange a meal or some other event for all Board members on a convenient date in the New Year. | TG |
| 28/16/6 | It was agreed that calendar invitations to Board meetings will be sent to Trustees electronically. | AC |
| | <u>Date of the next meeting</u> BHA Board of Trustees Policy Away Day on 3 December 2016 11.00-15.00 at The Space Centre, Judd Street. BHA Board of Trustees Meeting on 25 February 2017 11.00-15.40 at 39 Moreland Street, London EC1V 8BB. | |

Byelaws changes

11.4 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CEREMONIES BOARD

- ~~11.4.1 The Ceremonies Board is responsible to the Chief Executive for quarterly:~~
- ~~i. Receiving State of the Network reports and agreeing a bulletin to all celebrants~~

- ~~11.4.2 The Ceremonies Board is responsible to the Chief Executive for annually:~~
- ~~i. Proposing any changes to the Celebrant Handbook, after consultation with celebrants~~
 - ~~ii. Proposing any changes to the Commitment to Celebrants, after consultation with celebrants~~
 - ~~iii. Determining the content of the Annual Survey~~

- ~~11.4.3 The Ceremonies Board is responsible to the Chief Executive for every two years:~~
- ~~i. Recommending any changes to levy and accreditation fees, after consultation with celebrants~~
 - ~~ii. Proposing any changes to the Recruitment Policy~~
 - ~~iii. Advising on any strategic issues, including any proposals for strategic change~~

11.4.1 The Ceremonies Board is responsible to the Chief Executive for:

- i. Receiving quarterly State of the Network reports and agreeing a consequent bulletin to all celebrants
- ii. Receiving for consideration any proposed revisions of the Celebrant Handbook recommended by the Quality Assurance Committee
- iii. Reviewing the Commitment to Celebrants every year and proposing any changes, after consultation with celebrants
- iv. Determining the content of the Annual Survey
- v. Reviewing levy and accreditation fees every two years and proposing any changes, after consultation with celebrants
- vi. Reviewing the Recruitment Policy every two years and proposing any changes
- vii. Advising on any strategic issues, including any proposals for strategic change

11.5 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHAIR OF THE CEREMONIES BOARD

11.5.1 In addition to membership of the Ceremonies Board, the Chair is responsible to the ~~Ceremonies Board~~ Head of Ceremonies for:

- i. Chairing the working group producing the annual conference
- ii. Being a public face of Humanist Ceremonies e.g. on press releases, at exhibitions, and elsewhere
- iii. Reporting on the year's achievements to the annual conference

BHA POLICY

The BHA's formal policy does not cater for every possible issue that the BHA might wish to comment on – for instance, it does not deal with a number of issues that occur internationally but not domestically. However the policy does cater for the majority of relevant situations and should add clear direction for any other statements the BHA might make.

1. Human rights and equality

The BHA is firmly committed to the protection and promotion of human rights, as exemplified in documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These rights represent shared values rooted in our common humanity and our shared human needs, transcending particular cultural and religious traditions. This regard for human rights and for the equal dignity of all human beings underpins many of our policies.

a. Realising human rights and equality

Humanist principles of justice and of valuing the dignity of each individual lead us to support equality and oppose unwarranted discrimination. Humanists have been deeply involved in campaigning against discrimination – from homophobia to racism – for decades. Humanists have also been in the forefront of developing modern ideas of human rights, and have been prominent human rights defenders.

The first decade of the twenty-first century in the UK saw:

- unprecedented measures to increase equality between individuals and outlaw irrelevant discrimination, culminating in the Equality Act 2010
- positive developments in human rights with the coming into effect in 2000 of the Human Rights Act 1998, which incorporates the Council of Europe's Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) directly into UK law
- the foundation of the UK's first Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), as well as the Scottish Human Rights Commission, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

We were involved in advocating and supporting all of this progress and our then Chief Executive served on the Government's steering group to plan for the EHRC, and on the reference group for the 2006 Equalities and Discrimination Law Reviews.

Human rights law is of particular importance to us since it establishes beyond doubt that it is unlawful to discriminate between religious and non-religious beliefs.

Today, we concentrate on resolving situations where principles of human rights or equality are compromised in law or policy and where people are unfairly privileged or discriminated against because of their religion or belief. This involves defending existing protections from attack or repeal; working to end unjustified exemptions from equality and human rights law, such as many of those

enjoyed by religious groups; and working for the enforcement of equality and human rights law in key areas where it is not being enforced.

For example we work for:

- an extension of section 6 of the Human Rights Act to treat religious organisations providing public services on behalf of the state as public authorities
- no weakening in the UK's existing human rights settlement or pulling out of the European Convention on Human Rights.
- an end to the exemptions from the Equality Act for religious groups which allow much egregious discrimination on grounds of religion or belief and of sexual orientation to continue lawfully
- the realisation of a single equality act in Northern Ireland, as is the case in the rest of the UK, as well as the proposed Northern Ireland 'Bill of Rights' to supplement the Human Rights Act
- incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into UK law
- a fair and just balance between the right of one person to express or manifest a religion or belief and the rights of others not to suffer discrimination, where the two may conflict
- an end to irrelevant religious discrimination in publicly funded posts such as jobs in religious schools not concerned with pastoral care or religious instruction and general pastoral support jobs in hospitals, the armed forces, universities and prisons, which are often unfairly reserved only for religious people or people of particular religions
- equal treatment of the non-religious according to need in the limited number of settings where belief-specific services are legitimately provided such as hospitals, the armed forces, prisons, universities and hospices. In these settings, specific non-religious support is often lacking
- Repeal to the exemption from equality law for non-denominational organisations whose rules exclude non-religious people.

b. 'Conscientious Objection'

We are fully committed to freedom of conscience, belief and expression and a society where human rights are valued and where there is equality before the law.

Conscientious objection is not a new concept and, for example, humanists and religious people alike have exercised their right to refuse to go to war at times of conscription. Historically, conscientious objectors have suffered some sort of penalty for making a refusal on matters of conscience.

Today, increasing numbers of claims are being taken through the judicial system in an attempt to establish a right to a degree of religious exceptionalism which risks prejudicing the rights of other people. Although those asking for accommodation of their beliefs may use the term 'conscientious objection', there are only three instances in English law where there is a clear legal right to object on grounds of conscience, namely regarding abortion, technological procedures to achieve conception and pregnancy e.g. IVF treatment, and military service in times of conscription.

Elsewhere it is preferable to refer to claims for 'religious' or 'moral exemption'. This is certainly more accurate when describing a refusal by an individual to provide a service or to undertake a duty on grounds that it goes against their personal beliefs, for example when a religious pharmacist refuses

to dispense emergency contraception, when a civil registrar refuses to conduct civil partnership ceremonies, when an employee breaks the dress code or health and safety rules by wearing or displaying religious symbols at work, or when an employee proselytises or prays ostentatiously in the workplace.

None of these is a simple issue and we believe that a fair balance must be struck between the manifestation or expression of belief and the rights of others where there is a conflict.

We work to expose claims of alleged religious discrimination that are in fact the proper restrictions on religious behaviour that is unlawful or unjustifiably infringes the rights of others, whether in employment, service provision or elsewhere.

We work to oppose any attempts to establish wider exemptions for religious people from the Equality Act 2010 to 'accommodate' currently unlawful behaviour on alleged grounds of conscience.

c. Freedom of expression

We work for an open and inclusive society with freedom of belief, speech and expression. We believe that free expression is an essential liberty without which societies can easily slide into a culture of oppression, suspicion and fear. Freedom of expression has occupied an important part in humanist thinking for centuries and humanist organisations have always been active in campaigns for it.

One of our major past campaigns was against the blasphemy laws, abolished when the Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill received Royal Assent in May 2008. Although blasphemy is now not an offence in the UK, internationally it remains a big problem, including in democratic countries such as the Republic of Ireland, which recently enacted a new blasphemy law, and at the UN where the Islamic states have been seeking to impose serious restrictions on criticising of religious beliefs. We work with and through the international humanist organisations to tackle these threats.

For many years, we also lobbied and worked on what eventually became the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 and welcomed in particular the section of that Act which states: 'Nothing in this Part shall be read or given effect in a way which prohibits or restricts discussion, criticism or expressions of antipathy, dislike, ridicule, insult or abuse of particular religions or the beliefs or practices of their adherents, or of any other belief system or the beliefs or practices of its adherents, or proselytising or urging adherents of a different religion or belief system to cease practising their religion or belief system.'

This made it clear that the law is intended to protect people, not belief. However, there are still many threats to free expression today. We monitor legislation for any threats to free expression and work to protect free expression – especially where violations of the right to free expression jeopardise the free discussion of ideas and values. To this end we:

- monitor use of legal provisions against harassment on grounds of religion or belief in equality legislation which may lead to unwarranted free expression restrictions by the back door

- join calls to change UK libel laws to prevent victimisation of scientists, journalists, and human rights campaigners
- work with others to make legislation less restrictive of valid free expression, by liberalising the Public Order Act in relation to 'insulting' behaviour and resisting conflation in policies and legislation of valid free expression and extremism
- work with atheist, humanist and secularist student societies to identify and challenge unnecessary censorship on university campuses as can arise from 'no platform' and 'safe space' policies.
- advocate reform of the advertising regulations and practices which lead bodies such as the Advertising Standards Authority and advisory bodies such as the Committee on Advertising Practice to chill free expression in the name of preventing 'offence' and cause commercial interests to do the same
- protect and secure the right of students to freely criticise religions and other ideas and beliefs without fear of punishment under Student Union or University policies
- support the work of the European Humanist Federation and International Humanist and Ethical Union, who work on free expression issues globally, including on blasphemy laws

At the same time we support necessary restrictions on advertising that, for example, protect the public against actual harm from false claims. For example, we have taken action to refer anti-medical claims of evangelical churches to advertising regulators where they have done harm to people.

d. Broadcasting

In today's large and complex society, broadcasting – especially public service broadcasting – is one of the main ways in which citizens and communities can learn about and from each other; it is also one of the main sources of information for large numbers of people. The right to freedom of speech therefore includes the right of access to broadcasting media for different beliefs, religious and non-religious. For us, broadcasting is important because we want to ensure that humanist voices and perspectives are reflected in public discourse and assist those with humanist beliefs to identify themselves as humanists. In as much as there are to be reserved programmes for religious people, we want broadcasters to reflect fairly the religions and beliefs found in Britain and therefore to broadcast programmes aimed especially at humanists.

When the Communications Act was passed in 2003, we achieved a considerable success through lobbying the UK Government. The Act defines public service broadcasting as including programmes on 'religion and other beliefs', and it specifies that belief 'means a collective belief in, or other adherence to, a systemised set of ethical or philosophical principles or of mystical or transcendental doctrines'. At the time, the Government made clear that the 'reference to other beliefs...would include ethical systems or philosophies such as Humanism'.

Although the law makes clear that religions and beliefs, including non-religious beliefs such as Humanism, should be treated equally in terms of broadcasting, the BBC continues to resist doing so.

We bring pressure to bear on the BBC, on other public service broadcasters and on Ofcom on this and a range of broadcasting issues. We also participated in the BBC's Standing Conference on Religion and Belief, which advised the BBC on religion and belief issues, until it folded.

Thought for the Day

Thought for the Day is a religious slot that, coming in the middle of the BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme, obtrudes itself on the general listener. It plainly proclaims to all and sundry five days a week that reflective thoughts on the events of the day come only from people with 'a faith'. There are different views about the idea of a reflective slot in the middle of a current affairs programme: some see no place for it; others think it is a valuable interlude. For so long as it exists, however, it is entirely unacceptable to exclude some speakers just because they are non-religious. We want BBC Radio 4's *Thought for the Day* programme to include humanist perspectives.

e. Socio-economic rights

The BHA endorses the recognition in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that civil rights, such as the right to free speech and the right not to be discriminated against, need to be accompanied by socio-economic rights such as basic human rights to health and well-being, food and clothing, housing and education and medical care. We campaign for socio-economic inclusion as part of our campaigns around religious discrimination in school admissions, in particular. More generally, we do not duplicate the work of other secular organisations working to promote these human rights by campaigning on issues of poverty, global justice, and the protection of the environment for future generations, but we publicise them, encourage our members to support them, and provide specific support to particular campaigns and join coalitions, where appropriate and within the limits of our resources.

f. Religious courts

In addition to the Church of England's ecclesiastical courts that operate as part of English law but rarely rule on matters external to the Church, two significant non-statutory systems of religious 'courts' operate in the UK, namely Muslim sharia councils and the Jewish batei din. Individuals are of course free to regulate their lives through religious beliefs or cultural traditions and some have the option to use such religious 'courts' and to agree to abide by their rulings. However, these rulings are subject to national law and cannot be enforced through the national courts save in the limited circumstances prescribed in the Arbitration Act. Those religious 'courts' which fail to make clear to individuals the lack of legal status attached to them and available options for legal redress, should be outlawed.

There have been reported instances of (amongst other things) vulnerable women from religious communities being led to believe that religious 'courts' have legal standing when granting decisions about child custody following the breakdown of a marriage. It has also been shown that women are not always treated equally and of spousal or family coercion at religious courts and that the courts are not handling issues in an even-handed way. This is because these religious systems do not uphold sex equality. We support the work of women's organisations highlighting and working on these issues.

We do not support these 'courts' however we do support freedom of association. We call for the impact on women using these alternative religious systems to be monitored by the Equality and Human Rights Commission and an education outreach programme making clear the non legal standing of these 'courts'. We would also oppose any moves to incorporate religious 'courts' into the law.

2. Secularism

We are committed to secularism – the principle that, in a plural, open society where people follow many different religious and non-religious ways of life, the communal institutions that we share (and together pay for) should provide a neutral public space where we can all meet on equal terms. State secularism, where state institutions are separate from religious institutions or the state is otherwise neutral on matters of religion or belief, guarantees the maximum freedom for all, including religious believers. In such a state, no one should be privileged nor disadvantaged on grounds of their religious or non-religious beliefs.

a. Constitutional reform

Disestablishment

Although it has been disestablished in Wales and Northern Ireland, the Anglican Church is still the state church of England. Similarly the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland is recognised as the national church of Scotland and, like the Church of England, has the monarch at its head. Continuing establishment gives rise to and allows many of the inequalities and instances of discrimination we detail in our ‘Education’ and ‘Human Rights and Equality’ sections.

Disestablishment would include a separation of church and state so that the Head of State is not also Head of the Church of England or Church of Scotland, and an end to other constitutional entanglements between the state and the Church.

Religious representatives in the House of Lords

Secularism would also require an end to Bishops sitting as of right in the House of Lords and a substantial reduction in permissible discrimination based on religion or belief.

The UK is the only democratic country in the world to give seats in its legislature to religious representatives as of right. This is not just a harmless legacy of a medieval constitution but a present example of discrimination, religious privilege and undemocratic politics. It survives in spite of the Church of England commanding limited and declining public support, with only 17% of the population professing to affiliation according to the 2014 British Social Attitudes survey (and just 1% of the population attending an Anglican church on any given Sunday).

The presence of the Church of England in the House of Lords entrenches a privileged position for one particular branch of one particular religion. This cannot be justified in today’s society, which is not only multi-faith but increasingly non-religious. It is at odds with the aspiration for a more legitimate and representative second chamber and with affirmation of a plural society.

We have long argued for the removal of the right of Bishops to sit in the House of Lords, especially since the prospects for reform became (slightly) greater in 2002, and the public are strongly on our side in wanting to remove this religious privilege. An ICM survey conducted on behalf of the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust in March 2010 found that 74% of the British public – including 70% of Christians – believe it is wrong that Bishops have an automatic right to a seat in the House of Lords.

This also extends to those who are appointed to the House simply by virtue of their religious position, such as the former Chief Rabbi. We believe that religious leaders *may* be appointed but only along the same meritocratic process as everyone else.

b. Government and ‘faith communities’

We want a state with no discrimination or privilege on grounds of religion or belief and with truly inclusive approaches to public policy. We therefore want government and others to recognise the value of communities as a whole (rather than religious ‘communities’) and the contributions made by humanists and the non-religious at large as well as those from religious people. We want communities where people of all different backgrounds and beliefs engage and work with each other for the benefit of the whole community. Only in this context can people be positively empowered to make choices about their lives.

The UK Government is increasingly encouraging religious groups to take on a role in local communities and pressing local government to welcome such religious groups as ‘partners’. Insofar as these arrangements are no more than what would be offered to any local group with strong links with the local community, such moves may be acceptable.

However, there is strong evidence to suggest that what the Government intends amounts to new privileges for religion, such as a distinct role in providing public services on behalf of the state at national, regional and local levels (see Public Service Reform). We work for a state with no privilege or discrimination on grounds of religion or belief and so find this unacceptable. In terms of social cohesion initiatives, religious groups and communities have been singled out by government as having a special importance and being in need of special attention and assistance, mostly in isolation from other communities and almost always to the exclusion of the non-religious – normally under the remit of ‘faith’ or ‘interfaith’ strategies.

Interfaith initiatives, by their very name and often by their nature, are exclusive and do not involve humanists and other non-religious people in the community. Many bodies which government promotes and engages with as a means of bringing people of different beliefs together are ‘interfaith’ groups and explicitly exclude the non-religious. Where such initiatives are willing to include those with non-religious beliefs we support humanists joining them, but have a preference for the inclusion of non-religious people to then be made clear in the name of the group in question – preferring terms such as ‘multi faith and belief’ or ‘dialogue’.

We believe that, rather than making a fetish of faith, social cohesion and other community initiatives must focus on the contribution that all individuals and groups in the community can make. Where there are legitimate reasons for working with communities identified by beliefs, then these must also include humanists and other non-religious people, and we support the involvement of humanists in those circumstances.

Localism

In recent years, the UK Government and its agencies have been focusing disproportionately on religious groups and communities as part of its localism agenda, to the exclusion of many ordinary people within so-called ‘faith’ groups and certainly to the detriment of wider society and social

cohesion. That is a policy about which we are critical particularly because it tends to view and treat people by perceived or declared group identity rather than as equal, individual members of the wider community. We are concerned that current initiatives around devolution to English regions may compound these issues.

Unless localism initiatives are secular, neutral on matters of religion and belief, treating all people equally regardless of belief, and without privilege or discrimination, then they will fail to be inclusive and may serve to divide rather than to unite society.

Remembrance and other national ceremonies

We campaign for public ceremonies to be equally inclusive of those of all religions and beliefs. A particularly prominent example of a ceremony that is not inclusive is the annual Remembrance Ceremony at the Cenotaph in Westminster, where a number of religious representatives are included in proceedings but a humanist representative is not. Large numbers of non-religious people have given their lives in wars and the Cenotaph was designed as a secular monument in recognition of the diversity of belief groups amongst the armed forces. The Defence Humanists group currently has more members than the minority religion interest groups and yet are excluded from the formal ceremony. Here and elsewhere in the UK, we and [Defence Humanists](#) believe these ceremonies should be secular and inclusive.

c. Public service reform

We want inclusive, accessible public services without any identification with particular religions or beliefs and with no discrimination in employment or service delivery, and human rights protection for service users.

Across-the-board, publicly funded, comprehensive and statutory public services, to which all citizens have an entitlement, are in the process of extensive and significant reform. Government is introducing new suppliers of public services by placing contracts with private and voluntary and community sector organisations. The great majority of public service provision has hitherto been in the hands of secular bodies (public or through contractors), and there is no evidence that the public is dissatisfied with this. On the other hand, the main example of non-secular public service provision is state-funded religious schools, to which as many as four out of five people are hostile. However, as part of its marketisation of public services such as the welfare and employment, health, social care and housing services, the UK Government has been promoting the specific inclusion of religious organisations as providers, in particular at local level.

Religious organisations have important exemptions from the Equality Act 2010 allowing them to discriminate in various ways even when working under contract to provide a public service. For example, the exemptions from employment equality legislation allow religious employers to discriminate against potential applicants for jobs on grounds of religion or belief and of sexual orientation, and to discriminate against current employees on those same grounds in ways such as barring them from promotion or dismissing them (See Human Rights and Equality).

In addition, citizens whose services are delivered by private or charitable organisations, many of the latter religious, working under contract for a public authority do not have the protection of the

Human Rights Act. This is in spite of the fact that it is pure chance that they may receive their services from such a contractor and not directly from the public authority, itself automatically subject to the Act. Religious organisations appear to be particularly resistant to having public authority status extended to them, since they wish to maintain their right to discriminate in the name of their religious ethos.

We believe that such a policy gives rise to significant issues of principle and to substantial practical problems. Not only does having religious organisations providing public services on behalf of the state put at severe risk the secular nature of those services, but there are problems related specifically to contracting to such organisations:

- discrimination against employees of no, or another, religion – including public sector workers who have been transferred to a religious employer
- unfair promotion prospects for those of the 'right' religion
- discrimination against service users of no or another religion and reduced rights for service users
- discrimination against LGBT people whether employees or service users
- religious harassment
- artificial boosting with public funds of the prestige and strength of religious organisations
- uneconomic duplication of services
- divisive effects on the community with implications for social cohesion and equality.

We believe that the problems associated with having religious organisations as public service suppliers and providers are so varied and so great, that it is our firm view that no publicly-funded, comprehensive and statutory public service, to which all citizens have an entitlement, should be contracted out to a religious organisation until the law has been changed to protect service users and employees from discrimination.

If religious organisations are to supply and deliver public services, government must take a number of steps to address the problems that will inevitably arise:

- we want the Human Rights Act amended to treat religious contractors delivering general public services on behalf of a public authority to be treated themselves as public authorities
- we want the Equality Act 2010 and Northern Ireland equality legislation to be amended to suspend the exemptions for religious groups when they are working under public contract on behalf of the state
- until such time as legislation is amended, we want all contracts with religious groups (based in the UK or overseas) to provide public services to include equality, non-discrimination and non-proselytising clauses
- we want all public authorities to maintain a public record of contracts with religious groups and to set appropriate contractual and monitoring systems in place to prevent discrimination in employment or provision of services
- we want government to set in place appropriate measures to assist public authorities in identifying and excluding groups with extreme agendas that may bid to take on public services contracts

d. Marriage laws

Religious people have a choice between being married by a civil registrar and being married by a representative of their religion who shares their approach to life. Except in Scotland, non-religious people have no option other than the civil registrar. Many hundreds of people in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland each year choose to have a personalised and meaningful wedding ceremony performed by a humanist celebrant but their wedding is not a legal marriage. In Scotland the proportion of humanist marriages has grown rapidly since their legal recognition, overtaking Church of Scotland marriages in 2015, and we would expect the same in England and Wales.

We support the availability of secular civil registrars for all, and welcome the fact that civil marriages can now take place outside of Register Offices, in licensed premises.

But we want the law in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to allow humanist celebrants to conduct legal marriages as it does in Scotland. This would give non-religious people the same choice that religious people have of a meaningful ceremony composed by a person who shares their values and approach to life. Non-religious people in many other countries, from Norway to Australia to parts of the USA already enjoy this choice. After securing power under the Marriage Act 2013 to do so, the UK Government is currently considering whether to make an Order extending legal recognition to humanist marriages in England and Wales. We are also pushing for such recognition in Northern Ireland.

In relation to same-sex couples, we want marriage law to be reformed so that two men or two women enjoy the same access to marriage as a man and a woman. In England, Scotland, and Wales this is now possible, but it remains unlawful in Northern Ireland. Same-sex civil partnerships (which we supported even though we also advocated more radical reform) should be seen as a stepping-stone towards full marriage equality between same-sex couples and heterosexual couples.

3. Education

We are interested in education for three reasons:

- we aim for the UK to be secular state with no privilege or discrimination on grounds of religion or belief. The continuing religious discrimination in our state school system is therefore a concern for us
- we aim for Humanism to be better understood as an ethical and fulfilling non-religious approach to life and so we have an interest in ensuring that it features on the school curriculum on equal terms with religions
- humanists see education as a vital process and have been rich contributors to both the philosophy and practice of education

We have an interest in promoting better education that will meet these aspirations because we promote humanist perspectives in public debate and policy.

We concentrate on laws and policies that are discriminatory and violate principles of human rights or equality in state-funded schools or on matters where we have a distinctive humanist view. For example we work for:

- an end to religious discrimination in school admissions
- an end to religious discrimination in school employment
- progressive reform of the school curriculum
- inclusive assemblies in place of mandatory religious 'Collective Worship'

Some of the issues we work on are specific to state-funded religious schools (popularly known as 'faith' schools in England and Wales and denominational schools in Scotland and Northern Ireland) while others apply to education generally but are exacerbated in 'faith' schools. Because of this, we also work generally for an end to the expansion of 'faith' schools and the transformation of those that already exist into inclusive schools which serve the whole community.

a. School curriculum

One of our aims is to promote a humanist perspective on public policy issues. Many humanists have had a profound interest in education and so the school curriculum has naturally been a focus for us. In practice, we concentrate on aspects of the curriculum where the humanist voice is excluded or weak or where others are actively promoting policies at odds with our principles.

Beliefs and Values Education ('Religious Education')

We believe that all pupils in all types of school should have the opportunity to consider philosophical and fundamental questions, and that in an open society we should learn about each other's beliefs, including humanist ones. We want a subject on the curriculum which helps young people to form and explore their own beliefs and develop an understanding of the beliefs and values different from their own; enriches pupils' knowledge of the religious and humanist heritage of humanity and so supports other subjects such as History, English Literature, Art, Music, and Geography; and allows pupils to engage with serious ethical and philosophical questions in a way that develops important skills of critical thinking, reasoning and inquiry.

The usual contemporary justifications for the subject of 'Religious Education' ('RE') in the school curriculum – its contribution to social cohesion and mutual understanding, its presentation of a range of answers to questions of meaning and purpose, its role in the search for personal identity and values, and its contribution to understanding history and culture – can best be served by including humanist perspectives and non-religious students.

We therefore work for reform of the current subject of 'Religious Education' so that as required by human rights law it becomes inclusive, impartial, objective, fair, balanced and a relevant subject allowing pupils to explore a variety of religions and non-religious worldviews, sitting alongside other Humanities subjects in the curriculum and with the same status as them. It should include the historical and social contexts of the emergence and development of religions and beliefs. We want this subject to be a national entitlement for all pupils and not, as currently, drawn up on a local basis for each individual local authority.

In practice, our work in RE focuses on ensuring non-religious perspectives are included (e.g. atheism taught about clearly when beliefs about god are being taught, and Humanism taught about as a non-religious ethical approach to life) and opposing any confessional teaching in state schools, where

pupils are instructed in a particular religion, or instructed on the benefits of a 'religious life', and denied their entitlement to a balanced and objective syllabus.

At present in many schools RE is (meant to be) given according to a syllabus locally agreed by an Agreed Syllabus Conference comprising committees representing the Church of England, other religions and denominations, the teachers and the local authority. This antiquated system in England and Wales is becoming increasingly irrelevant, especially at secondary school level, as Academies (including Free Schools) are not bound by the syllabus set by the ASC, and a large majority of secondaries are now Academies. We want to see this system abolished and prefer a national syllabus drawn up by educational and other experts. Until such reform is achieved, we want humanists to be admitted as full members of these Conferences and Humanism to feature on the syllabuses.

We are willing to see the parallel bodies, the local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education, continue as a channel for consultation between teachers and local religion and belief communities and want to see humanists included equally with religious people on these bodies, as many increasingly are.

Science

Science has provided a consistently reliable way of finding answers, albeit provisional, to questions about the nature and behaviour of things. It is rational, universal, enquiry- and evidence-based, and one of humanity's greatest achievements. It is our position that the science curriculum in schools should make direct reference to the value of science as a way of finding out knowledge. It should cover the historical development of science and discovery and its impact on society. The general contextual understanding this would provide is of greater importance for the majority of children who will not pursue a scientific specialism. It is also our position that non-scientific or un-evidenced theories or approaches should never be taught as if they were scientific or evidenced.

Evolution

Evolution is the most important idea underlying biology. It is a key concept that children should be introduced to at an early stage so as to protect them from popular misconceptions ('it is all a matter of chance') and religious fallacies (such as arguments from design) and ensure a firm scientific understanding when they study it in more detail and depth later on. An understanding of evolution is central to understanding all aspects of biology, from human behaviour to the genetic basis of disease, to ecological relationships and how the environment affects the development and diversity of life on earth. As such it should be a central feature of school biology.

After extensive campaigning we were pleased when in 2015 evolution was added to the primary national curriculum in English state schools, and all English state schools were required to teach evolution. We believe this should be extended to all UK state schools.

Creationism and 'intelligent design'

Creationism and 'intelligent design' are not scientific theories, but they are portrayed as scientific theories by some religious fundamentalists who attempt to have their views promoted in publicly-

funded schools. We work for enforceable statutory rules that they may not be presented as scientific theories in any publicly-funded school of whatever type. Such rules must also be comprehensive, so that it is clear that any portrayal of creationism and 'intelligent design' as science (whether it takes place in science lessons or not) is unacceptable.

In 2014 the UK Government banned all English state schools from teaching creationism or intelligent design as scientifically valid. We believe this should be extended to all UK state schools.

PSHE and SRE

A vital task for all schools is the moral education of children, which includes the encouragement of understanding and respect between different groups in society. As part of a broader curriculum including RE and Citizenship, we believe Personal Social Health and Economic education (PSHE), which includes Sex and Relationships Education (SRE), has an important role to play.

In Wales, the equivalent subjects are known as Personal and Social Education (PSE) and SRE in Northern Ireland as PSHE and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). For simplicity we refer to PSHE/SRE throughout the rest of this policy.

We unequivocally support making PSHE a statutory part of the curriculum, and believe that the religious character of a school should not deprive children of their entitlement to good PSHE. We believe that the right of children to PSHE is more important than any other consideration and consequently that any right of parental withdrawal (as is currently the case for sex education) should cease.

Sex and Relationships Education

Good quality, age-appropriate Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) is a vital part of PSHE. It is known to reduce unwanted pregnancies, to reduce the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and equip young people with the language and tools to be clear about personal boundaries and understand appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, to be able to resist pressure assertively and to know whom to talk to and how to ask for help if and when they need it. It helps older children resist pressure, make safe choices, and be able to challenge and be critical of misleading and inappropriate messages about sex in the media and online including easily available internet pornography. National and international research shows that young people who have had good SRE are more likely to delay having sex for the first time. When they do have sex they are more likely to use condoms and contraception.

We believe that all children are entitled to full, accurate and age-appropriate SRE, including education about forming and maintaining rewarding relationships and unbiased information on contraception, STIs, abortion, sexual orientation, and the many forms of family relationship conducive to individual fulfilment and the stability of society.

Despite the obvious public health and child rights imperative for SRE, the current situation is that schools do not have to teach any SRE beyond basic information on human reproduction and infectious diseases in the science curriculum. All state maintained schools must also teach about HIV and AIDS; however there is no guidance about what information should be taught. Parents are entitled to withdraw their children from these lessons.

Our firm belief that all children are entitled to essential basic information about human reproduction and physiology in science and to broader and comprehensive SRE elsewhere in the curriculum means that we want it to be clearly defined and taught as a compulsory subject in all schools from primary age, with no parental opt out.

b. Collective Worship in schools

Current law and government guidance discriminates in favour of religion in requiring daily worship in schools, and in favour of Christianity in requiring that the majority of acts of collective worship should be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'. Sixth form pupils can self withdraw from this practice in England and Wales and parents on behalf of younger pupils have an absolute right to withdrawal from compulsory collective worship. This therefore means that there is no such thing as a fully secular state school.

The available evidence points to the UK being the only country in the world to impose Christian worship in state schools. In demanding 'Collective Worship' in a school which will typically have pupils from a wide variety of religious backgrounds and none, the law is incoherent: a school can do many things collectively but, lacking a shared religious faith, it cannot worship collectively. It also ignores the right of children, below the sixth form in England and Wales and of all ages elsewhere, to freedom of belief and conscience by giving only to parents the right to have a child excused from worship or to withdraw the child from school for an alternative form of worship.

In England and Wales, schools without a religious character can apply to the local authority's Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) for exemption from the 'broadly Christian' requirement for some or all of their pupils. This is called a 'determination', and alternative worship must be provided for these pupils, although parents still have the right to have their children excused from this worship and English and Welsh sixth-formers still have the right to excuse themselves.

Neither the parental nor sixth former right to excusal nor the possibility of obtaining a determination is a satisfactory means of achieving inclusiveness. Few parents avail themselves of the right to have children excused from school worship, not wishing them to be singled out or to miss the valuable elements of school assemblies: the celebration of shared values and the sharing of the school culture and ethos. Opting out is, in any case, a negation of inclusiveness. The process of obtaining a determination is often sufficiently bureaucratic and time-consuming to deter schools, apart from those with large and assertive groups of non-Christians. The law does not allow schools to determine to hold inclusive assemblies instead of worship, because the majority of their pupils are not religious, though surveys show that this must often be the case.

Very frequently schools can achieve worthwhile and inclusive assemblies only by breaking the law, sometimes with the connivance of the local SACRE. This is a far from ideal situation.

We want to see the current law requiring daily collective worship replaced with a requirement for inclusive school assemblies. In this we are in agreement with many religious groups and all the major education unions. Such assemblies could explore for examples topics such as happiness, sadness, beauty, ethics and the arts; encourage kindness, sharing and creativity; consider life, love, and death; and investigate what it means to be human. These assemblies should delve into different religious and non-religious points of view in a non proselytising, open and inclusive manner.

c. State-funded religious schools ('faith' schools)

We aim for a secular state guaranteeing human rights, with no privilege or discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, and so we campaign against 'faith' schools, as they are known in England and Wales, and denominational schools, as they are known in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and for an inclusive, secular schools system, where children and young people of all different backgrounds and beliefs can learn with and from each other.

We do not wish to interfere with the right of parents, explicit in the European Convention of Human Rights, to bring up their children in the religion or belief of their choice without interference from the state, provided the human rights of children are not infringed. However, we oppose state funding for confessional religious teaching which is properly the role of the home or the church.

We do not think that state schools should be allowed to choose pupils on the basis of religion, discriminating in access to a public service that should be open to all. We don't think that state schools should be free to select teachers and other staff, or to select governors, according to their religion. We are concerned that the proliferation of state-funded religious schools is making for more segregated future communities, especially as religions whose believers tend to come from particular ethnic groups gain more state-funded schools. When studies show that religious selection for pupils results, deliberately or otherwise, also in socio-economic selection, we think the social case against religious schools is even stronger.

We want to see an end to the proliferation of state-funded 'faith' schools. We want a progressive withdrawal of their privileges and exemptions so that religious schools are eventually absorbed back into the wider schools sector, becoming inclusive schools for all the community.

Around a third of all state-funded schools in England and Wales are schools 'with a religious character' – the legal term for 'faith' schools. The proportion has grown in recent years as successive governments have stacked the system in favour of religious groups in the state-funded education system and it is still growing. It has also been added to by the proliferation in England of so-called 'faith ethos' schools, which are not formally designated with a religious character but nonetheless have some form of religious ethos, and whose religious character is not always registered by the UK Government.

Many 'faith' schools are their own **admissions** authorities, which means they can give preference to children from families that share their religion when oversubscribed, or those who are otherwise religious, over those who are not. Not only does this discriminate against pupils of the 'wrong' or no religion and infringe their rights by assuming their beliefs are identical to their parents': it also leads to segregation along religious and socio-economic lines – 'faith' school populations are often far

from representative of their local communities – for example, they generally admit far fewer children eligible for free school meals.

‘Faith’ schools are also allowed to discriminate to varying extents in their recruitment and **employment** policies. Applicants can be rejected and staff barred from promotion if they are not of the ‘right’ religion, or of no religion. In some schools staff can even be dismissed if their behaviour outside school is deemed ‘incompatible’ with the school’s religion. One result is that non-religious teachers find that their career prospects are significantly reduced.

‘Faith’ schools are also uniquely privileged in law in **school organisation** – being able to open ‘by the back door’ outside of competition with other proposals, as well as having a privileged position in discussions about school closures and amalgamations. This has [been true for a number of years](#), and is increasingly becoming a problem in practice.

We are also concerned with the **curricula** of religious schools. Some (including the majority of secondary ‘faith’ schools) are permitted to teach their own syllabus of Religious Education (RE), unlike community schools, which must follow a locally agreed syllabus, and Academies with no religious character which must teach a syllabus that is equivalent in its balance. The teaching of RE in religious schools is not specifically inspected by Ofsted inspection, instead being inspected by someone chosen by the governors (which typically means the diocese). It is often confessional in nature, with the aim of instructing children in the doctrine and practices of a particular religion.

RE in such schools rarely covers other religions in any detail and almost certainly fails to give a fair account of non-religious views. Ethical issues such as abortion or assisted dying are often approached from an explicitly religious perspective, with all the potential for misinformation that this entails.

While there are many problems with locally agreed RE syllabuses, they do at least cover a range of religions and many now include the study of non-religious beliefs such as Humanism.

Because **Personal, Social, Health, and Economic Education** (PSHE) is not a statutory subject, faith schools are free to teach it from a religious perspective. We are particularly concerned that the sex and relationships components – if they are covered at all – may be taught in ways that are homophobic, gender discriminatory or that otherwise violate principles of human rights, or are otherwise inadequate (for example teaching abstinence only education instead of teaching about contraception and abortion) or fail to deliver a broad relationships education.

Concerns about the teaching of **creationism**, when they arise, typically do so within ‘faith’ schools. We do not think creationism or intelligent design should be taught as scientific theories, because they are not.

d. Other religious schools

We campaign for stronger regulation of private religious schools. We recognise that the European Convention on Human Rights affords parents the right to bring children up in line with their religious beliefs, and that state funds are not involved in their routine operation. But we also recognise children’s rights to form their own opinions on matters of religion and belief, and the duty placed on states by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Convention requires states to promote and encourage ‘the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge’. It also guarantees children ‘the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers’ and says they have the right to be prepared for ‘responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups’.

It further states that ‘States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.’ And ‘States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.’

As things stand, many private schools infringe these rights, particularly when it comes to religious and science education. So too do both the significant number of illegal, unregistered religious schools that are known to be in operation across the country, and those education settings providing (or claiming to provide) supplementary religious education to children outside of normal school hours.

As a practical first step, we therefore campaign for private schools to be equivalently graded by Ofsted to state schools, and for equivalent action to be taken if they fail to provide a broad and balanced education in these areas – currently there is no requirement for a private school to teach a broad and balanced curriculum with respect to science or education about religion or belief in order to achieve good marks. Such a change would ensure that parents and others are able to get an informed picture about the quality of the teaching provided.

We also campaign for the closure of illegal, unregistered religious schools and, where they are lacking, for the introduction of legal provisions allowing relevant authorities to close such schools and ensure the children within them receive the education to which they are entitled. As part of this, we campaign for robust regulation of supplementary schools, a number of which are known to actually operate as full-time illegal schools, and the equivalent regulation of homeschooling too. This is not to detract from the right of parents to homeschool their children or to enroll them in supplementary schools, but rather to allow the authorities to better identify where children are actually being taught in illegal religious schools.

4. Public ethical issues

One of our Aims is to promote humanist views on public ethical issues. We focus on those issues that are either important to humanists in particular or have high social importance, especially where others are actively promoting views opposed to humanist values or the humanist voice is excluded or weak.

Humanists form their views on the often-conflicting ideas and unpredictable consequences arising from, for example, new developments in medical science, using reason, evidence and compassion and putting human wellbeing and the wellbeing of other sentient animals at the centre of their thinking. We base our responses on the humanist principle that individuals should have the right to live by their own personal values and the freedom to make decisions about their own lives, as long

as these do not result in harm to others or to the general aim of minimising suffering and advancing human happiness.

We do recognise that some values are not shared by everyone. Humanists do not share the attitudes to 'interfering with nature' or 'playing God' or the same definitions of personhood held by some religious believers. We respect the right not to participate in some procedures of those holding religious beliefs about the sanctity of life and the limits of medical intervention. Equally, we deny them the right to impose their beliefs directly or indirectly on others.

a. Assisted dying

We have long supported attempts to legalise assisted dying, assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia across the UK, for those who have made a clear decision, free from coercion, to end their lives and who are physically unable to do so themselves. In many cases, the person in question will be terminally ill. However, we do not think that there is a strong moral case to limit assistance to terminally ill people alone and we wish to see reform of the law that would be responsive to the needs of other people who are permanently and incurably suffering.

Humanists defend the right of each individual to live by his or her own personal values, and the freedom to make decisions about his or her own life so long as this does not result in harm to others. Humanists do not share the attitudes to death and dying held by some religious believers, in particular that the manner and time of death are for a deity to decide, and that interference in the course of nature is unacceptable. We firmly uphold the right to life but we recognise that this right carries with it the right of each individual to make his or her own judgement about whether his or her life should be prolonged in the face of pointless suffering.

Currently, the needs and autonomy of patients are often disregarded. Many people are in fact helped to die by doctors or nurses but without the safeguards that legislation would bring. Compassionate doctors, who follow the wishes of their terminally ill or incurably suffering patients by assisting them to die, risk being charged with assisting suicide or murder. The current system also results in close relatives being faced with the immensely difficult choices of whether, knowing that it is unlawful, to assist a loved one who is begging for help to put an end to their suffering or not to act and hence prolong their suffering. We do not believe that anyone should be put into the position of having to make such choices, or indeed into a position where they believe that they have no other option but personally to end the life of someone they love. The few terminally ill and suffering people who are able to travel abroad to die often do so before it would be necessary if they did not need to be still able to travel.

Being able to die, with dignity, in a manner of our choosing must be understood to be a fundamental human right – a position supported by the landmark judgment in the Purdy case, where our highest court ruled that European Convention on Human Rights can be invoked in relation to the end of life. Legalising assisted dying would ensure that strict legal safeguards are in place and empower people to make rational choices over their end of life care, free from coercion. The choice of an assisted death should not be instead of palliative care for terminally ill people, but a core part of comprehensive, patient-centred approaches to end of life care.

In recent years we have intervened in support of Tony and Jane Nicklinson's and Paul Lamb's attempts to overhaul the law on assisted dying for the terminally ill and incurably suffering by taking human rights cases through the courts, as well as supported parliamentary attempts to legalise assisted dying for the terminally ill.

b. Sexual and reproductive rights

We campaign in favour of individuals' sexual and reproductive rights, in particular with respect to women's rights to abortion.

Abortion

Our position on abortion is 'pro-choice'. The present law in England, Wales, and Scotland is in practice more liberal than on paper. It makes abortion reasonably easily available to those who want one despite unnecessarily complex legal and medical formalities. It does not compel those with conscientious objections to take part in performing one. This position respects people's differing interpretations of the right to life and its bearing on the issue of abortion. In Northern Ireland the 1967 Abortion Act was never applied and access to abortion is only permitted if a woman's life is at risk or there is a permanent risk to her physical or mental health. There is an urgent need of whole scale reform, in order to move to a similar position to that of the rest of the UK.

It is best, of course, if every child is a wanted child and improved Sex and Relationships Education (SRE), more widely and freely available contraception, and better education and services for young people can all help to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies. However, for as long as abortion is needed, society should provide safe and legal facilities to provide it. Anything less would inevitably increase the number of illegal and unsafe abortions, and would be an infringement on a woman's right to choose.

We defend the right for women to gain access to safe abortion with appropriate secular counselling and after-care and support liberalisation of the abortion laws, which would include: permitting women from Northern Ireland the same rights to free abortions on the NHS in Great Britain as women in England, Wales and Scotland enjoy; decriminalisation of abortion across the UK, to stop women going to jail for what is now a safe medical procedure; other measures to make access to safe, early abortions easier; and measures to exclude protesters from buffer zones around abortion clinics when needed to enable clients to access them free from unwanted harassment and intimidation (protesters would of course retain their right freely to express their views elsewhere).

c. Human tissues and remains

For reasons of belief and doctrine some religious groups and individuals – some Christians in particular – attempt to restrict the use of human tissues and other remains, such as embryonic stem cells or historic human remains, for scientific research, impeding medical progress.

We want the primary ethical consideration in scientific matters to be benefit to human beings so that research, such as stem cell research, can yield the maximum return in terms of technologies and treatments for diseases.

Human remains found in archaeological excavations should be treated respectfully and unnecessary regard should not be afforded for any living persons, including distant descendants, to interfere with their retention for museum or scientific purposes.

Scientific research that involves the use of human tissues is continually developing and it would be impossible for us to develop policy that keeps up with these developments. However in broad terms we believe decisions as to whether to permit any such research should be based entirely on secular ethical considerations and not in any way on religious considerations.

d. Organ donation

We support medical advances for the improvement of human health and wellbeing. Humanists do not believe that respect for the dead constitutes any reason to object to allowing deceased humans' organs to be used to help others, except when the deceased has expressed a contrary wish.

We believe that better public education about organ donation and transplantation is essential, and that policy actions at both state and European levels are needed in order to increase the number of organ transplants and so save more lives. We are concerned that the low number of organs donated across Europe is contributing to unnecessary suffering, a large number of unnecessary deaths and to a market in organs and even trafficking in human beings for the purpose of removing organs.

England, Scotland and Northern Ireland operate 'opt-in' donor schemes where people have to register themselves. However, it is often the case that those who would be happy to donate their organs fail to register or have never discussed the matter with their friends and family, so medical staff and close relatives may not be aware of their consent to help others after their deaths. This contributes to the low number of organs available.

The British Medical Association has suggested a 'soft' system of 'presumed consent', whereby organ donation (for those over the age of 16) would be the default position, but individuals could opt-out while alive. Next of kin would be informed after death that the individual had not opted out and asked if they are aware of any unregistered objection: this would make their decision easier than at present. If not, organs could be transplanted. This is now the position in Wales, and we support this being rolled out across the UK, accompanied by public information and education campaigns. We support campaigns to encourage the public to discuss their wishes for the end of life, including organ donation, in advance.

e. Complementary and alternative medicine

We endorse scientists' and researchers' quest for knowledge and the improvement of human health and wellbeing that can follow it. Equally, we reject the endorsement of remedies for which no evidence is provided.

Much evidence has been produced to refute claims made for many 'complementary' and 'alternative' medicines and treatments. We oppose state funding of such treatments, including homeopathy (which is based on the administering of highly diluted substances to sick people). We want no further public money spent researching and administering such treatments when the evidence that they work no better than a placebo is overwhelming. We want pharmacists who sell such products to have a duty to make clear the lack of evidence supporting the efficacy of these products. We also want advertising about such products and claims made on packaging to have to be clear and scientifically accurate.

While there might be a place in healthcare for so-called 'ethical placebos', complementary and alternative medicines are unethical because their practitioners typically claim that they are efficacious for conditions in which more than a mere placebo is required.

We also support wider public health campaigns that are often opposed by proponents of complementary and alternative medicine but that are strongly supported by scientific evidence, for example: vaccinations being offered in all schools; fluoride being present in tap water; and folic acid being included in flour.

f. Animal welfare

We support the reduction of animal suffering resulting from human behaviour and see compassionate attitudes to animal suffering as a hallmark of a humane society. For this reason we support restrictive laws on experiments on animals, while recognising that some such experiments are justified in the cause of finding cures for diseases.

As we wish to reduce suffering, humanists are concerned about the treatment of food animals, both during their lives and when they are slaughtered. Many bodies, including the Farm Animal Welfare Committee, recommend that pre-stunning of animals prior to slaughter is the most ethical way to minimise suffering. Pre-stunning is mandated by law but there are exemptions for consumption by religious groups to provide kosher (or shechita) and halal meat. We believe these exemptions should end, as has happened in some other countries. We note that there is in fact widespread certification of meat as halal with pre-stunning.

If the exemptions enabling non stunned slaughter are not to be brought to an end, then we think at the very least rules should be introduced requiring all such meat to be labelled as such.

g. Genital mutilation of children

We support the bodily integrity of all people as an inalienable human right and want to promote respect for the autonomous choices of individuals wherever possible. We therefore do not support non-medically necessary procedures to remove parts of the genitals of boys and girls and want to see all laws allowing such procedures repealed and the procedures themselves outlawed when conducted without consent. Female genital mutilation (FGM) has been illegal since 1985 and further strengthened in 2003 to take into account girls being taken abroad for the practice. We want to see the law strongly enforced.

