

What do the parties say? Comparing key humanist issues to party positions in the 2016 Northern Ireland Assembly elections

NIH question	DUP	Sinn Féin	UUP	SDLP	Alliance Party	TUV	Green Party (NI)	UKIP
Manifesto link	https://humanism.org.uk/NIA2016DUP *	https://humanism.org.uk/NIA2016SF *	https://humanism.org.uk/NIA2016UUP *	https://humanism.org.uk/NIA2016SDLP *	https://humanism.org.uk/NIA2016Alliance *	https://humanism.org.uk/NIA2016TUV *	https://humanism.org.uk/NIA2016Green *	https://humanism.org.uk/NIA2016UKIP *
‘Would you support an end to religious discrimination in the employment of staff in all state-funded schools?’	Yes. ‘The DUP will seek to deliver equality for all school sectors... This includes... the abolition of the Catholic Teacher Training Certificate, [and] an end to the Article 71 exemption for teaching from Fair Employment’.	In February opposed an attempt to end religious discrimination in teacher employment– although supported such a move in principle in 2013. ¹	Yes. ‘The Ulster Unionist Party pledges that we will immediately legislate to end religious discrimination in teaching’, including by ‘Remov[ing] Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Equal Treatment Order 1998’.	In February opposed an attempt to end religious discrimination in teacher employment ² – although its manifesto makes clear it ultimately wants a fully integrated system.	Yes. When contacted by NIH, said ‘We do not support the “teacher exception” contained within Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998 and have voted to remove it’.	Yes. ‘TUV is committed to: Getting rid of the exemption for teaching from fair employment legislation. Everyone should have an equal chance to avail of employment opportunities.’	Yes. When contacted by NIH, said it ‘opposes religious discrimination of all kinds, which would include employment in public schools.’	Before the 2015 UK general election, UKIP said that employment discrimination ‘should be a matter for the schools and no one else’. ³
‘Do you think we should get rid of faith-based religious education in state schools, and instead treat all major religious and non-religious worldviews equally?’	The DUP has supported ‘shared education’ and ‘the Shared Education Bill’, whereby different single faith schools share the same campus, and ultimately wants there to be a ‘single education sector’, but does not support integrated schools as the way there. ⁴ No clear views on changing education about religious and non-religious worldviews.	Will ‘Continue to encourage & facilitate the growth of... Integrated and Shared Education.’ But also supports ‘parental preference – whether it be in the integrated, Catholic maintained, the controlled or Irish medium sectors.’ ⁵ No clear views on changing education about religious and non-religious worldviews.	‘We support a root and branch review of the ownership, financing and governance of the entire schools estate in Northern Ireland’. When contacted by NIH, said ‘Religious Education should remain taught in state schools, though school children should also be made aware that there are many different religions around the globe, as well as non-religious viewpoints.’	Supports integrated, not shared education, but ‘Within this framework it is still possible to have a diversity of religious elements built into the students’ weekly schedule.’ ⁶ And ‘believe that parents who wish to send their child to an integrated school should be facilitated by the department as should parents who wish to send their child to a denominational school.’ ⁷	‘Alliance believes that every child should have the choice and option of attending an integrated school.’ When contacted by NIH, said ‘We support undertaking a full and comprehensive review of the curriculum to ensure that a wide-range of academic and vocational options is available. This could be considered as part of that.’	No. Has described ‘shared and integrated education’ as ‘social engineering’. ⁸	Yes. When contacted by NIH, said ‘We would call for the creation in Northern Ireland of a single, publicly funded, non-selective, integrated secular education system, so we would oppose any attempt to enshrine one religion above others (or above agnosticism or atheism).’	Its 2015 UK general election Christian manifesto says ‘UKIP backs faith schools provided they are open to the whole community... [and] do not discriminate against any section of society’. ⁹ But have also said that employment discrimination ‘should be a matter for the schools and no one else’. ¹⁰

* All party policies come from the respective party manifestos unless a specific reference is given.

¹ BHA news item ‘Bid to end religious discrimination in teacher recruitment defeated in Northern Ireland Assembly’, February 2016: <https://humanism.org.uk/2016/02/24/bid-to-end-religious-discrimination-in-teacher-recruitment-defeated-in-northern-ireland-assembly/>

² *Ibid.*

³ Press release from UKIP education spokesperson Paul Nuttall, February 2015: <http://ukipnw.org.uk/on-faith-schools/>

⁴ *Belfast Telegraph* report, January 2015: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/dup-leader-peter-robinson-turns-his-back-on-the-policy-to-create-more-integrated-schools-30932883.html>

⁵ *News Letter* article on parties’ views on integrated education, March 2016: <http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/northern-ireland-news/integrated-education-where-do-ni-parties-stand-1-7291875#ixzz4727vPOps>

⁶ The manifesto says ‘The SDLP has long believed that if we are serious about a shared future then we cannot continue to educate children apart. Our current divided education system effectively passes on the old divisions and prejudices of the past to children in their most formative years. This cannot continue... [N]ow is the time to face the challenge in the primary and secondary sectors. The SDLP will actively build and promote the development of integrated education in Northern Ireland so that it becomes the educational format of choice... Our plans to develop integrated education will still operate in a context where parental choice remains paramount. In addition we are not confined to the current model of integration – there is scope to develop integrated education which builds upon the faith element of schools. For example there is no reason why a Catholic school cannot become an integrated school. The SDLP’s view is that the current DUP/Sinn Féin “Shared” education campuses initiative does not go far enough. Their model, which brings Catholic and Protestant schools closer together to share some facilities, actually maintains and institutionalises segregation. The SDLP model for integration means all children wearing the same uniform being taught by the same teachers in the same classroom. Within this framework it is still possible to have a diversity of religious elements built into the students’ weekly schedule.’

⁷ *News Letter* article on parties’ views on integrated education, March 2016: <http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/northern-ireland-news/integrated-education-where-do-ni-parties-stand-1-7291875#ixzz4727vPOps>

⁸ TUV statement on the Stormont House Agreement, December 2014: <http://tuv.org.uk/tuv-commentary-on-the-stormont-house-agreement/>

⁹ UKIP Christian Manifesto, April 2015: http://www.election2015.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/UKIPChristian_Manifesto-1.pdf

¹⁰ Paul Nuttall Q&A in *The Guardian*, March 2015: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/mar/17/ukip-education-policies-schools-paul-nuttall>

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‘Would you support making high-quality, comprehensive relationships and sexuality education part of the statutory curriculum in Northern Irish schools?’	No. Has voted against any attempts to strengthen sex and relationships education in Westminster. ¹¹	Yes. Have called in the Republic of Ireland for ‘comprehensive, evidence based sex education’ to be introduced in schools. ¹²	Yes. When contacted by NIH, said ‘We support age-appropriate sexual and relationship education to be introduced into the curriculum in Northern Ireland.’	Yes. Have called for comprehensive, age-appropriate SRE to be introduced, including in primary schools. ¹³	Yes. When contacted by NIH, said ‘We would introduce age-appropriate sex and relationship education (SRE) in schools.’	No stated policy.	Yes. ‘The Green Party will: Ensure comprehensive relationship and sexuality education for all pupils’.	No. Its 2015 UK general election Christian manifesto says ‘We support age-appropriate sex and relationship education at secondary level, but not for primary school children.’ ¹⁴ Does not support making PSHE and SRE statutory, and wants to scrap all SRE for primary school children. ¹⁵
‘Would you support legalising abortion in a similar way to how it is legal in Britain?’	No. Opposes any change in abortion law. ¹⁶	Party policy supports the legalisation of abortion in the case of fatal foetal abnormality. ¹⁷ All MLAs that voted in February also voted in favour of changing the law in cases of rape and incest. ¹⁸	When contacted by NIH, said that this is a matter of individual conscience. 73% of MLAs that voted in February voted against changing the law in the case of fatal foetal abnormality, and all voted against doing so in the cases of rape, and incest.	No. Opposes any change in abortion law. ¹⁹	When contacted by NIH, said that this is a matter of individual conscience. All MLAs that voted in February voted for changing the law in the case of fatal foetal abnormality but 71% voted against doing likewise in the cases of rape and incest.	Opposes any change in abortion law. ‘TUV does not believe that the unborn child should be denied his or her fundamental human rights... With TUV you know we will be a strong voice for the unborn before you vote.’	Yes. Will ‘Ensure... the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland’.	In February UKIP’s MLA voted against legalising abortion in the case of fatal foetal abnormality, and did not vote in the cases of rape and incest.
‘Would you support the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland?’	No. Have used petitions of concern to block previous attempts to change the law. ²⁰	Yes. Have proposed legislation to legalise same-sex marriage. ²¹ Will ‘Continue to support marriage equality and equality protections for lesbian, gay and bisexual citizens’.	When contacted by NIH, said that this is a matter of individual conscience. Almost all MLAs that voted in November voted against. ²²	Yes. Have proposed legislation to legalise same-sex marriage. ²³	Yes. ‘We would introduce legislation to extend civil marriage provisions to same sex couples, with protections for faith groups who don’t want to marry same sex couples.’	No. ‘TUV will oppose any redefinition of marriage and defend traditional family values as outlined in the founding principles of the party, believing that that is the bedrock for the success of society.’	Yes. Will ‘Bring forward legislation for equal marriage’.	No. Its 2015 UK general election Christian manifesto makes clear it opposes same-sex marriage. ²⁴

¹¹ See e.g. <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2010-07-21&number=39>; <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2011-05-04&number=266>; <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2015-07-15&number=49>; <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2015-07-15&number=49>

¹² Sinn Féin Republic of Ireland Education Spokesperson Jonathan O’Brien comments, April 2014: <http://www.sinnfein.ie/contents/29591>. See also Sinn Féin Northern Ireland Education Spokesperson Chris Hazzard comments, October 2015: <http://www.sinnfein.ie/contents/36846>

¹³ *Belfast Telegraph* report on SDLP Education Spokesperson Sean Rogers comments, February 2015: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/stormont-should-consider-sex-education-for-primary-pupils-31001350.html>

¹⁴ UKIP 2015 UK general election manifesto: <http://humanism.org.uk/GE2015UKIP>

¹⁵ Press release from UKIP education spokesperson Paul Nuttall, February 2015: http://www.ukip.org/labour_sex_education_plans_a_disgrace

¹⁶ *News Letter* report on votes on legalising abortion in cases of fatal foetal abnormality, rape, and incest, 11 February 2016: <http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/health/bid-to-change-abortion-law-fails-after-emotive-debate-1-7208996>

¹⁷ *Guardian* report on Sinn Féin policy amendment, 7 March 2015: <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/mar/07/sinn-fein-drops-opposition-to-abortion-at-derry-congress>

¹⁸ Report of February 2016 vote on abortion amendments in the Assembly, March 2016: <http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&eveDate=2016/03/01&docID=261095#2051553>

¹⁹ *News Letter* report on votes on legalising abortion in cases of fatal foetal abnormality, rape, and incest, 11 February 2016: <http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/health/bid-to-change-abortion-law-fails-after-emotive-debate-1-7208996>

²⁰ *BBC News* article on same-sex marriage vote of 2 November 2015: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-politics-34692546>

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ UKIP Christian Manifesto, April 2015: http://www.election2015.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/UKIPChristian_Manifesto-1.pdf

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‘Would you support the legalisation of humanist marriage in Northern Ireland, which has been hugely popular in Scotland since its legalisation there?’	No stated policy.	No stated policy, but supported legalisation of humanist marriages in the Republic of Ireland, which occurred in 2012-13. ²⁵	When contacted by NIH, said it does not currently have policy in this area.	No stated policy, but have supported calls to legalise humanist marriages in England and Wales. ²⁶	Yes. When contacted by NIH, said ‘We would support the extension of the authority to solemnise marriages to accredited humanist celebrants.’	No stated policy.	When contacted by NIH, said it does not currently have policy in this area.	No stated policy.
‘Would you oppose any moves in Westminster to weaken our human rights settlement, including pulling out of the European Convention on Human Rights – which is essential in protecting fundamental human rights and freedoms?’	No. ‘The DUP has long been critical of the Human Rights Act and the way in which it has been interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights... We support, as a minimum, the reform of the Human Rights Act, to remove the “right to family life” defence against deportation upon conviction for a serious criminal offence.’ ²⁷	Yes. Will ‘Work with all progressive forces to resist the repeal of the 1998 Human Rights Act’.	Yes. When contacted by NIH, said ‘We believe that the rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights are essential to a free society. We are open to the idea of a British Bill of Rights replacing the Human Rights Act, but only if the same rights and protections are given. We oppose any attempt to weaken Human Rights legislation in Northern Ireland.’	Yes. ‘We will... resist any attempts to diminish the protections currently afforded to us through the Human Rights Act 1998 and the European Convention of Human Rights.’	Yes. ‘Alliance will oppose any proposed repeal of the Human Rights Act.’	No stated policy.	Yes. When contacted by NIH, said it ‘would vigorously oppose any attempts to water down human rights or pull out of the European Convention on Human Rights.’	No. ‘UKIP will withdraw from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights. We will repeal the Human Rights Act and replace it with a new British Bill of Rights.’
‘Would you support the legalisation of assisted dying for people who are terminally ill or are permanently and incurably suffering, in order to protect their right to autonomy and self-determination?’	No. Has voted against proposals to legalise assisted dying in Westminster. ²⁸	No stated policy.	When contacted by NIH, said that this is a matter of individual conscience. Has voted against proposals to legalise assisted dying in Westminster. ²⁹	No. Has voted against proposals to legalise assisted dying in Westminster. ³⁰	When contacted by NIH, said that this is a matter of individual conscience.	No stated policy.	When contacted by NIH, said it will ‘call on the Northern Ireland Executive to commission research with a view to legislating on assisted dying for terminally ill, consenting adults.’ But did not say it supports legalisation for incurably suffering individuals.	No. Its 2015 UK general election Christian manifesto says ‘UKIP has no plans to change existing legislation on euthanasia or the “right to die.”’ ³¹

²⁵ Civil Registration (Amendment) Bill 2012: <http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/bills28/bills/2012/10512/document1.htm>

²⁶ SDLP signature on a Westminster early day motion, December 2014: <https://www.parliament.uk/edm/2014-15/590>

²⁷ Statement of DUP Parliamentary Chief Whip Jeffrey Donaldson, May 2015: <http://www.mydup.com/news/article/donaldson-human-rights-act-has-failed-victims>

²⁸ House of Commons Assisted Dying Bill vote results, September 2015: <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2015-09-11&number=69>

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ UKIP Christian Manifesto, April 2015: http://www.election2015.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/UKIPChristian_Manifesto-1.pdf

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About Northern Ireland Humanists

Northern Ireland Humanists is part of the British Humanist Association, working with the Humanist Association of Ireland. The BHA is the national charity working on behalf of non-religious people who seek to live ethical and fulfilling lives on the basis of reason and humanity. We promote Humanism, support and represent the non-religious, and promote a secular state and equal treatment in law and policy of everyone, regardless of religion or belief. Founded in 1896, we have around 40,000 members and supporters, and over 90 local and special interest affiliates.



Northern Ireland Humanists and the BHA are independent of all political parties and do not support, fund or advocate any particular political party.

All party policies come from the respective party manifestos unless a specific reference is given. Where policies are not stated we contacted the parties to seek further clarity and the table incorporates any replies we received. If you spot something where you think we've got it wrong, or have missed a piece of information, then please do contact us.

Some of the issues we discuss are not devolved to Northern Ireland and so the parties' policies are aimed at the UK Government in Westminster or the Irish Government in Dublin, and not the Northern Ireland Assembly.

You can find out more about our election work at www.humanism.org.uk/NIA2016

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