



Candidates for the role of Humanist Students President-Elect

Please see below for the details of all candidates standing for the role of Humanist Students President-Elect. Please use the [Voting Form](#) in order to cast your vote. You are only able to vote in this election if you are a student member of Humanists UK. Each member has one vote only.

Candidate 1: David Stanley

Biography: My name is David Stanley, I'll be starting an Engineering PhD at the University of Southampton this September. Since 2013 I've variously served as President, Secretary and now Committee Member of my university Humanist society, organising and holding weekly events. I've been an officer of Humanist Students at a national level and was elected as Treasurer prior to the organisation being restructured, following which I participated in a number of Humanist Students board meetings as part of a transition period. This past year I've also served as Head of Investigations for my university's student news publication, The Wessex Scene.

Supporting statement: In 2018, humanists should both celebrate significant victories and prepare for fresh challenges. We face stiff, lingering resistance from established religious groups on issues such as secularism and women's rights, as well as 'well-meaning' opposition from the wider culture on issues including children's rights and freedom of expression. But we've also gained wider recognition and a firmer place in society – more and more people are becoming aware of us and the important things we have to say.

We lead campaigns for a fairer, more just society that treats people with empathy: a society which respects and upholds people's many and varied rights, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, faith, or sexual orientation. We champion the fruits of a secular society, where people work together in common spirit towards increasing human flourishing and alleviating suffering, without needing to refer to sacred texts or divine commandments in describing their motivations or making their arguments. Instead, we turn to evidence, reason, and science.

As Humanist Students, we can build upon the work of the larger charity, bringing our message to new ears on campus and leading the way on issues that are especially important or relevant to students and academics. With deep knowledge, diverse skills, and connections for the future, we're also well placed to help in other areas of the humanist movement. From speaking in schools to engaging with local institutions and political bodies, investment in Humanist Students, and their skills and advocacy of humanism, can bring significant returns to the movement.

To help us on our way, Humanist Students should:



1. Facilitate events and mechanisms (such as creating an online forum) by which Humanist Students can find, meet, work with, and learn from one another. Students want to meet others who share their principles and beliefs, discussing humanist approaches to life and ethics. They also want to learn from others' experience of activism on campus, putting best practice to good use.
2. Continue to provide training and learning opportunities around humanism and relevant skills with significant effort and concessions made to get students to participate in them (such as covering travel expenses for students to attend Humanists UK's School Speakers Programme). Students are keen to embody the Humanist ideal of improving oneself and becoming the best 'them' that they can be, and they want to know more and speak more confidently about their Humanism.
3. Encourage and facilitate students in campaigning on issues highlighted by Humanists UK, providing appropriate materials and strategic direction (such as making available free campaign packs on #nowforNI). Students are eager and willing to bring about the change they want to see in the world and we should be helping them achieve their humanist goals.

I am well suited to working with Humanist Students, the Student and Youth Coordinator, and the other Presidents throughout this 3-year role, to bring the above aims to fruition. I hope that you will vote for me as the best person to provide strategic direction for Humanist Students.

Thank you for your consideration.



Candidate 2: Elena Strefford-Caine

Biography: I am a Film Music Student at Leeds College of Music, Optical Consultant at Boots Opticians. I am optimistic, confident and fun.

Supporting statement: I am from a family who support Humanists UK and the National Secular Society. My sister had a humanist ceremony for her wedding. I am pleased to have not been to a faith school, other than college, but I am completely open and accepting of other people's beliefs and religions. I am a strong advocate against segregation of faiths, I believe it's better to have a society where we're all working together regardless of what we believe. I am very interested in starting a non-religious chaplaincy within universities.



Candidate 3: Adedapo Adebajo

Biography: I am Adedapo, a 3rd year PhD student from Lagos Nigeria. I currently study at the University of Edinburgh doing a research in Business Management. I was born in a suburban area in Lagos to a family of four children. Prior to my doctoral studies, I worked in Nigeria for six years as a researcher and a strategic planner. My penchant for knowledge acquisition took me on multidisciplinary academic pursuits ranging from Sociology to Marketing and Philosophy. I love to read, play football and sing with a 'not-so-good' voice.

Supporting statement: As the first child in an African family, espousing exemplary leadership qualities was an imperative. I was raised to lead through service to my loved ones and I wish to bring the same virtue to bear if elected. Although I was born and raised a devout Christian, I became a humanist after reading the works of Paul Kurtz. I was convinced that the primacy of reason and ethics is fundamental to the advancement of humanity and the attainment of morality. I want to be the President-Elect of Humanist students so I can advance the cause of humanism in UK universities.



Candidate 4: James Dart

Biography: Having left my job as a school teacher 12 months ago, I returned to education this year to complete a Masters in European Politics at the University of Exeter. I am the current president of Exeter Humanist Students and founder of Exeter Humanists. In my professional life I work as an intervention support worker, supporting some of the most vulnerable and challenging young people in my community. Beyond my studies/job, I enjoy volunteering and have recently worked at the RAMM museum in Exeter. What's more, I am very active in local politics, having twice acted as an election agent, and more recently, having stood as a city councillor in May of this year. Finally, I'm quite competitive and enjoy keeping fit and challenging myself; hence my enjoyment at having played chess at county level, and competitive football for the last 20 years.

Supporting statement: Hello, Would you like to be more involved in humanism? Would you like to develop your public speaking skills? Do you enjoy writing about science, philosophy, ethics, humanism? As your President-Elect/President, I would like to limit the amount of top-down engagement and help to nurture a stronger grass-roots, bottom up approach, empowering and enabling students in order to foster greater ownership of our shared institution. This would involve finding out how Humanist Students can best serve you. I am also interested in diversifying our range of events, whilst creating greater opportunities for you, as students with a wide range of talents and interests, to take leading roles in the on-going development of Humanist Students.

As a passionate and lifelong humanist, I believe the position of President-Elect/President to be one of great importance. As the scope and reputation of humanism grows across the UK, the important role of university societies will continue to grow with it. Humanist societies offer students a valuable community on UK campuses and provide unique and stimulating events, but there is even more we can be doing.

As President and founder of Exeter Humanists I have come to find that the space offered by humanist societies to be one that is greatly valued by a large cross section of society. From 'spiritualists' and sceptics to agnostics and atheists; from students and the lay-person, to professionals and academics; from the young and energetic to the old and experienced; humanism brings together people from all different backgrounds and experiences - I LOVE this. The socially liberal values of that underpin humanism, that transcend gender, race and sexuality is something that should be celebrated. To that end, forging lasting relationships with those societies who share our values would be a key part of my presidency. Together, we are stronger.

Furthermore, as the President of Exeter Humanist Students and Exeter Humanists I hold a unique position of leading both local and university societies/groups simultaneously. This experience has strengthened my view that a strong partnership between local and student groups help to create a richer, deeper and more vibrant culture. Building those links between community and student humanist groups would be the second major aim of my Presidency.



Continually, throughout this year, I have organised and run a number of high profile events. As President-Elect/President I would communicate with societies listening to and offering insights into good practice, focusing on the importance of event type and audience, identity and USP, and the use of language in advertisement; all areas for which I have many hours of training.

As a humanist trained school speaker, I have helped deliver training on how to run assemblies, lessons and workshops on the topic of humanism. This has not only broadened my understanding of humanism and its history but has also given me a greater insight into how students of all ages ask questions and think about different world views.

Equally, as a school teacher I have taught Religious Education in schools around the country, including Cardiff, Oxford and Devon. When planning these lessons, it was important that I acted as a co-learner and did not dominate the conversation. The students were empowered to ask questions in a safe environment and were encouraged to challenge different ideas courteously and with respect. These are the principles with which I would work with you as your President-Elect/President.

Continually, it is with this spirit that I sit on the Devon Faith and Belief Forum committee. This organisation brings representatives together from the different religious communities that exist across Devon and work on shared goals and projects. As the humanist representative for Devon it falls to me to make the case for the non-religious community; something I do with great pride. This role requires sensitivity, patience and the ability to compromise, skills that I would utilise as your President-Elect/President.

If you were to vote for me as your President-Elect/President, these are some of the skills and experiences that I would bring to the role. I would prioritise the greater involvement of students in the leading of events and new initiatives. I also believe that cross-society and inter-faith work is increasingly important for humanist societies. Whilst it is not always easy, having a voice at the table, building bridges and opening dialogue and trust is a great way to achieve shared goals.

Thank you.



Candidate 5: Ronald Barr

Biography: I am a 20 year old Transgender man who is specialising in English and Childhood Studies at the Open University. I love spending my spare time attending Dorset Humanist meetings, volunteering at LGBT+ support groups, and tutoring children. I have identified as a Humanist for most of my life and started to take an active role in my local Humanist community 2 years ago. I love taking part and giving back to my local Humanist community and would like to take this opportunity to step up and represent the Student Humanists.

Supporting statement: I would like to run for President Elect as I believe I have the skills, experience, and passion necessary to represent you, the students, on the Humanist Students Board.

I have plenty of experience serving on a board committee, having spent six years of secondary school and sixth form serving on the student council, spending later years chairing and note-taking at the meetings. I spent a lot of time speaking to and surveying students to find out their opinions and feedback to the board about what needed to be done. Following on from school I have taken up roles on committees for Dorset Humanist Schools Education Project, Space Youth Project peer mentor committee Supernovas, and the Dorset Community Fund panel.

I have an active role in my local Humanist community, being a member and diversity representative for Dorset Humanists. I regularly attend meetings and events for the group, volunteer at the group's stall at Bourne Free Pride each year, and am currently in the process of organising a Humanist Naming Ceremony for myself. I hope to within the next year gain accreditation from Humanists UK and AQA for becoming a Humanist school speaker and peer mentor respectively and bring the skills gained from these courses to the president role.

I consider myself to be a level-headed and impartial man and I try to see all sides of an argument before taking action. I feel that I would be able to listen your wants and needs and do my best to act accordingly and create a community that you feel proud to be a part of.



Candidate 6: Ahmed Abdelmaksoud

Biography: I was born in Egypt and came to the UK to study PPE. I, along with my exec members founded the Essex Humanist Students a year ago. Since then, with the help of Humanist Students, our events have featured renowned speakers, nuanced debate and discussion, and intelligent, open-minded individuals from across the ideological spectrum. We eventually won the New Society of the Year award at our university. This, along with a desire to exact larger scale change to the way discussions about meaning, value, politics, and science are had, motivated me to run for Humanist Students President.

Supporting statement: Coming to the UK gave me the freedom to construct an identity based less on the background or collective to which I belonged, and more on who I was as a unique individual; it was not what I had by accidental dint of birth, but the extent to which I took on the responsibility of developing my virtues and guarding against my vices, that determined my success. This difference made me realize how people could build their lives and societies upon widely disparate sets of values, how each such set would unfold according to its own internal logic, and -- most crucially-- that there would be significant qualitative differences between societies that were built on one set of values and ones built on another. What followed was an observation that many people had made before me, namely: that societies built on enlightenment values were more humane and brought more prosperity to their inhabitants, overall. And, while I did not think this uncontroversial, I did not expect the idea that enlightenment values were worthy of a defense to be so underrepresented on the political left. Worse still was the fact that, when manifest on the right, it was a sentiment unaccompanied by a sufficient level of humility -- or even an acknowledgment of the horrors brought about by unscrupulous chauvinism. This state was what prompted me, along with my fellow exec' members, to create the Essex Humanist Students: a society that would come to be centered around the reassertion of enlightenment values and the promotion of scientific literacy, philosophical inquiry, and informed political debate.

Today, a year later, I was inspired to run for the presidency of Humanist Students, partially to continue this revival of enlightenment values, but, foremost, to help develop Humanist Students as a support network for students who believe in using human reason and cooperation to help us all lead better lives. In light of this, I aim to focus my presidency on three points:

1. Creating a more expansive Humanist Students Network: to begin with, by providing Humanist Students societies with greater opportunity to network with influential speakers, ranging from academics to political figures as well as to meet up and learn from each other. Specifically, we will be holding at least one national event annually, with workshops as well as speaker events on a litany of topics relevant to humanism. Additionally, societies in universities proximate to one another will receive support in planning local socials; this will facilitate greater cohesion in the network by helping newer societies, allow societies to plan



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bigger events with bigger budgets for the benefit of more students, and add connecting to more people in your local area to the benefits of being a member of Humanist Students Societies.

2. Encouraging a more open celebration of science and scientific literacy by helping societies host more science speakers. With the rise of political polarization and dogma, it is necessary to be armed with science; understanding human nature and the evolutionary roots of tribalism, for example, goes a long way in mitigating the effects of simplistic thinking; this should, increasingly be something Humanist Students work on providing Humanist Students Societies with the opportunity to do.
3. Developing a more serious dialogue about questions of meaning, values, and ethics, in the absence of religion. This, in my view, is the most crucial to the furthering of humanism because, although many people manage fine without religion, others do not do as well, especially if they have had to transition from it. That is often because of the all too human and psychological yearnings for meaning, value, and structure that atheism or rationalism alone cannot satisfy. Instead, humanism must expand to include the development of a conversation about these needs and about the kinds of structures that can help us salvage whatever baby might be in the bath waters of religion.

The fulfillment of these three points will aid Humanist Students societies in their provision of campuses with an alternative to dogmatic discourse, religious or political, which will, in turn, help pave the way for a future in which humans take on the responsibilities of thinking for themselves and figuring out how to treat each other in the one life we know we have.
