

# What do the British parties say? Key humanist issues at the 2019 UK general elections

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

Humanists UK question	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats	Brexit Party	Green Party of England and Wales	Scottish National Party	Plaid Cymru
Manifesto link:	<a href="https://humanists.uk/GE2019con">https://humanists.uk/GE2019con</a>	<a href="https://humanists.uk/GE2019lab">https://humanists.uk/GE2019lab</a>	<a href="https://humanists.uk/GE2019libdem">https://humanists.uk/GE2019libdem</a>	<a href="https://humanists.uk/GE2019brexit">https://humanists.uk/GE2019brexit</a>	<a href="https://humanists.uk/GE2019green">https://humanists.uk/GE2019green</a>	<a href="https://humanists.uk/GE2019snp">https://humanists.uk/GE2019snp</a>	<a href="https://humanists.uk/GE2019plaid">https://humanists.uk/GE2019plaid</a>
Will your party give legal recognition to humanist marriages in England and Wales?	No plans to extend legal recognition. The Government recently commissioned the Law Commission to undertake a two-year review of marriage law – but forbid it from making a decision on whether or not to give humanist marriages legal recognition.	Yes. In 2015 the former leader Ed Miliband pledged to give legal recognition to humanist marriages if Labour formed the next Government. <sup>1</sup> Support has been reaffirmed by the Labour front bench since. <sup>2</sup>	Yes. 'Introduce legal recognition of humanist marriages.'	No stated policy.	Yes. The Green Party told us in 2017, 'Clearly the law should allow those who wish to have a humanist marriage ceremony the same rights as couples who want a religious ceremony with the celebrant of their choice. The Green Party is committed to ending the current discrimination as soon as possible.'	No. This matter is devolved so SNP MPs won't vote on it, but humanist marriage is already legal in Scotland. Since coming to power, the SNP has strengthened the legal provisions around humanist marriages.	No stated policy.
Will your party support school assemblies in England being equally inclusive of all pupils, regardless of religion or belief, rather than being acts of collective worship?	No stated policy. However in 2015 were supportive of the requirement for collective worship in schools. <sup>3</sup>	No stated policy. However in 2015 were supportive of the requirement for collective worship in schools. <sup>4</sup>	Yes. Party policy would see the repeal of 'the existing legal requirement for all state-funded schools to hold acts of collective worship'. Schools would be required to ensure that any act of worship and any religious instruction is optional ... and that suitable alternative activities are provided. <sup>5</sup>	No stated policy.	Yes. Party policy states that 'we will abolish the requirement for a compulsory daily act of worship. Schools which choose to continue to hold acts of worship will provide an alternative activity for learners who choose not to take part. Pupils who do not participate in worship will not suffer any form of discrimination.' <sup>6</sup>	No. This matter is devolved so SNP MPs won't vote on it, but the SNP Government has not supported calls to end the requirement to have six acts of religious observance in schools per year.	No stated policy. When contacted by us in 2015, said it 'does not have a party position on this matter.'
Will your party support the inclusion of humanism in Religious Education	No stated policy. In 2015, opposed inclusion of humanism when reviewing GCSE and A level RE syllabuses, beyond a few mentions. <sup>7</sup> Has not made	Yes. Labour Education Spokesperson in the House of Lords, Lord Watson, stated the law is quite clear that humanism should be included on an	Yes. 'Ensures that religious education in all state-funded schools...Covers all the major religious and non-religious viewpoints.' <sup>8</sup>	No stated policy.	Yes. Party policy states that 'Education should encourage critical engagement with, and non-dogmatic exposure to, diverse, sometimes	No. This matter is devolved so SNP MPs won't vote on it, but the SNP Government has not taken steps to require humanism to be taught to the same extent	No stated policy.

<sup>1</sup> Humanists UK, 'Labour leader pledges to legalise humanist marriage', 28 April 2015 <https://humanism.org.uk/2015/04/28/labour-leader-pledges-to-legalise-humanist-marriage/>

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Labour frontbench spokesperson Baroness Thornton speaking from the dispatch box in 'Peers from all sides call for legal humanist marriages in England and Wales', 22 November 2018:

<https://humanism.org.uk/2018/11/22/peers-from-all-sides-call-for-legal-humanist-marriages-in-england-and-wales/> and 'Push for legal humanist marriages gets more support in Parliament', 18 January 2019:

<https://humanism.org.uk/2019/01/18/push-for-legal-humanist-marriages-gets-more-support-in-parliament/>

<sup>3</sup> Times Educational Supplement, 'TES Pre-election debate 2015 - Part 2', 16 March 2015 <http://www.edcomsteachers.com/blog/2015/tes-pre-election-debate-part-2/>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> F16: The Role of Faith in State-Funded Schools, Spring 2017, as quoted by Humanists UK in 'Liberal Democrats vote to end religious selection amongst state schools', 19 March 2017:

<https://humanism.org.uk/2017/03/19/liberal-democrats-vote-to-end-religious-selection-amongst-state-schools/>

<sup>6</sup> Green Party, 'Education Policy', last updated Spring 2017: <https://policy.greenparty.org.uk/ed.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Humanists UK, 'Response to DfE statement on the religious studies GCSE judicial review' November 26th, 2015

<https://humanism.org.uk/2015/11/26/response-to-dfe-statement-on-the-religious-studies-gcse-judicial-review/>

syllabuses in England? (On an equal footing to the major religions, in line with case law?)	any further changes in this direction since.	equal basis to the major religions—indeed, this was the conclusion of a 2015 judicial review of the matter. In debate on Commission on RE. <sup>9</sup>	However, when contacted by us, said that ‘while we would be sympathetic, our overall policy is that the details of the curriculum should not be set by politicians but by independent experts. So in a Liberal Democrat government, MPs wouldn’t be voting on this at all.’		competing, worldviews and beliefs – whether based on culture, religion or spirituality. <sup>10</sup>	as the principal religions in Religious and Moral Education (RME) in Scotland.	
Will your party support fully inclusive school admissions with no discrimination on the basis of religion?	No. The Conservative Government has allowed new fully selective voluntary aided faith schools to open.	No. Supportive of faith schools and religious selection per se, but has also told us that it supports retaining the 50% on religious selection in new free schools/academies. Labour Education Spokesperson in the House of Lords, Lord Watson, has opposed fully selective new faith schools. <sup>11</sup>	Yes. Supportive of faith schools but party policy calls for ‘a new approach to state funded faith schools which... ensures that selection in admissions on the basis of religion or belief to state funded schools is phased out over up to six years.’ <sup>12</sup>	No stated policy.	Yes. Party policy states ‘No publicly-funded school shall be run by a religious organisation. Schools may teach about religions, comparing examples which originated in each continent, but are prohibited from delivering religious instruction in any form or encouraging adherence to any particular religious belief.’ <sup>13</sup>	No. This matter is devolved so SNP MPs won’t vote on it. However, the SNP Government is supportive of faith schools and has not taken steps to limit religious selection by denominational schools in Scotland.	No stated policy.
Will your party ensure that high-quality, accurate, and LGBT inclusive Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) is introduced in all English Schools?	Partially. The Government has introduced compulsory RSE, in effect from September 2020. However, no content of the curriculum is compulsory, and schools are required to take into account the ‘religious background of all pupils’. Faith schools are allowed to ‘reflect their faith in their teaching’. Guidance says pupils ‘should receive teaching on LGBT content’, but this is not mandated. <sup>14</sup>	Yes. ‘Provide sufficient funding for schools to deliver mandatory LGBT+ inclusive relationships and sex education.’	Yes. ‘Introduce a “curriculum for life”, in all state-funded schools. This will include... age-appropriate Relationships and Sex Education (RSE). Teaching about sexual consent, LGBT+ relationships, and issues surrounding explicit images and content will be included in RSE.’	No stated policy.	Yes. ‘End the opt-out of LGBTIQA+ inclusive PHSE classes at school to ensure that every child learns about different types of couples and families that make up UK society.’ ‘Properly fund training to support the delivery of comprehensive, age-appropriate Personal Health and Sexual Education (PHSE) lessons in schools covering all aspects of sex and relationships, with a focus on consent.’	No. This matter is devolved so SNP MPs won’t vote on it. Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education (RSHP) is a core part of the new Curriculum for Excellence and the SNP Government has produced new guidance on it. However, denominational schools can go against this guidance.	Leader Adam Price has spoken in favour of LGBT inclusive RSE. <sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Humanists UK, *Liberal Democrats vote to end religious selection amongst state schools*, March 19, 2017 <https://humanism.org.uk/2017/03/19/liberal-democrats-vote-to-end-religious-selection-amongst-state-schools/>

<sup>8</sup> House of Lords, *Religious Education*, 17 December 2018

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2018-12-17/debates/A497B8C8-9BE9-4975-95E3-91F4748A98AC/ReligiousEducation?highlight=humanism#contribution-98A590D6-3A52-4D34-8C81-DC28DA91E6A3>

<sup>10</sup> Green Party, *Education Policy*, last updated Spring 2017 <https://policy.greenparty.org.uk/ed.html>

<sup>11</sup> Humanists UK, Over 180 high-profile campaigners join forces against new 100% religiously selective schools April 14, 2019

<https://humanism.org.uk/2019/04/14/over-180-high-profile-campaigners-join-forces-against-new-100-religiously-selective-schools/>

<sup>12</sup> Liberal Democrat party policy as passed at Spring Conference, March 2017, <http://www.libdems.org.uk/conference-spring-17-f16-faith-schools>

<sup>13</sup> Green Party Policy, <https://policy.greenparty.org.uk/ed.html>

<sup>14</sup> Department of Education, *Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education guidance*

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/805781/Relationships\\_Education\\_\\_Relationships\\_and\\_Sex\\_Education\\_\\_RSE\\_\\_and\\_Health\\_Education.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/805781/Relationships_Education__Relationships_and_Sex_Education__RSE__and_Health_Education.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Plaid Cymru on Twitter, March 2019. [https://twitter.com/Plaid\\_Cymru/status/1108024829612122114?s=20](https://twitter.com/Plaid_Cymru/status/1108024829612122114?s=20)

Will your party support legalising assisted dying for people who are of sound mind but are terminally ill or incurably suffering?	No plans to legalise. MPs are allowed a free vote on this matter. Leader Boris Johnson is opposed and voted against an assisted dying bill in 2015. <sup>16</sup>	No plans to legalise. MPs are allowed a free vote on this matter. Leader Jeremy Corbyn is opposed and voted against an assisted dying bill in 1997 and abstained in 2015. <sup>17</sup>	Yes. Party policy states that 'medical assistance to die should be available to patients in particular circumstances', however, 'any such legislative proposal should be determined by way of a free vote'. <sup>18</sup> Leader Jo Swinson is in favour.	No stated policy.	Yes. Party policy states that 'people have a right to an assisted death' within a detailed framework. <sup>19</sup>	This matter is devolved so SNP MPs won't vote on it. The SNP has not supported assisted dying legislation proposed in the Scottish Parliament. It does, however, allow its MSPs a free vote on the matter.	No stated policy.
Will your party remove the automatic right of the 26 bishops to sit in the House of Lords?	No. Has opposed proposals to this effect in recent years. <sup>20</sup> 'After Brexit we also need to look at the broader aspects of our constitution: the relationship between the Government, Parliament... (and) the role of the House of Lords.'	Yes. 'We will act immediately to end the hereditary principle in the House of Lords, and work to abolish the House of Lords in favour of Labour's preferred option of an elected Senate of the Nations and Regions'.	Yes. 'Reform the House of Lords with a proper democratic mandate.'	Yes. 'Abolish the House of Lords'.	Yes. 'Create a fully elected House of Lords. Members will be elected for a maximum of ten years with half of the house being elected every 5 years.'	Yes. 'SNP MPs will continue to oppose the undemocratic House of Lords and vote for its abolition.'	Yes. 'Plaid Cymru supports reform of the House of Lords so that it becomes a directly elected upper chamber representing the regions of England, and so long as they remain part of the UK state, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.'
Will your party support the introduction of an Ambassador-level post for global freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief?	Yes, effectively. The Government has introduced a Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, including the non-religious. 'We will seek to protect those persecuted for their faith and implement the Truro Review recommendations [into persecution of Christians]' – but the non-religious aren't mentioned.	Yes, but the wording of the policy is not entirely inclusive of the non-religious. 'Appoint a Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief to work across government to promote Freedom of Religious Belief in the UK and abroad.' <sup>21</sup>	Yes. 'Appoint an Ambassador-level Champion for Freedom of Belief.'	No stated policy.	No stated policy.	No stated policy.	No stated policy.
Will your party decriminalise abortion and introduce protected 'buffer zones' around abortion clinics?	No. Has not supported decriminalisation whilst in Government. In 2018 the Government rejected plans to introduce buffer zones. <sup>22</sup>	Yes. 'We will uphold women's reproductive rights and decriminalise abortions.' Leader Jeremy Corbyn has praised the Court of Appeal's decision to rule abortion clinic buffer zones legal, stating	Yes. 'Decriminalise abortion across the UK while retaining the existing 24-week limit and legislate for access to abortion facilities within Northern Ireland.' 'Enforce safe zones around abortion	No stated policy.	Yes. 'Extend the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights to give women in all EU countries access to legal, safe and affordable abortion services.' No stated policy on buffer zones, former leader	Unclear. This matter is devolved so SNP MPs won't usually vote on it, but they were granted a free vote on decriminalisation in Northern Ireland. The SNP Government in Scotland is looking into legislation on	No stated policy.

<sup>19</sup> Green Party, *Health Policy*, updated June 2019 <https://policy.greenparty.org.uk/he.html>

<sup>20</sup> They Work for You, *Boris Johnson voting record on assisted dying* [https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/10999/boris\\_johnson/uxbridge\\_and\\_south\\_ruislip/divisions?policy=6732](https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/10999/boris_johnson/uxbridge_and_south_ruislip/divisions?policy=6732)

<sup>21</sup> They Work for You, *Jeremy Corbyn voting record on assisted dying* [https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/10133/jeremy\\_corbyn/islington\\_north/divisions?policy=6732](https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/10133/jeremy_corbyn/islington_north/divisions?policy=6732)

<sup>22</sup> Liberal Democrats 2012 Federal Conference report motion on 'Medically Assisted Dying' [http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/libdems/pages/2012/attachments/original/1390841944/Conference\\_Report\\_Brighton\\_2012.pdf](http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/libdems/pages/2012/attachments/original/1390841944/Conference_Report_Brighton_2012.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> House of Lords, *Church of England: Disestablishment*. 28 November 2018 <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2018-11-28/debates/A8ECC7C8-0EB0-4F75-A00C-56139ED453A8/ChurchOfEnglandDisestablishment>

<sup>24</sup> Labour Party, *Race and Faith Manifesto*, November 2019 <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Race-and-Faith-Manifesto-2019.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Politics Home, *Sajid Javid rejects call for 'buffer zones' to shield women from abortion protests*, September 13, 2018

<https://www.politicshome.com/news/uk/social-affairs/news/98210/sajid-javid-rejects-call-buffer-zones-shield-women-abortion>

		that 'a woman's right to choose, free from intimidation or harassment, must be protected.' <sup>23</sup>	clinics, make intimidation or harassment of abortion service users and staff outside clinics, or on common transport routes to these services, illegal.'		Caroline Lucas has previously called on the Secretary of State to enforce buffer zones outside reproductive health clinics. <sup>24</sup>	buffer zones. <sup>25</sup>	
Will your party commit to retaining the Human Rights Act and remaining part of the European Court of Human Rights?	Unclear. 'We will update the Human Rights Act and administrative law to ensure that there is a proper balance between the rights of individuals, our vital national security and effective government.'	Yes. 'We are guided by our firm commitment to the Human Rights Act and Convention on Human Rights.'	Yes. 'Defend the Human Rights Act, resist any attempt to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights and oppose any laws that unnecessarily erode civil liberties.'	No stated policy. Leader Nigel Farage has previously criticised the Human Rights Act. <sup>26</sup>	Yes. 'Retain the Human Rights Act and reaffirm the UK's commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights.'	Yes. 'The SNP re-affirms its commitment to the Council of Europe and the ECHR. SNP MPs will oppose any attempts by the UK government to scrap the Human Rights Act and withdraw the UK from the ECHR.'	Yes. 'Against the backdrop of a Tory Party who are intent on undermining the Human Rights Act, we will publish a human rights charter for Wales to protect the most vulnerable members of our communities.'

## About Humanists UK

Humanists UK is the national charity working on behalf of non-religious people. Powered by over 85,000 members and supporters, we advance free thinking and promote humanism to create a tolerant society where rational thinking and kindness prevail. We provide ceremonies, pastoral care, education, and support services benefitting over a million people every year and our campaigns advance humanist thinking on ethical issues, human rights, and equal treatment for all.

Humanists UK is independent of all political parties and does 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 devolved to Scotland and/or Wales and so the Scottish National Party's and/or Plaid Cymru's policies are aimed at the devolved governments and not at the UK Government in Westminster. Where this is the case we have stated it. The SNP has stated that its MPs will only vote in the UK Parliament on matters primarily concerning England, Wales or Northern Ireland when those matters have financial implications for Scotland. But it has given no indication it will vote on other matters primarily concerning England, Wales, or Northern Ireland and in the past has not done so. This includes some of the issues discussed in this table.

You can find out more about our election work, including how to write to your prospective parliamentary candidates (PPCs) about these issues, at [humanists.uk/ge2019](https://humanists.uk/ge2019).

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<sup>23</sup> Jeremy Corbyn on Twitter, August 21, 2019: <https://twitter.com/jeremycorbyn/status/1164135737450778624>

<sup>24</sup> Caroline Lucas, *Caroline responds to anti-abortion campaigners press release*, April 29, 2015: <https://www.carolinelucas.com/latest/caroline-responds-to-anti-abortion-campaigners>

<sup>25</sup> The Scotsman, SNP Government looks at protecting patients at abortion clinics, July 25, 2018 <https://www.scotsman.com/news-2-15012/snp-government-looks-at-protecting-patients-at-abortion-clinics-1-4773834>

<sup>26</sup> Nigel Farage on Twitter, March 2013: [https://twitter.com/nigel\\_farage/status/316907842605039616?lang=en](https://twitter.com/nigel_farage/status/316907842605039616?lang=en)