



# IMPACT REPORT 2020

Covering July 2019 - June 2020

# INTRODUCTION

**FROM ANDREW COPSON**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE, HUMANISTS UK**

I'm sure a lot of us are sick of hearing the phrase 'unprecedented times'. And as I look back on quite an extraordinary 12 months in this annual *Impact Report* for Humanists UK members, I don't want to dwell too much on the many disruptions caused by the virus. To do so would risk detracting from the many achievements we have to report on since last summer.

But it is right that I use this introduction to say a few words of thanks. This movement owes a great deal to a great many people. The generosity and continued support of members has helped Humanists UK to manage a period of intense financial strain and I was deeply heartened that so many people joined and donated in response to my appeal at the outset of the pandemic.

At the same time, we saw humanist funeral celebrants and pastoral carers leap into action, supporting the wider community to manage their grief and anxiety at a time of difficulty. And surveys found that an astounding one third of our members volunteered in some capacity at the height of the crisis. Though separated by distance, this community has truly held together. Day in day, day out, I have been inspired by what I've seen.

This report offers a slimmed-down account of the work we've done since the last AGM. Despite everything, we've managed to have many successes, particularly across our campaign and public affairs work, which we seek to celebrate as best we can.

As this report receives its final edit, we are all also moved by the welcome and growing calls for racial justice in society that, as humanists, we support. We will be looking for ways to continue our own contribution to this in the coming year.



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## THINK FOR YOURSELF, ACT FOR EVERYONE

### WHO WE ARE

We started out in 1896, and since then we've always been a movement at the forefront of social change.

Today, Humanists UK is backed by over 90,000 members and supporters and over 70 local interest humanist groups who infuse our work with energy, drive, and relentless optimism at every level. Their commitment and generosity allow us to promote free thinking and freedom of choice for everyone.

Our policies are formed with the support of more than 180 of the world's most prominent thinkers and experts, including scientists, philosophers, writers, academics, and public figures. We work to advance these policies with the help of more than 100 parliamentarians who are members of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group (APPHG).

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### WHAT DO WE WANT?

- A world where everyone lives cooperatively on the basis of shared human values, respect for human rights, and concern for future generations
- To help non-religious people be confident in living ethical and fulfilling lives on the basis of reason and humanity

### WHAT DO WE DO?

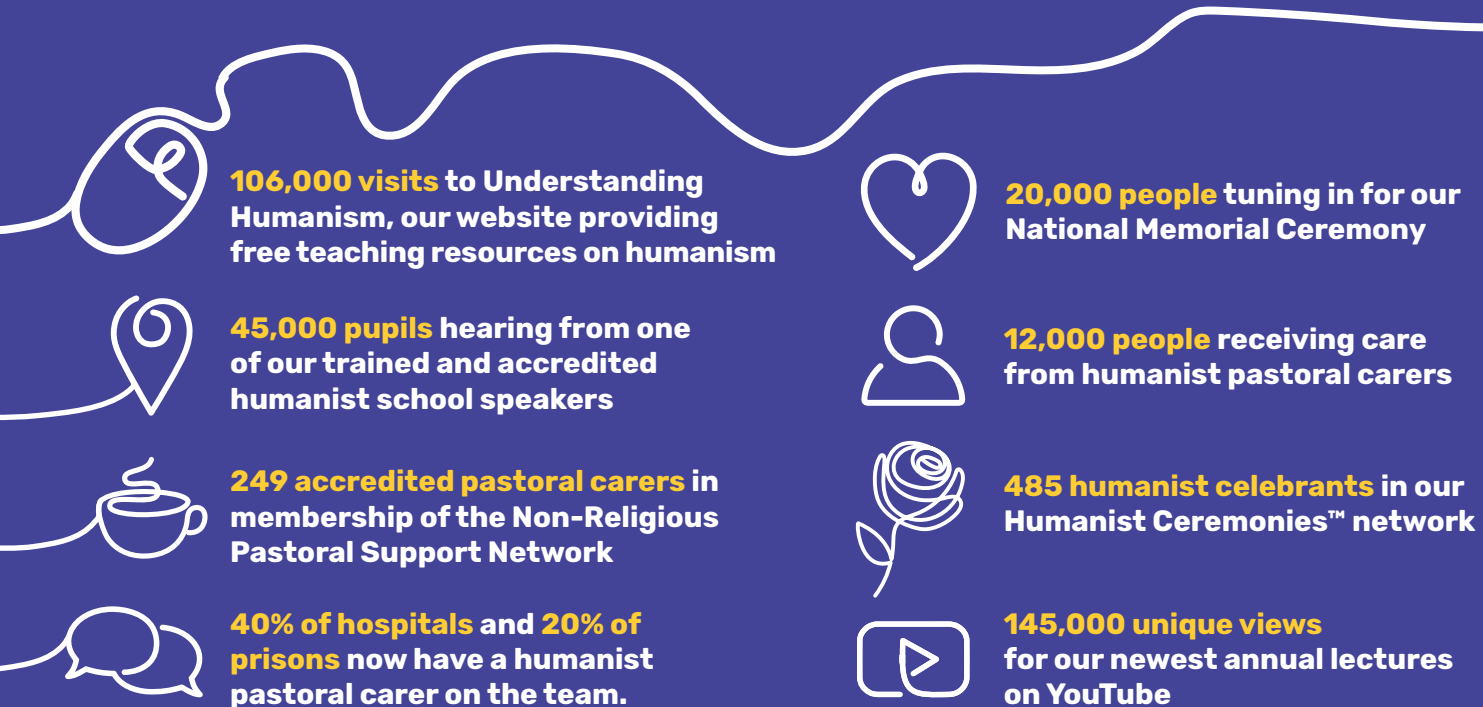
- We promote humanism, work on behalf of the non-religious, and support those who wish to live humanist lives, including through the provision of humanist ceremonies and support services
- We campaign for a secular state, challenge religious privilege, and promote equal treatment in law and policy of everyone regardless of religion or belief
- We offer a humanist perspective in public debate, drawing on contemporary humanist thought and the worldwide humanist tradition



# YEAR IN NUMBERS

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*This report is full of information about what we've been up to, but for an easy reference, here's a quick snapshot of our impact since last year.*




# PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING

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A busy year saw humanist school speakers talk to over 45,000 pupils before the closure of schools in March. With the shift to home education, we re-packaged many of our Understanding Humanism resources at the start of lockdown to better work for parents providing home education. We were delighted that BBC Bitesize chose to start its first ever 'national' Religious Education lesson on BBC iPlayer with an introduction to humanism film we helped write, featuring Cerys (pictured right), a young Humanists UK member from Wales.

We also increased output discussing humanism to our YouTube and SoundCloud channels, including new interviews and videos from our patrons, which we released as part of a new initiative called Humanism At Home. Our new content on YouTube received over 120,000 views between March and July.

Last year we also began an exciting new Humanist Heritage Project to compile the full, often overlooked, history of humanism in these isles. From humanist social reformers and authors to the unsung stories of the men and women who shaped the early humanist movement, the project looks to right a historical wrong by putting a rich history into full view in time for our 125th anniversary celebrations next year.



**We aim to arrive at a situation where humanism is understood as an ethical and fulfilling non-religious approach to life involving a naturalistic view of the universe**





# EVENTS AND LECTURES

## GROWING ANNUAL LECTURE SERIES

Our public lecture series continued to go from strength to strength, with the biggest event of the year being Chris Packham's stirring Darwin Day Lecture on 'Evolution or extinction?', chaired by Professor Alice Roberts. Taking a conservationist theme and looking at the negative impact humanity is having on biodiversity, and its consequences for the future of our species and our planet, Chris delivered a timely lecture to 2,000 on the need to act to save our planet. Alice presented Chris with our annual Darwin Day Lecture Medal.

In March, for International Women's Day, Bible historian and humanist Professor Francesca Stravakopoulou

gave a fascinating Rosalind Franklin Lecture on the Bible's sexist politics and how this can still be seen in contemporary sexism. She was presented with the Rosalind Franklin Lecture Medal. And in the weeks before the General Election, ITV News Political Editor Robert Peston gave a thought-provoking Holyoake Lecture in Manchester on our polarised political climate and the place for humanism in politics.

Our 2019 annual Convention in Leicester was also a huge success, with 500 people turning up to hear from an all-star cast of thinkers and entertainers over a busy weekend in June.



Annual lecturers: Chris Packham, Robert Peston, and Francesca Stravakopoulou

## HUMANISTS EVERYWHERE: NATIONWIDE AND ONLINE

The pandemic naturally hit our events programme hard. Brilliant planned events like our 2020 Annual Convention in London were cancelled immediately, while others, like our fast-selling Voltaire Lecture with Dr Adam Kay were indefinitely postponed.

In this vacuum of physical events, online events have taken on an even greater importance. Humanists UK sections, partner groups, and branches have organised fascinating talks across the country using digital platforms such as Zoom – unbound by geography or the usual financial restrictions. For example, our 18-35s section Young Humanists organised educational online gatherings on timely issues such as humanist weddings, and the Black Lives Matter movement. The latter was co-organised with Central London Humanists and the Association of Black Humanists.

In January and February, before the reality of physical distancing truly kicked in, we also enjoyed a range of other nationwide events. One clear highlight was our 'A Night of Humanism' annual comedy and philosophy event in Belfast, which once again drew in 200 people. They heard from comedians Tim McGarry and Cally Beaton in conjunction with humanist philosopher Dr Stephen Law.



# SERVING THE COMMUNITY

*Our network of humanists working on the ground now includes 485 humanist celebrants, 230 active school speakers, and 249 non-religious pastoral carers operating across England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the Channel Islands.*

## Our Community Services

- **Humanist Ceremonies™**, including non-religious weddings, namings, funerals, and memorials
- **Non-religious pastoral care** in settings like prisons, hospitals, hospices, and universities
- **Faith to Faithless**, providing community events and peer support for 'apostates'
- **Education initiatives**, such as our courses on humanism and our Understanding Humanism and Assemblies for All resources
- **Special interest sections**, including events and activities organised by LGBT Humanists, Young Humanists, and Humanist Students
- **Local groups**, including Humanists UK branches and partner groups

## SUPPORT WHERE IT'S NEEDED

Our Community Services team was stretched during the pandemic, with funeral celebrants and pastoral carers being designated as key workers by UK Government. As well as regulations limiting the number of mourners at funerals, other changes included increased use of online video-conferencing for things like family visits and ceremonies.

As a result of the virus, our pastoral carers were much less able to reach prisoners, many of whom were no longer allowed out of their cells. In such bleak isolation, we partnered with National Prison Radio to deliver a weekly radio series (still ongoing) featuring contributions from Alice Roberts, Joan Bakewell, Alf Dubs, Andrew Copson, and many others. Many of those radio broadcasts are available to listen to on our SoundCloud account at [soundcloud.com/humanistsuk](https://soundcloud.com/humanistsuk).



## NATIONAL MEMORIAL CEREMONY

To mark three months since the start of lockdown – a period in which over 60,000 excess deaths were recorded – we aired a 30-minute National Memorial Ceremony on 23 June aimed at supporting those affected by grief and loss due to the pandemic. The moving ceremony, which was viewed by over 20,000 people in the week of its release, was led by humanist celebrants, pastoral carers, and activists from every part of the UK, and was hosted by our President, Alice Roberts; our Vice President, Jim Al-Khalili; All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group co-chair Joan Bakewell; and humanist writer and actor Mark Gatiss.

The video had an extraordinarily positive reception online and was even aired in prisons. The ceremony was endorsed by the Minister for Communities, Stephen Greenhalgh, on behalf of the UK Government. The ceremony is available to watch on our YouTube channel, [youtube.com/humanistsuk](https://youtube.com/humanistsuk).



**We aim to arrive at a situation where people with humanist beliefs and values are supported in identifying themselves as humanists and in expressing those beliefs and values in their lives**





# PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND POLICY

## TOWARDS A FAIRER SOCIETY

**ABORTION LEGALISED IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

**HUMANIST MARRIAGE LEGAL CASE**

**PROGRESS TOWARDS INCLUSIVE ASSEMBLIES**

**SAME-SEX MARRIAGE IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

**ASSISTED DYING FIGHT ENTERS NEW PHASE**

**ENGLISH ORGAN DONATION LAW TAKES EFFECT**

**INCLUSIVE RE MADE COMPULSORY IN WALES**

**BOLD CAMPAIGN FOR SECULAR PARLIAMENT**

**ACTION ON UNREGISTERED SCHOOLS**

**NEW COALITION TO TACKLE FGM**

**CAMPAIGN AGAINST BLASPHEMY LAWS IN NI**

**CHANNEL ISLANDS ASSISTED DYING REVIEWS**

**HUMANIST MARRIAGE IN GUERNSEY**



We aim to arrive at a situation where public debate and policy are shaped by humanist perspectives

## ABORTION AND SAME-SEX MARRIAGE AT LAST IN NORTHERN IRELAND

In 2019, we called on members to write to MPs and worked with humanists in Parliament to successfully pass amendments to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill, which guaranteed, on human rights grounds, that same-sex marriage and abortion would become legal in Northern Ireland if no devolved government was re-established by 21 October of that year.

We helped to pave the way for this with legal cases and work at the UN Human Rights Council which established consensus around a human rights breach concerning abortion. As a result, abortion became legal in Northern Ireland on 31 March 2020 by repeal of Sections 58 and 59 of the Offences of Against the Person Act 1861, and same-sex marriage (along with opposite-sex civil partnerships) became legal on 13 January 2020.

We celebrated the news by putting up Humanist Ceremonies™ billboards across Northern Ireland depicting happy same-sex humanist weddings, declaring 'Love wins for everyone.'



## ACTION ON GENITAL MUTILATION

In February, we were proud to announce a new manifesto for the eradication of female genital mutilation (FGM) as part of the launch of ACTION:FGM, a new coalition we helped to found alongside think tanks, academics, medical professionals, and FGM survivors.

The manifesto points out that since legislation came into effect in 1985, there has only been one successful prosecution for the crime in the UK, and little to address awareness of FGM.

We have long campaigned for better education on FGM in schools, and have supported Humanists International in frequently speaking out against FGM at the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

## NEW ORGAN DONATION LAW

After years of our campaigning for reform, the organ donor register in England moved to a soft 'opt-out' system in May, following on from similar changes in Wales in 2015. The new law makes a rational, humane, and evidence-led change that is expected to lead to a meaningful increase in life-saving donor organs. We were part of the publicity drive for the change with NHS England, which saw some disruptions as a result of the pandemic hitting in March. Our contribution to the campaign includes a forthcoming series of humanist films starring our patron Jamie Theakston (pictured). The same change will take effect in Scotland in 2021.



## GLOBAL PERSECUTION OF HUMANISTS

We rushed to action in April when the President of the Nigerian Humanist Association, Mubarak Bala, was arrested for his humanist activism and transferred to the Islamic stronghold state of Kano, where blasphemy is punishable by death. As well as co-ordinating media coverage of his situation with Humanists International, we held high-level meetings with Foreign Office ministers and officials, prompting them to raise his case with Nigerian ministers. We are calling for Mubarak's unconditional release. In June, Humanists International published a report into global persecution of humanists, funded by the UK Foreign Office. This followed on from our criticism of the department's disproportionate focus last year on Christian persecution.



being brushed aside by MPs. In Jersey, Channel Islands Humanists welcomed the announcement that a Citizen's Jury (public-led inquiry) would convene to examine the issue.



We aim to arrive at a situation where the UK is a secular state guaranteeing human rights, with no privilege or discrimination on grounds of religion or belief

## BIG WIN: COLLECTIVE WORSHIP LEGAL CASE AND 'ASSEMBLIES FOR ALL'

In November, we successfully backed humanist parents Lee and Lizanne Harris to take a landmark legal case against their children's school of no religious character, arguing that the school's insistence on strictly Christian 'collective worship' each day violated their children's human rights by not providing a meaningful, inclusive alternative. We were delighted in November when the school (which has no religious character but is under the control of an Anglican diocese) conceded rather than face a judge. We capitalised on our victory by publishing a toolkit so parents can replicate the success of our action in their local schools. We also launched a new website, 'Assemblies for All'. It brings together



all the resources teachers need to put on school assemblies suitable for all children, regardless of religion or belief. You can download the toolkit at [humanists.uk/inclusiveassembliesnow](https://humanists.uk/inclusiveassembliesnow) or explore our vast inclusive assemblies resource library at [assembliesforall.org.uk](https://assembliesforall.org.uk).

## BLASPHEMY LAWS IN SCOTLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

In September, Northern Ireland Humanists staged a protest in Belfast to raise awareness of the blasphemy law, following on from our work last March to secure repeal commitments from MLAs. All the major parties in Northern Ireland except the DUP have now backed repeal. This work is ongoing.

In April, the Scottish Government announced that new legislation would repeal the blasphemy law in Scotland. Our partner Humanist Society Scotland has long campaigned on this and is now working with MSPs to refine the new Bill so that free speech on religion is adequately protected.



## 'PARLIAMENTARY PRAYERS' AND PUSH FOR A SECULAR UK PARLIAMENT

In February, we turned public attention to the issue of 'parliamentary prayers', addressing the fact that the UK Parliament begins its sessions with Anglican prayers, effectively creating a system where non-Anglican MPs are at a disadvantage for access to limited seating and (ultimately) speaking opportunities during Parliamentary business.

We launched a high-profile petition attracting 10,000 signatures to the Procedure Committees of Parliament, asking to replace parliamentary prayers with inclusive time for reflection, as is the case in Scotland and British Columbia (which introduced it following a similar campaign in 2019).

That same month, the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group (APPHG) convened to discuss its major new *Religion in Parliament* report (right), which discussed the issue alongside other areas of discrimination in our constitution and politics, such as the presence of unelected bishops in the Lords. At Prime Minister's Questions, Commons Speaker Lindsay Hoyle MP told APPHG co-chair Crispin Blunt MP that the Procedure Committee ought to look at the issue. Further work on this campaign was temporarily delayed by the considerable impact of coronavirus on parliamentary procedures.

## COUNTER-EXTREMISM REPORT INCLUDES APOSTASY ISSUES

In 2019, Humanists UK and activists from our Faith to Faithless programme submitted evidence to the UK Government's new Lead Counter-Extremism Commissioner, Sara Khan (who spoke at our 2017 Convention). It highlighted the experiences of 'apostates' from Islam and the abuse and threats they face from extremists in the community. Faith to Faithless' evidence was extensively cited in the final report on *Challenging Hateful Extremism*.

As UK Government policy is formed in this area, we're hopeful the experiences of apostates will be better understood, and accounted for.



## HUMANIST MARRIAGE LEGAL CASE

This June, we announced that six humanist couples are taking a legal case seeking a ruling that the lack of legally recognised humanist marriages in England and Wales is unlawful discrimination against humanists. This follows on from the successful court case on the same grounds which led to recognition in Northern Ireland in 2018.

We saw blanket media coverage for our media case in every UK national newspaper, as well as Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland media. Our celebrants assisted us in getting widespread local and specialist news interest, leading to 165 distinct media stories. We are hopeful that, following a two-day hearing in early July, we will receive a favourable ruling on the issue soon.

News of the case broke just a week after we released a story with widespread news coverage showing that in Scotland, where humanist weddings are legally recognised, there are now more humanist marriages than Christian marriages!

In April 2020, the Guernsey Assembly passed a new law to give legal recognition to humanist marriages. This will come into force next year and will mean humanist marriages are legally recognised across Jersey, Guernsey, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Ireland.

## MAJOR EDUCATION REFORMS ON THE CARDS IN WALES

We look set to make historic progress in Wales as the Welsh Government is proposing to reform RE into Religion, Values, and Ethics (RVE), with an explicit legal requirement to include humanism equally to religions. We also celebrated the decision to remove the 'right to withdraw' from new, compulsory, and pluralistic Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).

We also warned the Welsh Government that removing the right to withdraw from 'faith-based RE' in faith schools would leave them open to a human rights-based challenge, and shared a legal opinion from a Bristol University Law Professor with the media.

Responding to our campaign in May, the Welsh Government announced it would make it a legal requirement for faith schools to provide inclusive version of RVE whenever parents of children in faith schools request it. This move is now being lobbied against by the Catholic Church. We are encouraging Education Minister Kirsty Williams AM (right) to push ahead.





# GROWTH & ESTEEM

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## CHARITY AWARDS NOMINATIONS

In autumn, we were delighted to receive two nominations at the prestigious Third Sector Awards. Our President, Alice Roberts, was nominated for Charity Champion of the Year in recognition of her high-profile campaigning on our behalf.

The Non-Religious Pastoral Support Network also received a nomination for Breakthrough of the Year, reflecting the successful year we'd had, training new pastoral carers to enter hospitals and prisons around the UK and providing a vital new service.



Staff and trustees dressed up for 2019 Third Sector Awards

## ONE IN THREE VOLUNTEERING AT HEIGHT OF COVID CRISIS

As the Covid-19 pandemic took hold, we immediately surveyed our members and supporters to find out how they were all holding up and to see what support we could offer. We also asked about volunteering, as promoting volunteering as

part of the national effort had been a heavy focus in our communications. One of the big takeaways of our *Community Response* survey was how many people were donating their time! Roughly one in three respondents were involved in volunteering, including many who were volunteering informally in their local neighbourhoods. It goes to show what a caring and socially responsible membership we have.



**We aim to arrive at a situation where we are respected as an organisation for our expertise and professionalism and recognised as the national voice of humanism and a leading national voice for the non-religious and for secularism**



## STAR-STUDED PODCAST

In June, we were delighted to expand into a new area with the launch of the first ever Humanists UK podcast. Taking its name from the Bertrand Russell and EM Forster essays of that name, *What I Believe* sees our Chief Executive, Andrew Copson, interview famous humanists about the values, convictions, and opinions that give shape to their lives, including Tim Minchin, Janet Ellis, Alice Roberts, and Robin Ince. The podcast has had a great reception so far and is rated five stars on Apple Podcasts. Find out more at [humanists.uk/what-i-believe](https://humanists.uk/what-i-believe).

## COVID-19 ETHICS ADVISORY ROLE

As part of the UK Government's response to the pandemic, it assembled a Moral and Ethical Advisory Group providing responsive support to the UK Government on ethical and philosophical dimensions of its handling of its pandemic response, including on weighty questions such as the extent to which restrictions on civil liberties and freedoms are justified on grounds of public health. Our Chief Executive,

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Andrew Copson, was invited to be part of this expert panel alongside leading ethicists, senior medical professionals, legal experts, and religious leaders. Separately, our Director of Community Services Teddy Prout was part of the London Resilience Forum, which provided advice on the handling of deaths and NHS capacity issues in the capital.

## AWARD-WINNING WEDDING CELEBRANTS

We were delighted to have so many award-winning celebrants this year, including Laura Gimson (Best Celebrant, UK Wedding Awards), Emma Bailie (Best Celebrant, Northern Ireland Wedding Awards) and Jane Blackham (Best Celebrant, Wedding Industry Awards). Our commitment to quality goes back 125 years and Humanist Ceremonies™ celebrants continue to be the absolute best you'll find anywhere.



**We aim to arrive at a situation where we are an expanding, financially healthy and sustainable organisation with high standards of governance and management**

Cont. overleaf »

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES  
INCLUDING THE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE  
ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2019

	Funds 2019			Funds 2018
	£ restricted	£ unrestricted	£ total	£ total
INCOMING RESOURCES				
Incoming resources from general funds				
Legacies and donations	189,068	1,212,273	1,401,341	1,774,027
Other trading activities	-	14,890	14,890	12,228
Investments	-	4,310	4,310	17,251
Incoming resources from charitable activities	-	1,250,110	1,250,110	1,077,582
Total incoming resources	189,068	2,481,583	2,670,651	2,881,088
RESOURCES EXPENDED				
Costs of generating income	-	(195,132)	(195,132)	(182,049)
Costs of charitable activities	(203,688)	(2,239,384)	(2,443,072)	(1,992,156)
Total resources expended	(203,688)	(2,434,516)	(2,638,204)	(2,174,205)
NET INCOMING RESOURCES/(RESOURCES EXPENDED) BEFORE TRANSFERS AND INVESTMENTS	(14,620)	47,067	32,447	706,883

OUR FULL FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR IS AVAILABLE ON THE CHARITY COMMISSION WEBSITE AND AT [HUMANISTS.UK/MEMBERS](http://HUMANISTS.UK/MEMBERS)

	Funds 2019			Funds 2018
	£ restricted	£ unrestricted	£ total	£ total
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES <i>(continued)</i>				
Net gains/(losses) on investments	-	(29)	(29)	(20,218)
Net income/(expenditure) for the year	(14,620)	47,038	32,418	686,666
Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-
NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS	(14,620)	47,038	32,418	686,666
Balances brought forward at 1 January	124,224	1,515,238	1,639,462	952,796
BALANCES CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 DECEMBER	109,604	1,562,276	1,671,880	1,639,462

SENIOR STAFF

Chief Executive Andrew Copson  
Director of Public Affairs and Policy Richy Thompson  
Director of Community Services Teddy Prout  
Director of Operations Catriona McLellan  
Director of Communications Liam Whitton  
Director of IT Andrew West

BOARD OFFICERS

Chair Tamar Ghosh  
Vice Chair Ann O'Connell  
Treasurer John Adams

Auditors Knox Cropper  
Bank The Co-Operative



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YOURSELF,  
ACT FOR  
EVERYONE**

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Humanists UK, 39 Moreland Street, London EC1V 8BB  
0207 324 3060 • [info@humanists.uk](mailto:info@humanists.uk)