

What do the parties say? Comparing key humanist issues to party positions in the 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly elections

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Northern Ireland Humanists question	DUP	Sinn Féin	UUP	SDLP	Alliance Party	TUV	Green Party (NI)	People Before Profit
Manifesto link	https://humanists.uk/NIE2022DUP	https://humanists.uk/NIE2022SF	https://humanists.uk/NIE2022UUP	https://humanists.uk/NIE2022SDLP	https://humanists.uk/NIE2022Alliance	https://humanists.uk/NIE2022TUV	https://humanists.uk/NIE2022Green	https://humanists.uk/NIE2022PBP
‘Do you support repealing the blasphemy laws in Northern Ireland?’¹	No. Former leader Arlene Foster replied to a constituent confirming that the party does not support repealing these laws.	Yes. In replies to constituents Sinn Féin confirmed it ‘supported removing blasphemy from the constitution and we actively campaigned for its removal throughout the 2018 referendum in the south. As a 32 county organisation the position we took on the referendum in the south is reflective of our party’s position in the north. The laws are outdated and not representative of the Ireland we live in today.’	The UUP does not have official party policy on the blasphemy laws but most UUP MLAs have expressed individual support for repeal, and previous party leader Mike Nesbitt has told a constituent, ‘I agree with you so will ask the party leadership to consider supporting change.’	Yes. In replies to constituents, the SDLP confirmed it ‘agrees... that maintaining these laws here... provides tacit support to other nations which use similar laws to violently oppress minorities... The SDLP has previously supported attempts to amend our libel laws to remove offences related to blasphemy.’	Yes. ‘Repeal blasphemy laws - to strengthen freedom of, and from religion and so that these antiquated laws can never be used to curtail freedom of expression.’	No stated policy.	Yes. In replies to constituents the Green Party Northern Ireland confirmed it is ‘fully supportive of abolishing existing blasphemy laws.’	Yes. In a reply to a constituent Gerry Carroll MLA stated, ‘I can confirm that People Before Profit do indeed support the call for ending the blasphemy laws. They are a relic of the past and need to be rescinded.’
‘Do you support ending religious discrimination in the employment of staff in all state-funded schools?’	Yes. The DUP supported the Fair Employment (School Teachers) Act, passed by the Assembly in March 2022. DUP MLA Diane Dodds told the Assembly ‘It has been a long-held manifesto commitment ² of the DUP, and we are pleased to support it.’ ³	Yes. Sinn Féin supported the Fair Employment (School Teachers) Act, passed by the Assembly in March 2022. Previously, Sinn Féin MLA Pat Sheehan told the Assembly “all teachers should be able to enjoy the same legislative protection as other workers”. ⁴	Yes. The UUP supported the Fair Employment (School Teachers) Act, passed by the Assembly in March 2022. In the Final Stage debate, MLA John Stewart said: ‘On behalf of the UUP, I support the Bill at Final Stage... The Bill is... massively significant and symbolic... it reflects a change in society and where we are today.’ ⁵	Yes. SDLP supported the Fair Employment (School Teachers) Act, passed by the Assembly in March 2022. Previously, SDLP Education Spokesperson Daniel McCrossan MLA commented, ‘It is long past time that this exemption was removed and teachers were afforded access to the full scope of equality legislation that they deserve.’ ⁶	Yes. Alliance MLA Chris Lyttle, Chair of the Assembly’s Education Committee, brought forward the Fair Employment (School Teachers) Act, passed by the Assembly in March 2022. MLA Chris Witty commented: ‘...Fairness and equal opportunities are a key aim of Alliance, and delivering this crucial reform will improve the prospects of many.’ ⁷	Yes. TUV supported the Fair Employment (School Teachers) Act, passed by the Assembly in March 2022. When contacted by us in 2017 it said, ‘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. The Greens supported the Fair Employment (School Teachers) Act, passed by the Assembly in March 2022. When contacted by us in 2017, said it ‘opposes religious discrimination of all kinds, which would include employment in public schools.’	Yes. PBP supported the Fair Employment (School Teachers) Act, passed by the Assembly in March 2022. When contacted by us in 2017, said ‘PBP is for: an end to religious discrimination in schools’.
‘Do you support replacing faith-based religious education in state-funded schools with a curriculum that treats all major	Unclear. No clear views on changing education about religious and non-religious worldviews.	Unclear. No clear views on changing education about religious and non-religious worldviews.	Yes. When contacted by us in 2017, said ‘Religious Education should remain taught in state schools, though school children should also be made	No. When contacted by us in 2017, said ‘We recognise the value of faith based education and the initiative of various churches in this regard.’	Unclear. In correspondence with us, said ‘Faith-based RE should reflect all faiths, as should the curriculum more widely.	Unclear. No clear views on changing education about religious and non-religious worldviews. However, its manifesto states, ‘TUV believes that religious	Yes. When contacted by us in 2017, said ‘We would call for the creation in Northern Ireland of a single, publicly funded, non-selective, integrated	Yes. When contacted by us in 2017, said ‘PBP is for: Education about religious and non-religious beliefs’.

¹ All answers to this question have been gained through correspondence shared between Northern Ireland Humanist members and their MLAs, with the exception of the Alliance Party which appears in their manifesto.

² DUP Assembly Manifesto 2016 stated ‘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’ April 2016: <http://www.mydup.com/publications/view/dup-manifesto-2016>

³ Fair Employment (School Teachers) Bill: Second Stage, 2 March 2022. <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/ni/?id=2022-03-02.2.213>

⁴ Mark Bain, ‘Equality Bill for teachers supported by Assembly’ *Belfast Telegraph*, 18 May 2021. <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/equality-bill-for-teachers-supported-by-assembly-40438291.html>

⁵ Northern Ireland Assembly Official Report on Final Stage of the Fair Employment (school teachers) Bill, March 2022 [Official Reports \(niassembly.gov.uk\)](https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Official-Reports/)

⁶ ‘McCrossan backs NASUWT calls to remove exemption of teachers from fair employment legislation’ *SDLP*, <https://www.sdlp.ie/mccrossan-backs-nasuwt-calls-to-remove-exemption-of-teachers-from-fair-employment-legislation>

⁷ ‘Good day for fairness and equality, says Lyttle, as Bill removing religious discrimination against teachers passes Assembly’ *Alliance Party* <https://www.allianceparty.org/religious-discrimination-against-teachers-lyttle>

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religions and humanism equally?’			aware that there are many different religions around the globe, as well as non-religious viewpoints.’			belief, teaching, and practice is a fundamental human right and will oppose any moves to dilute this.’	secular education system, so we would oppose any attempt to enshrine one religion above others (or above agnosticism or atheism).’	
‘Do you support moves towards an inclusive education system?’ ⁸	Unclear. The party has stated their support for a single education system but it is not clear what they mean by this. Further, they tried to block the Integrated Education Bill by using the Assembly veto mechanism. ⁹ MLA Diane Dodds commented on the Bill: ‘This will mean that the Department of Education will have to prioritise one sector over all others. This is unfair and unreasonable. My local controlled school should not be deprived of a new building just because it is not in the integrated sector.’ ¹⁰	Yes. ‘Respond to the demand for both Irish Medium and Integrated Education’ The Party also supported the Integrated Education Bill, passed by the Assembly in March 2022, aimed at providing dedicated funding for the integrated school sector. ¹¹	Yes. ‘Now, 23 years after the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement it is finally time to properly unite our schools and establish a multi-denominational single education system that is efficient, fit for purpose and capable of preparing our young people for the modern world.’ Voted against the Integrated Education Bill, but this was because they would rather make other types of school inclusive than replace them with integrated schools.	Yes. The Party supported the Integrated Education Bill, passed by the Assembly in March 2022, aimed at providing dedicated funding for the integrated school sector. ¹²	Yes. ‘Continue to promote and improve Integrated Education provision, and build on our Integrated Education Bill’. Alliance MLA Kellie Armstrong, brought forward the Integrated Education Bill, passed by the Assembly in March 2022, aimed at providing dedicated funding for the integrated school sector. ¹³	No. ‘TUV demands equality not elitism in education. Thus, we opposed the Alliance Party’s Bill to elevate the integrated sector above all others. The controlled sector is open to all and evinces true integration at many levels, yet it is the poor relation in much of educational provision. Meanwhile Irish medium and integrated sectors are feted with enhanced protections and promotion. TUV will continue to expose and oppose this disparity.’	Yes. ‘Ensure that all children have access to integrated education... Support the provision of Irish-medium education within the integrated sector’.	Yes. ‘People Before Profit support: Proper investment in integrated, non-selective education to provide a universal, accessible, lifelong education system, free at the point of access for all.’
‘Do you support introducing 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. ¹⁴	No stated policy.	When contacted by us in 2017, said ‘that this is a matter of individual conscience.’ In the past it has voted against proposals to legalise assisted dying in Westminster. ¹⁵	No. Has voted against proposals to legalise assisted dying in Westminster. ¹⁶	In correspondence with us, the Alliance Party stated, ‘this is a conscience matter.’	No. ‘Just as we support the rights of the unborn, so at the end-of-life stage we oppose euthanasia. We believe in the sanctity of life.’	Yes. ‘The Green Party will: Support dignity in dying.’ ¹⁷	No stated policy.

⁸ When we use the term ‘inclusive education’ we mean an educational environment which is not segregated and intentionally strives to include the religion or belief, cultural and social identities of all, enabling pupils to learn with and from each other. Further, we mean education according to a curriculum that is objective, critical, and pluralistic, and is designed to cultivate open-mindedness alongside an appreciation of shared values and interdependence. In sum, it is an education that treats all learners with dignity and respect, and so is suitable for all.

⁹ ‘How MLAs voted on Stormont integrated education bill’ ITV News, 9 March 2022. <https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2022-03-09/how-mlas-voted-on-stormont-integrated-education-bill>

¹⁰ Brendan Hughes ‘Integrated education bill would create a ‘three-tier system’, *Belfast Live*, 17 January 2022. <https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/integrated-education-bill-would-create-22773806>

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ House of Commons Assisted Dying Bill vote results, September 2015: <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2015-09-11&number=69>

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Unclear if this refers to incurably suffering, as well as terminally ill, individuals.

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<p>‘Do you support introducing a ban on so-called ‘conversion therapy’ that aims to change or suppress a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity?’</p>	<p>Unclear. A party spokesperson stated, ‘We will not support, indeed we will veto, any legislation which does not contain robust protections for churches. We will work constructively with all parties to ensure that harmful practices are banned but religious freedom is not curtailed.’¹⁸</p>	<p>Yes. ‘Ban conversion therapy.’</p>	<p>Yes. ‘Ban the practice of conversion therapy in Northern Ireland.’</p>	<p>Yes. ‘We will introduce a comprehensive ban on all forms of conversion therapy.’</p>	<p>Yes. ‘Conversion Therapy Ban Bill - to prohibit so called “conversion therapy” which seeks to change, “cure” suppress a person’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity.’</p>	<p>No. The party’s only MLA, Jim Allister, voted against a motion in the Assembly to ban conversion therapy.</p>	<p>Yes. ‘Ban “conversion therapy” in Northern Ireland.’</p>	<p>Yes. The Party’s only MLA, Gerry Carroll, voted in favour of a motion to ban conversion therapy in the Assembly.</p>
<p>‘Would you oppose any moves in Westminster to weaken judicial review or the Human Rights Act?’</p>	<p>No. ‘Crack down on political litigation and prevent human rights legislation being exploited to rewrite the past.’ The DUP has previously stated, ‘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.’¹⁹</p>	<p>Yes. ‘Work with all progressive forces to resist the repeal of the 1998 Human Rights Act.’²⁰</p>	<p>Yes. When contacted by us in 2017, 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.’</p>	<p>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.’²¹</p>	<p>Yes. ‘We will oppose any attempt by the current UK Government to roll back or undermine human rights.’</p>	<p>No stated policy.</p>	<p>Yes. ‘Defend the Human Rights Act against attacks from Westminster’ and ‘Oppose withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights.’²²</p>	<p>Yes. When contacted by us in 2017, said ‘We are for retaining [the Human Rights Act].’</p>

About Northern Ireland Humanists

Northern Ireland Humanists is part of Humanists UK, working with the Humanist Association of Ireland. Humanists UK is the national charity working on behalf of non-religious people. Powered by 100,000 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.

Northern Ireland Humanists and Humanists UK 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.

For further comment or information, media should contact Northern Ireland Humanists Coordinator Boyd Sleator at boyd@humanists.uk or phone 07918 975795.

¹⁸ Brandon Hughes, ‘DUP will veto gay conversion therapy ban unless there are ‘robust protections for churches’ *Belfast Live*, 21 April 2021. <https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/dup-silent-arlene-foster-not-20437733>

¹⁹ Statement of DUP Parliamentary Chief Whip Jeffrey Donaldson, May 2015: <http://www.mydup.com/news/article/donaldson-human-rights-act-has-failed-victims>

²⁰ Sinn Fein Manifesto 2017 Assembly Election <https://humanism.org.uk/NIA2017SF>

²¹ SDLP Manifesto 2016 Assembly Election https://www.sdlp.ie/site/assets/files/43032/sdlp_manifesto_web-1.pdf

²² Northern Ireland Green Party Manifesto 2016 Assembly Election <https://humanism.org.uk/NIA2016Green>