



IMPACT REPORT 2024

Summer 2023 - Spring 2024



INTRODUCTION

FROM ANDREW COPSON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

We're delighted to present our *Impact Report* for July 2023 to June 2024. Your membership, donations, and volunteer time have played a central part in all that we have achieved during the past 12 months.

We launched our groundbreaking national helpline for people leaving high-control religious groups; we celebrated the introduction of humanist pastoral care within the UK Armed Forces; our campaign for assisted dying reached an audience of millions across the country; and we brought our fight for inclusive education and the closure of illegal faith schools to Westminster, igniting high-profile media debates while working tirelessly to garner political support.

With the announcement of a general election this July, your support has never been more crucial. Together, we are creating a more compassionate, tolerant, and rational society. Your generosity has been instrumental in our progress, and we're deeply grateful for your continued support in realising our shared vision for a more progressive future. Thank you!



We want a world where
rational thinking and **kindness** prevail

By advancing the humanist approach to life, we **inspire and support** non-religious people to be **happy, confident, and ethical**, and work with them **for a better society**.

We're the national charity working on behalf of non-religious people, and we've been at the forefront of progressive social change in this country for over 125 years. Today, we're powered by over 120,000 members and supporters. The ingenuity, enthusiasm, and generosity of every single person in our movement is absolutely vital to what we do. It's what allows our important work to grow, expand, and flourish – as this report details.

Our policies are formed with the support of more than 200 of the world's most prominent thinkers and experts, including scientists, philosophers, lawyers, writers, academics, and public figures. We work to advance our policies with the help of MPs and peers who are members of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group (APPHG).

CHAMPIONING IDEAS FOR THE ONE LIFE WE HAVE

We promote wider awareness and an enriched understanding of the humanist approach to life.

THINK FOR YOURSELF, ACT FOR EVERYONE

We provide resources and services to help people navigate difficult moments and important occasions in life, and to connect with like-minded people.

LASTING CHANGE FOR A FAIRER SOCIETY

We promote freedom of thought and choice for everyone, changing law and public opinion through our campaigns.

BRINGING NON-RELIGIOUS PEOPLE TOGETHER

We speak up on behalf of non-religious people and give them a voice in public debate. We champion and defend their rights and freedoms.

YEAR IN NUMBERS



A quick snapshot of our impact in the last 12 months



Over 1,000 people in Humanists UK, including: volunteers, staff, consultants



60,000 people took our 'How humanist are you?' online quiz



65,000 people tuned into our *What I Believe* podcast



16 employed humanist pastoral carers in the NHS, prison service, and universities



More than 11,000 humanist ceremonies conducted by our celebrants



40 million impressions across all social media platforms



57,000 people from 113 countries visited our Humanist Heritage website



600 teachers trained by our Understanding Humanism team

PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING

The past year was a triumph for promoting humanism online. Our animations, social media, Humanist Heritage project, and bestselling books are bringing humanist ideas to millions!

In 2023, we released two vibrant animations exploring the humanist approach to life: *Where Do We Come From?* with Alice Roberts and *Humanist History: From Radical Ideas to Common Sense* with Hannah Peel.

In August, we launched our *Humanist Bookshelf* social media campaign to celebrate humanist authors, and we reached over five million people in just two weeks.

You also may be aware that last year we received a £160,000 grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund for our Humanist Heritage project. The new two-year project *Humanist Heritage: Doers, Dreamers, Place Makers* is specially designed to bring humanist history to new audiences. And in April, we launched a new interactive virtual tour of Conway Hall for school pupils across the country - this has never been done before!

In April, we were also delighted to announce our upcoming book: *What I Believe*.



This inspiring collection of interviews with over 30 prominent humanists, including Stephen Fry, Sandi Toksvig, and Alice Roberts, is scheduled for release in November 2024. It builds on the success of our popular podcast of the same name, which has already reached over 300,000 listeners worldwide, with 65,000 of those tuning in within the last 12 months.



More people knowing what humanism is and more non-religious people with humanist beliefs and values recognising themselves as humanists

ANNUAL LECTURES AND MEDALS

In February, we celebrated Charles Darwin's birthday at our Darwin Day Lecture. Neanderthal expert **Rebecca Wragg Sykes** told our evolutionary story with special attention to what 'makes us human'. Rebecca emphasised our capacity for compassion, artistic expression, and migratory behaviours as fundamental to our humanity. Alice Roberts awarded Rebecca the Darwin Day Medal for her contributions to archaeology and her efforts in science communication, especially her role in highlighting the significant work of women in the sciences.

In March, coinciding with International Women's Day, **Claudia Hammond** delivered our Rosalind Franklin Lecture by exploring kindness as an innate human behaviour. Drawing on extensive research,

Claudia demonstrated how small acts of kindness significantly improve our wellbeing. She underscored the courage it takes to extend kindness to our loved ones, strangers, and also to oneself. Lecture chair Samira Ahmed awarded Claudia the Rosalind Franklin Medal for her work to foster a more tolerant society through a better understanding of kindness.

In November, historian **Caroline Dodds Pennock** led the Voltaire Lecture. She discussed the seldom-told impacts of indigenous American cultures on early modern Europe. She challenged conventional narratives about these interactions, which often predated the 'discovery' of the New World. The lecture, chaired by Adam Rutherford, culminated in Caroline receiving the Voltaire Lecture Medal for her outstanding historical research.

Over 6,000 people attended our events in the past year

Zion Lights delivered our Holyoake Lecture online in November 2023. She emphasised the responsibility of developed nations in aiding global transitions to cleaner energy, while urging her fellow environmentalists to reconsider nuclear energy, and adopt an evidence-based, human-centred,

technology-friendly approach to address the looming challenges facing humanity. Zion was awarded the Holyoake Lecture Medal for her contributions to the political discourse on environmentalism.

We also had our best-attended Blackham Lecture ever in December, featuring cognitive neuroscientist **Roi Cohen Kadosh**. He emphasised the critical need for a comprehensive understanding of how ADHD profoundly impacts individuals, and how it is so often (and sometimes cruelly) misunderstood. His research into non-traditional treatments, like transcranial random noise stimulation (tRNS), presented new possibilities beyond conventional medication, particularly significant during periods of medication shortage. Roi was awarded the Blackham Lecture Medal for his 'years of work to better understand the factors that can affect learning and cognition, and his efforts to develop safe and sustainable methods for improving learning across diverse populations.'



Watch our events online
on our YouTube channel:
[youtube.com/humanistsuk](https://www.youtube.com/humanistsuk)

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

Our network of humanists working on the ground now includes 550 humanist celebrants, 210 active school speakers, 140 representatives on council bodies which set RE syllabuses, 130 pastoral carers in hospitals and prisons, and 30 volunteers supporting 'apostates', right across England, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man, and the Channel Islands.

Our services

- **Humanist Ceremonies**, including non-religious funerals and memorials, weddings, and naming ceremonies
- **Humanist pastoral care**, in settings like prisons, hospitals, hospices, and universities
- **Faith to Faithless**, providing the first UK-based dedicated helpline, community events, and peer support for people who have left high-control religious groups
- **Asylum support** for humanists who would otherwise be deported to countries where they face death or persecution
- **Humanist communities**, including events and activities organised by LGBT Humanists, Defence Humanists, Young Humanists, and the London Humanist Choir
- **Local groups**, including Humanists UK local groups and partner groups



FAITH TO FAITHLESS HELPLINE



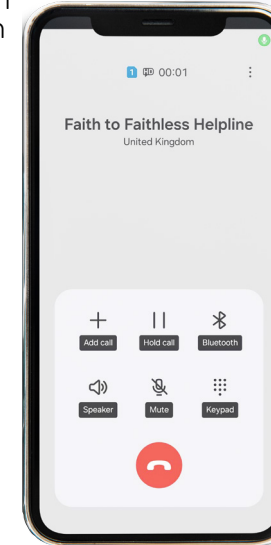
In February, we launched the first UK-based dedicated helpline specifically for people leaving high-control religious groups. Leaving such groups is incredibly challenging, with 'apostates' often subjected to violence, abuse, homelessness, and shunning.

Our helpline offers a confidential and empathetic space to support those navigating those complexities. Operational three days a week, it's staffed by well-trained volunteers familiar with the challenges encountered by former members of various religious groups, including ex-Muslims, ex-Jehovah's Witnesses, ex-Evangelicals, and ex-Mormons. They provide a listening ear, practical advice, and guide individuals to additional services, helping with everything from forming new social connections to accessing counselling and legal assistance. The helpline makes sure that people have the support they need during transformative periods in their lives, promoting the freedom to change and express one's beliefs safely.

HISTORIC WINS FOR HUMANIST CARE

- In August, NHS England mandated equal access to non-religious pastoral care in hospitals
- In November, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) announced that it will recruit non-religious pastoral carers for the first time, bringing our 20 year-campaign to a successful end
- In November, the Senedd (Welsh Parliament) appointed a humanist pastoral carer to a national legislature. Mari Vaughan-Owen is the first non-religious pastoral carer for Members of the Senedd and staff
- In January, HMP Highpoint appointed Tony Carter as a humanist pastoral carer, making him the third paid humanist pastoral carer working in a UK prison
- In February, Director of Humanist Care Clare Elcombe Webber was elected Chair of the Network for Pastoral, Spiritual, and Religious Care in Health – a major national pastoral care network

These landmark decisions underscore the fundamental right of everyone to access pastoral care that aligns with their beliefs, as well as a growing acceptance of non-religious pastoral care.



PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND POLICY



More people enjoying greater
freedom of thought, of expression,
and of choice over their own lives



ASSISTED DYING SUPPORT AT ALL TIME HIGH

In April, over 200 members and supporters rallied outside UK Parliament for assisted dying legislation for the terminally ill and incurably suffering. This coincided with a Westminster Hall debate, sparked by Esther Rantzen's 200,000-signature e-petition. The rally followed the Health and Social Care Committee's inquiry into assisted dying. While the inquiry didn't recommend a change, it refuted many of the myths used to argue against assisted dying and noted that palliative care has generally improved where assisted dying is legal, as seen in Oregon and Australia. It underscored the urgent need for clear laws and medical guidance, in contrast to the current and unclear legal situation.

We've witnessed an unprecedented surge in support for compassionate assisted dying legislation in the past 12 months, with backing from senior politicians from across the political spectrum and celebrities alike. In February Rishi Sunak promised he would change the law on assisted dying if MPs voted in favour. And, in March, Keir Starmer committed to hold a vote on assisted dying during the next parliament if he becomes Prime Minister.

Dame Esther Rantzen's decision to join Dignitas amid her battle with lung cancer, and Dame Diana Rigg's heartfelt plea for change just weeks before her death, have galvanised the campaign. Support from figures like Sue

Johnston, Dame Prue Leith, and Dame Joan Ruddock further amplified the message, drawing significant media attention. Following the release of the Commons report in February, we argued for compassionate legislation on BBC News, Sky News, LBC, GB News, and BBC Radio 4, reaching an audience of many millions.

This push for change aligns with similar efforts in Scotland, Jersey, the Isle of Man, and the Republic of Ireland. We are supporting reform on every front: with our members, collaboration with Humanist Society Scotland, parliamentary consultations, and by providing evidence-based advocacy.

Andrew Copson gave evidence to the Irish Oireachtas Committee on assisted dying in October. In March, the committee recommended legislation be introduced to allow for assisted dying. This is a significant step, as any law in the Republic of Ireland will apply to Irish citizens in Northern Ireland. The time has come for the UK to align with progressive international models and provide a compassionate, safely regulated framework for assisted dying.





**RESIST SEGREGATION
AND INDOCTRINATION**

FIGHTING DISCRIMINATION IN FAITH SCHOOLS

Two damning reports on faith schools were published this year, exposing the deeply entrenched harms of faith-based discrimination in education. A Sutton

Trust report revealed that

‘faith schools are consistently more socially selective than non-religious schools’, while an Education Policy Institute (EPI) report highlighted that ‘disadvantaged pupils are less likely to be admitted’ to such institutions. While this is not new information to us, the fact that these two organisations have published these findings in black and white further strengthens our campaign for inclusive admissions. Their reports provide undeniable evidence of the systemic inequalities perpetuated by faith schools, reinforcing the urgent need for reform.

The UK Government’s proposal in May to remove the 50% cap on faith-based admissions in England threatened to unravel years of progress towards a more inclusive education system. This radical step backwards would have allowed all new and existing state-funded faith schools to select pupils solely based on religion – a decision that would have significantly intensified segregation within our schools.

The general election means that this plan, which was propelled by the Catholic Church, has been abandoned. However, we were extremely concerned in May to learn that the Church had donated £17,710.60 to Gillian Keegan MP, who made the announcement while serving as Education Secretary. We fear this raises questions about a serious conflict of interest.

We were delighted, however, as plans to turn a community school in Southwark into a Church of England school were scrapped. Working alongside parents and teachers, we took part in an extensive consultation process. We revealed the facts about faith schools, particularly in areas such as admissions policies, employment practices, mandatory collective worship, and narrow religious education. This was humanism in action – collaborating with people of different beliefs to serve the entire community, so that no religion or belief was put above another. Looking ahead to the general election, where we expect to hear more pro-faith school rhetoric from the major parties, we will champion policies that prevent religious indoctrination, discrimination, and segregation.



FIGHTING FOR THE FORGOTTEN CHILDREN IN ILLEGAL SCHOOLS

Thousands of children in the UK are trapped in unregistered schools that operate beyond the reach of

official oversight. Disguised as ‘supplementary’ education centres, they undermine safeguards, jeopardising the wellbeing and educational future of vulnerable children. The Government’s abandonment of the Schools Bill, which aimed to tackle this issue, has exacerbated the crisis. Ofsted remains restricted, unable to take decisive action. We are spearheading reform.

This past year, we ignited debates in the House of Lords, and helped secure the Labour Party’s commitment to a home schools register – a vital step towards accountability in education. Furthermore, Ofsted’s recent indictment of religious education in independent faith schools highlights the urgent need to reassess how education is delivered. No child should be subjected to unsafe or substandard schooling. The UK Government should take immediate steps to empower regulatory bodies, champion inclusive education, and shut down illegal schools.

NORTHERN IRELAND LEADS THE WAY WITH SAFE ACCESS ZONES

Northern Ireland’s implementation of safe access zones around abortion clinics in September 2023 was a landmark victory for women’s rights and humanist campaigning. Although the UK Parliament voted for similar measures in England and Wales, full implementation remains stalled. We must demand safe access zones across the UK to shield women from harassment and intimidation when accessing essential healthcare.

Alarmingly, the UK Government’s recently proposed guidelines for safe access zones bend over backwards to cater to religious extremists. These guidelines would allow large and intrusive ‘silent prayer’ gatherings and give individuals leeway to approach women outside clinics – directly undermining the legislation’s purpose. This is unacceptable. Every woman should be able to access an abortion clinic without religious fundamentalists blocking the entrance, calling her ‘murderer’, or filming her. This is the reality of women having no protection afforded by the law. We need safe access zones right now.



SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE



The religious landscape of the United Kingdom is undergoing a transformation, adding weight to our calls for the disestablishment of the Church of England and a critical reassessment of its privileged role in society.

In August, findings from a survey conducted by *The Times* revealed that the majority of Church of England clergy recognise that Britain

is 'no longer' a Christian nation. This perspective is bolstered by recent British Social Attitudes surveys, which show that 53% of adults identify as non-religious, while only 12% describe themselves as Anglican. It's unsurprising, then, that 73% of the surveyed clergy believe the traditional privileges of the Church, such as bishops' automatic rights to seats in the Lords, are increasingly indefensible.

Beating the drum for a more rational and inclusive politics, we mobilised thousands of our supporters to urge MPs to support the removal of bishops from the Lords. We supported a Private Member's Bill that aimed to sever the formal ties between church and state. This call for change was echoed in the House of Commons, where we organised a backbench debate. Tommy Sheppard MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group, highlighted the influence bishops wield in our legislative process, especially on issues such as same-sex marriage and assisted dying.

At the beginning of last year, there was an overwhelming response to our patron Sandi Toksvig's petition, which collected 160,000 signatures advocating for the removal of bishops from the Lords due to their discriminatory stance on same-sex marriage. Meanwhile on the Isle of Man, the Bishop of Sodor may soon be stripped of automatic voting rights by a new bill in the House of Keys. If this passes, it will be a huge step forward for people on Man and set an example for Westminster.

As the UK becomes more diverse and non-religious, the call for the Church of England's disestablishment grows louder. The convergence of clergy opinions, public sentiment, legislative initiatives, and dedicated advocacy underscores a clear and pressing need: to re-examine and redefine the Church's entrenched role in a modern democracy committed to true equality and representation.



HUMANISTS UK LEADS GLOBAL FIGHT AGAINST BLASPHEMY LAWS

Blasphemy laws are a dangerous affront to freedom of expression and a tool of oppression. They put the feelings of conservative religious factions above human rights, silencing dissent and fueling violence. The world has witnessed their deadly consequences: protesters hanged in Iran, religious mobs attacking minorities in Pakistan, and 12 countries still upholding the death penalty for 'blasphemy' or 'apostasy'.

Denmark's recent re-introduction of a blasphemy law is a chilling reminder that progress can be reversed. We vehemently opposed the Danish ban on 'inappropriate treatment' of religious texts. Appeasing bullies only emboldens them; the answer to extremism is never the surrender of fundamental freedoms. That's why we partnered with the Danish Humanist Society to deliver a joint intervention at the UN Human Rights Council, condemning this retrograde move. Our intervention highlighted how these laws stifle dissent and contravene international human rights law.

We must never forget that humanists around the world face imprisonment, torture, and even death for simply expressing their beliefs. President of the Humanist Association of Nigeria



Mubarak Bala was sentenced to 24 years in prison for blasphemy in 2022. And while we were relieved to learn in May that his sentence has been reduced to five years, we continue to call for

his immediate and unconditional release.

In May, we successfully advocated for enhanced legal protections for teachers against accusations of 'blasphemy' in schools in England. This victory follows a series of troubling incidents, such as those at Batley Grammar School and in Wakefield, where educators faced a severe backlash and death threats from religious protesters. We welcomed

the Government-backed *Walney Review*, which recommended statutory guidance for managing blasphemy-related incidents, safeguarding teachers from automatic suspension, and preventing the religious bullying of schools. This aligns with prior recommendations from Dame Sara Khan's review on social cohesion, which emphasised the importance of protest 'buffer zones' outside schools and strengthened teacher protections. We spearheaded this reform, applauded the review, and are calling for its immediate implementation.



GROWTH & ESTEEM

BIGGEST EVER ELECTION OUTREACH CAMPAIGN

Rishi Sunak's May announcement of a snap election in July triggered our largest ever election outreach campaign. Our policy team has been communicating with the policy heads' and shadow ministers across the political landscape, working at breakneck speed creating systems to write to thousands of candidates, influence manifestos, and lay the groundwork for new bills on humanist issues. The closure of Parliament also brought a halt to several draft laws we'd been advising on, including a ban on LGBT conversion therapy, the decriminalisation of abortion, and advocacy for humanists at risk overseas. We'll be putting these back on the parliamentary agenda after the election, alongside key campaigns like humanist marriage, assisted dying, and inclusive schools.



Humanists UK: respected for our expertise and professionalism and recognised as the leading national voice for the non-religious

SHARING EXPERTISE

Our Dialogue Officer and the NRPSN Manager were invited to speak to the European Humanist Professionals about religious-humanist dialogue in the UK. Our Director of Understanding Humanism was invited to be part of a European-wide working group on education. The Director of Humanist Care and NRPSN Manager were sought for their support in the formation of a European network of non-religious and humanist pastoral carers. Closer to home, they were sought again by the College of Healthcare Chaplains and UK Board of Healthcare Chaplains to contribute to policy formation for the sector.

WELSH GOVERNMENT FORUM

Our strong relationship with the Welsh Government continued this year, with such notable highlights such as meetings with First Minister Mark Drakeford MS. The appointment of Wales Humanists to the 'Faith Communities Forum' by ministerial direction stands as a mark of esteem – a position we earned after certain members of the forum resisted our legal right to be included.

FAITH TO FAITHLESS HONOURED AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE GARDEN PARTY



Volunteers and staff from our Faith to Faithless programme were honoured in May with an invitation to a Buckingham Palace Garden Party. This recognition highlighted the service's work in providing a supportive community for people moving away from high-control religions. The event was attended by HM The King and HM The Queen, the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, and HRH The Princess Royal. Official recognition is not only rewarding for the volunteers who make these services tick, and motivating for the service users we support, but it also potentially helps point the way to further funding to expand our service. For Faith to Faithless that work can be life-saving.



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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FAITH AND CIVIL SOCIETY COMMISSION

We were invited to form part of a new Faith and Civil Society Commission on Artificial Intelligence chaired by Sajid Javid MP, created in the run-up to the Prime Minister's Bletchley Park summit on artificial intelligence. Our Director of Communications and Development and two of our patrons (AI experts Dr Susie Alegre and Dr Kate Devlin) are humanist representatives to the Commission, which looks at the ethical and existential implications of new generative AI technologies and how governments can best regulate their use.



STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES
INCLUDING THE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

	Funds 2023			Funds 2022
	£ restricted	£ unrestricted	£ total	£ total
INCOMING RESOURCES				
Incoming resources from general funds				
Legacies and donations	231,516	1,721,690	1,953,205	1,298,012
Other trading activities	-	-	-	-
Investments	-	28,013	28,013	8,432
Incoming resources from charitable activities	-	1,398,033	1,398,033	1,301,802
Total incoming resources	231,516	3,147,735	3,379,251	2,608,246
RESOURCES EXPENDED				
Costs of generating income	-	(222,651)	(222,651)	(217,066)
Costs of charitable activities	(249,460)	(2,708,784)	(2,958,244)	(2,475,861)
Total resources expended	(249,460)	(2,931,435)	(3,180,895)	(2,692,927)
NET INCOMING RESOURCES/(RESOURCES EXPENDED) BEFORE TRANSFERS AND INVESTMENTS	(17,944)	216,300	198,356	(84,681)

OUR FULL FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR IS AVAILABLE ON THE CHARITY COMMISSION WEBSITE AND AT HUMANISTS.UK/MEMBERS



Humanists UK: an expanding, financially healthy, and sustainable movement

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES <i>(continued)</i>	Funds 2023			Funds 2022
	£ restricted	£ unrestricted	£ total	£ total
Net gains/(losses) on investments	-	61,561	61,561	(58,204)
Net income/(expenditure) for the year	(17,944)	277,861	259,917	(142,885)
Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-
NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS	(17,944)	277,861	259,917	(142,885)
Balances brought forward at 1 January	140,824	2,763,565	2,904,389	3,047,273
BALANCES CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 DECEMBER	122,880	3,041,426	3,164,306	2,904,388

SENIOR STAFF

Chief Executive Andrew Copson
Director of Public Affairs and Policy Richy Thompson
Head of People Ann-Michelle Burton
Director of Organisational Operations Catriona McLellan
Director of Communications and Development Liam Whitton
Director of Understanding Humanism Luke Donnellan
Director of Ceremonies Deborah Hooper
Director of Humanist Care Clare Elcombe Webber
Director of IT Andrew West

BOARD OFFICERS

Chair Neil Hawkins
Vice Chair Neil McKain
Treasurer Ann O'Connell
Auditors Knox Cropper
Bank The Co-Operative



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ACT FOR
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