

BHA response to the Girlguiding UK promise consultation

20 February 2013



A About us

The British Humanist Association is the national charity working on behalf of non-religious people who seek to live ethical and fulfilling lives on the basis of reason and humanity. We promote Humanism, support and represent the non-religious, and promote a secular state and equal treatment in law and policy of everyone, regardless of religion or belief. Founded in 1896, we have around 30,000 members and supporters, and over 70 local and special interest affiliates.

1 Our expertise

The BHA has a long history of work in education, children's rights and equality, with expertise in the 'religion or belief' strand. We provide materials and advice to parents, governors, students, teachers and academics. We also work closely with others on wider equalities issues in a range of forums. The BHA is a member of the National Children's Bureau Sex Education Forum (SEF), the Children's Rights Alliance for England and the Religious Education Council for England and Wales.

(i) BHA expertise in equalities, 'religion and belief' and spirituality

Our Chief Executive has been a member of a number of different Government steering groups focussing on spirituality and 'religion or belief'. These include the Department for Education steering groups which developed the 2004 *Religious education: The non-statutory national framework* (to which we gave our named support);¹ the non-statutory programmes of study and attainment targets for key stage 3² and key stage 4/5³ RE in 2007; the abandoned level descriptions⁴ and key stage 1/2 non-statutory programme of learning⁵ in RE, in 2010; and the 2010 non-statutory RE guidance.⁶ We also advised Ofsted on spiritual development for the non-religious during the development of their guidance *Promoting and evaluating pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development*.⁷

Our current Chief Executive has served on the following steering groups:

- Religious Education Council Religious Education Subject Review, 2011-
- Advisory Panel on Equality and Inclusion, Ofqual, 2011-

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http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090903160937/http://qca.org.uk/libraryAssets/media/9817_re_national_framework_04.pdf

² http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110813032310/http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/uploads/QCA-07-3350-p_RE_KS3_tcm8-411.pdf

³ http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110813032310/http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/uploads/QCA-07-3351-p_RE_KS4_tcm8-412.pdf

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http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100202100434/http://qcda.gov.uk/libraryAssets/media/Level_Descriptions_-_Religious_Education.pdf

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http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100202100434/http://qcda.gov.uk/libraryAssets/media/095654_QCA_PCR_Rel_Educ_SS5.pdf

⁶ <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/religious%20education%20guidance%20in%20schools.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/promoting-and-evaluating-pupils-spiritual-moral-social-and-cultural-development>

- National Advisory Panel, Equality Matters for Children, 2011/12
- Faith, Belief and Meaning Group, National Council for Palliative Care, 2010-12
- Independent Schools Practitioners' Group on Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009-10
- Steering group on Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education in Further Education, Learning and Skills Improvement Service, 2009-10
- RE Consultants Group, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), 2006-10

In addition, he was the Vice Chair of the National Council of Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education from 2008-12; Chair of Trustees of the Values Education Council from 2006-08; has been a Director and Trustee of the Religious Education Council for England and Wales since 2006; and until recently was a Trustee of All Faiths and None. Our current Head of Education also sits on the National Council of Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education. The BHA is a founding member of all these organisations.

(ii) 'Spiritual' development

The BHA has extensive expertise in the area of 'spiritual' development for the non-religious. We also have a long history of involvement in the concept, which was arguably invented in 1961 by educationalist and future BHA President James Hemming and the philosopher Harold Blackham, later the first Executive Director of the BHA. At the BHA's conference in 1969, the distinguished political theorist Sir Bernard Crick, future Vice President of the BHA, presented a paper in which he linked spiritual development and citizenship for the first time. Crick advocated the virtue of toleration in the ideal state, saying 'the most important thing about living in any complex and reasonably civilized community is to perceive it is pluralistic.' He also argued that young people should learn about the different beliefs which are common in society as part of the school curriculum, and that people of different beliefs could cooperate for the common good.

In more recent years, BHA staff have written a number of papers on spirituality from a non-religious point of view; former BHA Education Officer Marilyn Mason gave a definition of spirituality from a humanist point of view and set out the range of humanist views on spirituality, including in education, at the 2000 International Conference of Children's Spirituality⁸ and at a Religious Education Council seminar later that year.⁹ Her successor in that role, Andrew Copson (now Chief Executive), has also written on the matter for the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education¹⁰ and in the *Journal of Chaplaincy in Further Education*.¹¹

More recently, Marilyn set out her personal view that humanists should avoid describing themselves as spiritual, noting how it is often assumed to have unshared religious or pseudoscientific meanings, before concluding:

To sum up, "spiritual" and "spirituality" almost always require explanation if they are to communicate clearly, and so I think that it would be better to abandon them altogether, and

⁸ Marilyn Mason, "'Spirituality'- What on Earth is it?', paper given at the International Conference of Children's Spirituality at Roehampton Institute, Summer 2000: <http://www.humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/SpiritualitywhatonEarthisit.pdf>

⁹ Marilyn Mason, 'Creativity, culture and humanist spirituality: A humanist response to "All our futures" and to some aspects of the school curriculum today', REC seminar, 7 November 2000: <http://www.humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Creativityandspirituality.pdf>

¹⁰ Andrew Copson, 'It is grander and nobler to think for yourself...' Diversity in British Humanism', *World Religions in Education 2007*: http://www.shapworkingparty.org.uk/journals/articles_0708/copson.pdf

¹¹ Andrew Copson, 'Spirituality for Materialists', *Journal of Chaplaincy in Further Education*, 2008: <http://andrewcopson.net/2012/10/spirituality-for-materialists/>

leave them to the religious. If we are really talking about emotions or emotional development or emotional literacy, or aesthetic awareness or experiences, or love of nature or humanity, or love and goodness, or hope, why just not say so?¹²

Other humanists would disagree, most notably Dr Jacqueline Watson, lecturer in Educational Research at the University of East Anglia. Jacqueline is a BHA member and humanist representative on Norfolk Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education. Jacqueline is also a Member of the Executive Committee for the International Association for Children's Spirituality, and has written extensively on the subject.¹³

The BHA also responded as an organisation to the National Youth Agency's consultation on spirituality in 2005.¹⁴

2 Past work on the Scouts and Guides Promises

The BHA has worked extensively over the years in order to allow the non-religious to become members of the Scouts and Guides.

During the passage of the 2006 and 2010 Equality Acts, the BHA led the campaign to amend the law to prevent such exclusion from occurring.

Equality Act 2006

During the passage of the 2006 Act, a new clause was added by amendment during passage through the House of Lords – first proposed during Committee Stage,¹⁵ then passed with Government support during Report.¹⁶ Introducing the amendment, Baroness Scotland said,

'[I]n discussion with the Scout and Guide associations, it became clear that, because of the particular nature of their foundation situation, the practice of requiring members to say the Promise could possibly be threatened by the Bill... **The specific effect of this amendment is to allow the Scouts and Guides to continue requiring their members to say the Promise. This requirement is a necessity if the associations are to remain members of the international movements they represent.** In most circumstances, a charity that wished to restrict its membership would do so by ensuring that a charitable instrument adequately reflected its intentions, and it would then be covered by Clause 60.¹⁷ In this case, however, because the establishment of the Scouts and Guides was made by Royal Charter, we felt an

¹² Marilyn Mason, 'Can humanists be "spiritual"? The no camp.', 9 January 2010:

<http://www.humanistlife.org.uk/2010/01/can-humanists-be-spiritual-the-no-camp/>

¹³ See Jacqueline Watson's academic profile:

<http://www.uea.ac.uk/education/People/Academic/jacquelinewatson#research>

¹⁴ 'Spirituality and Spiritual Development in Youth Work: Response to the National Youth Agency consultation paper from the British Humanist Association, June 2005': <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/BHA-Response-to-NYA-Consultation-on-Spirituality.pdf>

¹⁵ Equality Bill Lords Committee Stage, 13 July 2005:

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200506/ldhansrd/vo050713/text/50713-26.htm#50713-26_head1

¹⁶ Equality Bill Lords Report Stage, 19 October 2005:

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200506/ldhansrd/vo051019/text/51019-35.htm#51019-35_spnew1

¹⁷ Eventually section 58: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/3/section/58>

additional exemption was justified. This will equally protect any other charities that may exist that are in similar circumstances.'

The BHA briefed against the new Clause before its introduction,¹⁸ and subsequently briefed in favour of its removal during the Lords Third Reading¹⁹ and the Commons Second Reading²⁰ and Committee Stage²¹. During the latter, BHA Vice President Dr Evan Harris MP tabled an amendment to remove the Clause, citing our briefing.²² We again briefed against the clause at Report stage, with amendments tabled.²³

Equality Act 2010

Section 58 of the 2006 Act was repealed and replaced by section 193 of the 2010 Act,²⁴ which was in the Bill from introduction. Ahead of this, we responded to the Joint Committee on Human Rights' call for evidence on 'The Draft Legislative Programme: JCHR priorities for 2008-09', again highlighting the issue at hand.²⁵ We also briefed on the matter for the Commons Second Reading²⁶ and Committee Stage²⁷ and in our memorandum to the Commons Bill Committee²⁸. Again with our support, Dr Harris moved an amendment on the matter.²⁹ Following requests for examples of discrimination in practice, the BHA produced a more in-depth briefing for the Report Stage, with an amendment again tabled.³⁰

Other work

We wrote to the Scout Association regarding their membership policies in July 2004, June 2005,³¹ and in January 2008, met with Derek Twine,³² presenting him a paper on the issue.³³ Following on

¹⁸ BHA Briefing on the Equality Act 2006 Lords Report Stage, 1 October 2005: <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/BHA-Briefing-on-Equality-Bill-Lords-Report.pdf>

¹⁹ BHA Briefing on the Equality Act 2006 Lords Third Reading, 9 November 2005: <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/BHA-Briefing-on-Equality-Bill-3rd-Reading-in-the-Lords.pdf>

²⁰ BHA Briefing on the Equality Act 2006 Commons Second Reading, 15 November 2005: <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/BHA-Briefing-on-Equality-Bill-Commons-2nd-Reading.pdf>

²¹ BHA Briefing on the Equality Act 2006 Commons Committee Stage, 30 November 2005: <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/BHA-Briefing-on-Equality-Bill-Commons-Committee.pdf>

²² Equality Act 2006 Commons Committee Stage, 6 December 2005: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmstand/a/st051206/pm/51206s10.htm>

²³ BHA Briefing on the Equality Act 2006 Commons Report Stage, 14 January 2006: <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Briefing-on-Equality-Bill-Commons-Report.pdf>

²⁴ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/193>

²⁵ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt200809/jtselect/jtrights/169/169we14.htm>

²⁶ BHA Briefing on the Equality Act 2010 Commons Second Reading, 11 May 2009: <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/BHA-Briefing-2009-A-Equality-Bill-Commons-2nd-Reading-FINAL-NP.pdf>

²⁷ BHA Briefing on the Equality Act 2010 Commons Committee Stage, 23 June 2009: <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/BHA-Briefing-2009-B-Equality-Bill-Committee-Stage.pdf>

²⁸ Memorandum to the Equality Bill Committee from the British Humanist Association, 21 May 2009: <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/BHAMemorandumtoEqualityBillCommitteeFINAL.pdf>

²⁹ Equality Act 2006 House of Commons Committee Stage, 17th sitting, 2 July 2009: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmpublic/equality/090702/am/90702s04.htm#09070260000013>

³⁰ BHA Briefing on the Equality Act 2010 Commons Report Stage, 2 October 2009: <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/BHA-Briefing-2009-Commons-Report-Stage-Charities-FINAL.pdf>

³¹ <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Letter-to-Derek-Twine-Scout-Association.pdf>

³² BHA news item, 'Scout's Honour?', 31 January 2008: <http://humanism.org.uk/2008/01/31/news-84/>

from this we wrote to him again.³⁴ We wrote to Denise King and Liz Burley of Girlguiding UK about this issue three times in 2007.³⁵ We also had correspondence with Ed Miliband over funding for the Scouts in 2007.³⁶

More recently, the BHA and the UK Armed Forces Humanist Association have been working for the British cadet organisations to drop their requirements that members make a religious oath on joining. This month we were pleased to announce our first success in this area, as the Air Cadet Organisation agreed to provide a non-religious oath for Air Training Corps cadets.³⁷

We have also been encouraging our members and supporters to respond to the Scouts and Guides consultations.

B Reasons the Scouts and Guides should become inclusive of the non-religious

Discrimination

The main reason we think the Scouts and Guides should change their rules to allow for a non-religious promise is simply because the current situation seems to us to be discriminatory against atheists and agnostics who do not have any religious belief. In our opinion this discrimination is unjustifiable, as the non-religious are just as able as the religious to meet and fulfil the values in the Scouts' revised Fundamentals, or in the Guide Law – the Fundamentals and Guide Law being what set out what it fundamentally means to be a Scout or a Guide. Evidence shows that the non-religious in the UK give as much to charity as the religious, and volunteer as much as their time.³⁸

To do otherwise would also go against both organisations' claims to be inclusive to all, regardless of religion or belief. For example, in their FAQ for adult volunteers, the Scout Association say:

Are there any age restrictions on helping out?

As long as you are over 18 years of age, you can help out as an adult volunteer in Scouting.³⁹

While in their FAQ, Girlguiding UK says:

Can anyone become a volunteer with Girlguiding UK?

We welcome volunteers of all backgrounds, cultures, faiths, and abilities.⁴⁰

³³ 'Scouting and Good Citizenship: The way ahead', 1 January 2007: <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Scouting-and-Good-Citizenship-Paper.pdf>

³⁴ <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Letter-to-Derek-Twine-Scout-Association-from-BHA-and-NSS.pdf>

³⁵ <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Letter-to-Denise-King-Girlguiding-1.pdf>, <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Letter-to-Denise-King-Girlguiding-2.pdf> and <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Letter-Liz-Burney-Guides.pdf>

³⁶ <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Letter-to-Ed-Miliband-on-Scouts-1.pdf> and <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Letter-to-Ed-Miliband-on-Scouts-2.pdf>

³⁷ BHA press release, 'BHA welcomes Air Cadets' commitment to provide a non-religious oath', 21 January 2013: <http://humanism.org.uk/2013/01/21/bha-welcomes-air-cadets-commitment-to-provide-a-non-religious-oath/>

³⁸ See *BHA Briefing 2010: Religion, belief & volunteering*, December 2010: <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/1bha-briefing-volunteering-12-10-final.pdf>

³⁹ <https://members.scouts.org.uk/cms.php?pageid=1813>

⁴⁰ http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/get_involved/volunteer/faqs.aspx

Neither of these statements is true.

The latest Census recorded 25% of the population of England and Wales as having no religion,⁴¹ while the most recent *British Social Attitudes Survey* found that 46% of the public does not belong to a religion.⁴² Focussing on young people specifically, the 2010 *British Social Attitudes Survey* (the most recent to segregate by age) records 65% of 18-24 year olds as not belonging to any religion.⁴³ Meanwhile, the 2003 Citizenship Survey found 46% of 11-15 year olds not having a religion,⁴⁴ while a 2004 Department for Education report found 65% of 12-19 year olds are not religious.⁴⁵

In other words, a very large portion of the population, and a particularly large portion of young people, has no religion. To require that these people either lie in making the Promise (something which we have seen being encouraged in the past – but which strikes us as incompatible with the Fundamentals and Guide Law), or else be excluded entirely, seems to us to be unjustified.

George Pratt was one recent and particularly prominent example of a young boy who was refused membership of the Scouts because of his unwillingness to make a pledge.⁴⁶ But the BHA is frequently contacted by parents and would-be volunteers who face similar exclusion. For many years, this issue and the issue of and Collective Worship in schools have competed to be the largest category of complaint the BHA has to deal with. Examples of complaints the BHA received in 2012 alone are included in annex 1.

Need for volunteers

Following on from the previous point, adults with no religious beliefs can play a valuable role in helping young people meet the values found in the revised Fundamentals and the Guide Law, and follow the Scout and Guiding Methods. Scouting and Girlguiding are growing movements in need of more adult volunteers, and even as things stand, a large number of non-religious adults are already quietly volunteering with individual groups. To keep excluding many atheists and agnostics would deprive the Scout Association and Girlguiding UK of much-needed support; to perpetuate others' silent service would be hypocritical.

Public funds

Both the Scout Association and Girlguiding UK are in receipt of substantial public funding, most recently in August receiving a large share of £10 million in funding for new youth groups in inner city

⁴¹ Office for National Statistics, 'Religion in England and Wales 2011', 11 December 2011: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt-religion.html>

⁴² NatCen Social Research, 29th British Social Attitudes Survey: <http://bsa-29.natcen.ac.uk/>

⁴³ 28th British Social Attitudes Survey – see page 195: http://ir2.flife.de/data/natcen-social-research/igb_html/index.php?bericht_id=1000001&index=&lang=ENG

⁴⁴ Christine Farmer, '2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey: Top-level findings from the Children's and Young People's Survey' (Home Office and Department for Education and Skills, 2005), p. 37: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/452490.pdf>

⁴⁵ Alison Park, Miranda Phillips and Mark Johnson, 'Young People in Britain: The Attitudes and Experiences of 12 to 19 Year Olds' (Department for Education and Skills, 2004), pp. 10-11: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RR564.pdf.pdf>

⁴⁶ BHA news item, '11 year-old banned from joining the Scouts for refusing to pledge allegiance to God', 18 October 2011: <http://humanism.org.uk/2012/10/18/news-1129/>

areas.⁴⁷ In January, the Scouts and Guides similarly received much of £1.3 million from the Mayor of London, as part of a similar scheme.⁴⁸

We believe that public funds should be spent in a secular manner that is equally accessible to all members of the public, regardless of religion or belief. That the Scouts and Guides are in receipt of such large amounts of public funding surely only increases the impetus for their opening up membership to atheists and agnostics. In addition, with new equality law on public authorities making such grants, it is likely that legal challenges to such funding would be successful if brought.

No international barriers

When section 58 of the Equality Act 2006 was first passed, the Government justified the amendment by saying that it was 'is a necessity if the associations are to remain members of the international movements they represent.' Given the current consultations, this is clearly no longer true. In addition, Girl Guides Australia decided last year to drop their Promise to God entirely.⁴⁹

C Spirituality

Both the Scouts and Guides talk about spirituality, and look set to continue to do so after this consultation is over. The revised Fundamentals see Scouts 'share in spiritual reflection', whereas Girlguiding UK's consultation talks of the 'essence of spirituality'.

As set out in the section on our expertise, humanists do not have a common position on whether or not the term 'spiritual' should be used to describe non-religious beliefs. In addition, 'spirituality' is often not a concept that young people yet understand in any meaningful way, or otherwise find the concept inaccessible. As a consequence, our preference would be for the Scouts and Guides to avoid using this term where an alternative, less ambiguous phrase can be substituted.

However, when the term is used, then we would welcome the Scouts and Guides adopting a definition which is clearly inclusive of the non-religious, thus preventing anyone from misinterpreting the term's intended usage as being in an exclusively religious way. A good definition would be similar to how it is used within the context of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in schools. We particularly like Ofsted's definition, which we helped to develop, from their 2004 guidance on SMSC:

Spiritual development is the development of the non-material element of a human being which animates and sustains us and, depending on our point of view, either ends or continues in some form when we die. It is about the development of a sense of identity, self-worth, personal insight, meaning and purpose. It is about the development of a pupil's 'spirit'. Some people may call it the development of a pupil's 'soul'; others as the development of 'personality' or 'character'.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ 'Government to fund youth schemes', Press Association, 25 August 2012: <http://money.aol.co.uk/2012/08/25/government-to-fund-youth-schemes/>

⁴⁸ Joe Lepper, 'Uniformed groups win funding to expand services across the capital', 19 January 2012: <http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1071576/uniformed-win-funding-expand-services-capital>

⁴⁹ BHA news item, 'Girl Guides in Australia drop their promise to serve God and the Queen', 6 July 2012: <http://humanism.org.uk/2012/07/06/news-1066/>

⁵⁰ Ofsted, *Promoting and evaluating pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development*, 2004

Ofsted goes on to define further characteristics of pupils who are developing spiritually, and attributes of schools that are encouraging their pupils' spiritual development; these are also worth looking at.

In 2010, the Royal College of Nursing conducted a survey of its members, seeking their views on spirituality. The majority agreed with definitions which gave spirituality meanings open to both religious and non-religious experiences.⁵¹ The above Ofsted definition does the same thing, and this seems like it would be a sensible approach for the Scouts and Guides as well.

D Suggested Promise for the non-religious

Of the list of suggested Promises given in question 11 the consultation document, our favourites are 'Develop my beliefs' and 'Search for the meaning in my life' – but the latter only if it was changed to 'Search for meaning in my life', as we all find meaning in more than one thing.

We also like 'Be true to my beliefs' and 'Be true to myself', as it is important people stand by their convictions, but being willing to change one's beliefs is a good thing and we would be concerned that this point would be lost with these promises.

We also like 'Be true to a higher ideal'.

We are less fond of 'Search for the spiritual value in my life': as we set out above, 'spiritual' is an ambiguous term which for many has exclusively or predominantly religious connotations, and we doubt it has wide enough significance for young people to be useful. If this term is used, then we would want it to be clearly defined as having a meaning that is inclusive of the non-religious.

We do not like 'Serve the Highest Truth and Love faithfully at all times', as there is not necessarily a highest truth, and the capitalisation has religious connotations.

We strongly dislike the three Promises referring to God, and the one referring to faith, as non-religious people do not have a God or faith.

E Specific points on the consultation

We will now respond to any relevant questions asked by the public consultation, providing more depth where necessary.

8. We believe the promise needs rewording to remove the reference to God, and replace it with something else which promotes a strong, personal message yet is fully inclusive of the non-religious.

9. We think the 'essence of spirituality' section of the Promise needs significant consideration.

10. Our preference would be to remove the religious aspect of the Promise entirely and just have one Promise. Having a single Promise will strengthen the cohesiveness of the movement in removing barriers and bringing members together.

We believe that young people should have the time and space to form their own religious or non-religious beliefs. We think requiring children as young as four to make a theological Promise would

⁵¹ Wilfred McSherry, *RCN spirituality survey 2010*, page 17:
http://www.rcn.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/391112/003861.pdf

either lead them to make a Promise which they do not yet comprehend and so is meaningless, or pressure them to make a decision on such matters before they could be mature enough to be fully informed. This is even a problem among older members, many of whom won't form an opinion on religion until late teens.

Even if everyone has reached a decision as to their religion or belief, requiring them to say a Promise in front of their peers seems to us like it could pressurise them to change their mind in order to fit in, or else single them out from their peers, which could lead to bullying.

Conversely, we are unaware of any reasons that from our perspective support keeping the Promise.

11. Whichever Promise is decided upon, there should certainly be an option suitable for the non-religious. We have responded in more detail to this question in the previous section, but to reiterate, our favourite suggestions are 'Develop my beliefs' or 'Search for meaning in my life'.

13. These expressions of commitment to others are all strong, but we particularly like 'Take action for a better world', which emphasises the global side of the commitment, as well as the local; and 'Be responsible for myself and others', which highlights that a commitment to others also means a commitment to oneself.

15. The Promise is of utmost importance as it is the set of values at the core of Girlguiding in the UK. With such a large number of young people being members of the guides, rainbows and brownies, we think it is of utmost importance that these values inculcate the modern British values of respect, tolerance and support for diversity.

As things stand, the Promise is not inclusive of the non-religious. For the reasons given above, we believe this should be changed.

16. We have explored the Guiding Manual for other areas that we think need changing. Changes we would suggest include:

- Where there are references to 'religion' or 'faith', these would always be accompanied by references to 'belief'.
- References to spirituality would make clear that the term is meant in a way that it is inclusive of the non-religious.

Looking at specific portions of the Manual which we would suggest should be revised:

- The Spirituality portion of the Equality and Diversity Policy would not encourage members to take an active part in the religion or faith of their families and communities, but would encourage them more generally to explore their beliefs, without reference to already being part of one religion.
- The 'Who we are' section needs updating to reflect the new Promise.
- The 'Young members', 'Adults in guiding', 'Unit guiding', 'Types of unit' and 'Who we are' sections need references to belief alongside faith.

Other documents will also need checking to ensure references to religion or faith always sit alongside references to non-religious beliefs.

Conclusion

As things stand, the Scouting and Girlguiding movements are not inclusive of the non-religious. Young people and adult volunteers who do not have any religious beliefs have to choose between

leaving the movement, or going against the movements' values by lying when making the Promise. The non-religious can make a fantastic contribution to the movement, with surveys showing that, as a section of society, they volunteer as much and give as much to charity as the religious. Many young non-religious people would love to be part of such an engaging and valuable movement, and with recent growth, the movements would surely value the support of non-religious leaders.

We urge you to open up your movement to the non-religious.

For more details, information and evidence, contact the British Humanist Association:

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Annex 1: examples of people who have contacted us

Person A (a former Rainbows leader)

'I read with interest yesterday's news on your website, re: the 11 year old boy banned from joining Scouts. I found the article because yesterday I made the decision to step down as the local Rainbows Leader (pre-Brownies) because Girlguiding UK has insisted that I cannot become a Leader unless I take the Promise to "love my God"...I have spent the last three months trying to persuade Girlguiding UK of why it is morally wrong for them to enforce the Promise when they claim to be an inclusive organisation. Initially, they were very sympathetic and engaged with my arguments. However, yesterday I received a very abrupt email making it clear that the issue was closed hence my decision to resign.'

'It does concern me that the largest girls organisation in the country is allowed to market itself in a non-religious way with no mention of "God" but that once you are "in" the organisation you are "forced" to take a Promise that presupposes a belief in God...I think some parents don't even know the content of the Promise that their children have taken! Given the moral significance and importance of promise-making, we need to challenge this.'

'I actually did quite a bit of research before I let my girls join Rainbows. I suspected there might be an issue with the Promise. I discussed this with the local Rainbows Leader and after seeking advice from a local colleague she decided that it was acceptable for the girls to substitute the word "World" for "God" but she warned me that I would have to negotiate this with each Section of Guiding as the girls moved through the organisation...This very accommodating Rainbows Leader has since gone off on Maternity Leave and the local Rainbows Unit was in danger of closing unless I stepped forward. Little did I realise how difficult it was going to be to persuade Girlguiding UK to respect and include my views and beliefs. I was just trying to "do good" for my local community - surely that is all that should be important for an ethically minded organisation?'

'Locally, everyone has been very sympathetic to my arguments but their hands are tied by the "party" line (now that they know it!). I genuinely believe there are Guide Leaders out there who don't even realise they are promoting a particular world view, because they are so unquestionably part of that world view. It is only when someone challenges this that they begin to understand and recognise what it is they are promoting. I think some local Leaders are beginning to question whether they want to be part of that. I think some have been a bit shocked at the response from Girlguiding HQ. However, I am not sure they have the will or the desire to fight it.'

'So the question is, where do I go from here? Now that my girls are "in" the organisation it is going to be difficult for me to get them "out": they are having a fun time and I don't want to withdraw them because of my beliefs. The tricky thing is that my older daughter is now a Brownie and we have reached the compromise that she can be a Brownie in every way, except she cannot have the badge that signifies she has taken the Promise (unless, of course, she takes it)!!! Whether these Leaders are going to be so accommodating now that I've resigned as the Rainbows Leader is another matter.'

Person B (a Brownie leader)

'Last night, I was told by a Guide Leader that I would have to leave Girlguiding UK, as I had privately mentioned to her that I am an atheist. I was told that I was not welcome, and that the only way I could be permitted to stay would be to concede that I was not really an atheist, but a lost soul, searching for a faith. The Leader in question was very clear that this was not merely her opinion, but

the rules of Girlguiding UK, and that you could be a Leader if you were practicing any religion, but not if you were of a non-religious persuasion... The Leader continued to say that as Leaders, we were expected to guide the girls in choosing a religion – I countered that I did not feel that it was my place to do this, and she replied that “the organisation” would say that it was.’

‘I was told by this Leader that I should not tell anyone within Oxfordshire Girlguiding of my atheism, and that she would not tell anyone either (seemingly she could not resist, as within ten minutes of our conversation, she had told another Leader with the Brownie unit). Never have I been made to feel so humiliated and belittled because of my beliefs, and I consider being asked to leave a movement that I have given so much to because of these beliefs to be discriminatory.’

‘My faith, or lack thereof, has never affected my abilities as a Leader – I have never been asked what my faith is and although I have never hidden my beliefs, it has never been mentioned or been an issue before...While I fully understand that Girlguiding has its roots in Christianity, it is also my understanding that now, as an organisation, we do not subscribe to a particular faith and pride ourselves on being inclusive. I am familiar with Girlguiding UK’s Equality and Diversity Policy, which states that Members and supporters are welcomed irrespective of faith, race, culture, nationality or any other circumstance.’

Person C (a Brownie leader)

‘I am a Brownie Leader and as such had to make the Promise but I decided to just grit my teeth through the God bit. My Pack is connected to a C of E Church so I attend church from time to time out of a sense of community and good will.’

‘In my opinion it would be good to have an alternative Promise and Law rather than doing away with the existing one altogether as many people like it and believe in God.’