

BHA response to the Scout Association Fundamentals consultation 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. Our policies are informed with the support of over 120 of the UK's most prominent philosophers, scientists, and other thinkers and experts and we seek to advance them with the help of over 100 parliamentarians in membership of the All Party Parliamentary Humanist Group. Our trained and accredited celebrants conduct funerals and other non-religious ceremonies attended by over 500,000 people each year.

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

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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>

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-
- 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

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

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

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 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

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

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

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 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

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

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>

Other work

We wrote to you regarding your membership policies in July 2004, June 2005,³¹ and met with you in January 2008,³² presenting you a paper on the issue.³³ Following on from this we wrote to you 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

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/>

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>

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

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.

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

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/>

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 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

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/>

‘spirit’. Some people may call it the development of a pupil’s ‘soul’; others as the development of ‘personality’ or ‘character’.⁵⁰

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

In their consultation, Girlguiding UK have helpfully provided a list of suggested Promises, including those which could be used by the non-religious. These are ‘Develop my beliefs’; ‘Be true to my beliefs’; ‘Be true to myself’; ‘Be true to a higher ideal’; ‘Search for the spiritual value in my life’; ‘Search for the meaning in my life’; and ‘Serve the Highest Truth and Love faithfully at all times’.

Of these, 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.

E Specific points on the consultation

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

4. We are strongly supportive of the revised Fundamentals of Scouting and believe the language is clear. The only caveats we would attach to them is our suggestion that spirituality is defined and understood in the manner that we have set out above, i.e. fully inclusive of the non-religious; and that we don’t think exploration of faiths, beliefs and values should involve proselytising.

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

⁵¹ Wilfred McSherry, *RCN spirituality survey 2010*, page 17:

http://www.rcn.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/391112/003861.pdf

5. We think the programme needs to change in a number of ways to fit with the revised Fundamentals' inclusion of the non-religious, both in terms of the range of activities offered, and the language used in any guidance to describe those activities. (For instance, any references to faith or religion would be accompanied by a reference to non-religious beliefs; references to worship would be removed).

6. All roles in Scouting should be open to all adults, irrespective of their beliefs – as long as they are committed to the Fundamentals of Scouting. We have set out above why we think this should be the case.

7. Yes, there should be a version of the Promise that is suitable for people who have no religious belief.

8. Yes, there should have a version of the Promise that is suitable for young people who have no religious belief.

9. We think a number of other policies need revising in light of the changes to the Fundamentals. 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.
- References to worship would be removed.
- The term 'Chaplain' or 'Chaplaincy' would be replaced with something inclusive of all faiths and beliefs. 'Religious and humanist leaders' would be an improvement. In terms of referring to something specifically with a pastoral focus, the BHA prefers not to use the term 'Humanist chaplain' because it continues to have religious connotations which we believe makes it inappropriate and misleading. In the settings where it operates, the BHA uses 'moral counsellor' or 'pastoral carer'.

In terms of specific portions of the Policy, Organisation and Rules which we would suggest should be revised:

- Chapter 1 and Rule 1.1 clearly need rewriting, if nothing else to contain the revised Fundamentals; but also to reflect any revisions to the Promise.
- We believe the Religious Policy in chapter 2, along with rule 2.1, should be entirely scrapped. Scouts should not be required to be a member of a religious body, or be encouraged to attend religious services. As detailed above, we would support replacing the term 'Chaplain'. Scouts should not be compelled to attend religious services.

If, however, some semblance of a policy is to remain, it could become 'The Religion or Belief Policy', and be limited to emphasising the freedom of religion or belief of members, precluding proselytising or any requirement to take part in religious worship, and perhaps making available religious and Humanist pastoral support. We would welcome the opportunity to advise on this policy before it is implemented.

Rule 4.13.d and the appointment process guide contain references to the religious policy that need revising.

- The Equal Opportunities Policy should now refer to 'political, religious or non-religious belief', and the related Note should be removed.
- The Faith Partnership Award, referred to in rules 3.46.b and 4.54b, could be called the Belief Partnership Award. We welcome Scout groups and Scouts building partnerships with

religious or non-religious communities in order to promote understanding is fine, but would prefer there to be no proselytising or taking part in religious worship.

- Co-opting representatives of religious bodies onto County Scout Councils (as recommended in chapter 5) may no longer be appropriate.

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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February 2013

Annex 1: examples of people who have contacted us

Person 1 (Volunteer with local Scout group)

I've recently started volunteering for my local Scout Troop and have experienced discrimination during an initial interview with the district leader. Having left the space for religion blank on the application form I was told that I needed to fill this in, however atheists are not permitted to become leaders with the scouts and so it was suggested I just put on Christian as I was enrolled in a Methodist school as a child. I have refused to do this as I don't agree with compromising my position or that of practising Christians and am awaiting the outcome.

Person 2 (Parent)

I have a 5 year old son who I contacted the scouting information helpline to ask if my son could participate without making the 'Promise' to God and the Queen, as I am both an Atheist and a Republican and was told he could not take part without making the 'Pledge'. Discriminatory.

Person 3 (Volunteer with local Scout group)

I was a regular assistant with my local scouting group for about four years...so I'm a believer in what Scouting can do. But I suspect many scouts may have been uncomfortable living by some parts of the promise. Certainly, I could not make the promise as my values are not based in a religious belief, so I stayed outside the formal organisation.

Quoting the new statement of purpose and values:

The scouting organisation should show 'respect' for those whose ethics and values are not rooted in belief in a personal god, but who do (or can be encouraged to) have a 'belief' in a set which are based on other, human, values. Scouting should 'care' about 'engaging and supporting young people' in 'their personal development', and it should be prepared to 'co-operate' with those that don't share the current members' religious views.

If Scouting does not positively embrace non-faith full membership then the members are absolutely breaking their stated values. And Scouting has little to offer what is, on official figures, the majority of young people who do not have a religious belief; rather, actively discouraging them. I think that is a terrible waste of the resources the organisation is guardian of and would disappoint many of the people who support it in various ways.

I tried to follow these values as a regular assistant at scouts over several years, but in contrast to individual members, I did not feel the Scout organisation gave me that same respect. I was happy to carry on as I could see the benefits to the scouts and for myself, but the current stance must jeopardise the future of the movement and more importantly the utilisation of its resources for the benefit of young people.

Person 4 (Parent and former Girl Guide)

Our family have been affected by this. Neither of our children would have been comfortable swearing allegiances as they were both confirmed atheists at a young age (their decision, not ours). I knew from my own experience of Brownies and Guides that not only did allegiances need to be sworn, the Brownie and Guide meetings are closely associated with the church. Many is the time I carried the flag on a Sunday service, so I know the close connection.

We assumed nothing would have changed, especially as the meetings are still held in Church Halls. So they missed out on the opportunity to go to Scout, Guide, or Brownie style meetings, or join in with their friends in these activities. As I think the actual activities the Scouts and Guided take part in can be very beneficial to children, I thought this a shame, but they would not have been able to pretend beliefs they don't have as they think their own beliefs equally important as those of religious people, and they felt they would have had a bad experience from the adults involved.

We as parents would not have been able to help out either without feeling unwelcome, and awkward that we did not go to the Church.

Person 5 (Assistant Scout Master and parent)

For the past three years I have been a member of the scouts association as assistant scout master. I was a scout as a child, two of my children are cubs and explorer scouts. When I joined three years ago it is fair to say that I was agnostic. Since then my personal journey of over twenty years has led to me confirming my views as firmly atheist. A few weeks ago the press article highlighting the exclusion of George Pratt was sent to me. I re-read the various aspects of the Scouts religious policies on their website and sent the following email to my scout leader and group scout master.

Extract from e-mail:

While I would agree that being unwilling to follow an organisations policies should lead to a prohibition on joining that organisation I am deeply saddened that an organisation like the Scouts whose purpose is to 'to contribute to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual potentials, as individuals, as responsible citizens and as members of their local, national and international communities' has failed to recognise that in today's enlightened age a view that there is no need to believe in a god is as acceptable (I would argue more desirable) than a belief in one. As we know in its drive to expand across the world the organisation has managed to accommodate various religious beliefs. It is now time that the organisation recognises the absence of belief.

Until that day, if the powers that be allow, I am happy to continue to assist as a parent helper. However either through the wearing of the scout uniform or performance of an investiture which may be contrary to a child's belief (in fact if I were to be invested today I would omit the word god from the promise) I am unable to continue in my position as scout leader.

I believe in an individual's right to believe whatever he chooses, and have and would never seek to impose my views on any adult or child. I believe the Scouting Organisation to be one of the last places our children can be exposed to the opportunities it provides, and is on the whole a force of good in the world.

I believe that apart from it's religious views The Scouts Organisation helps to develop children into well rounded adults. In the three years I have been involved in scouting I have met very few christian scouter's. Being reflective of society at large this reflects the largely agnostic or thought less views of modern society. I am still waiting for my resignation to be confirmed. I would like to see the scouts organisation become secular. I would like to see the scouts organisation preclude the creation of groups limited to particular religious groups and remain fully inclusive.

Person 6 (former Scout member and former applicant to become a Scout Leader)

I joined the Scouts aged 12. Although I was a Christian, and was happy to recite the promise, I didn't realise that religion was so fundamental to the Scouting Movement. I progressed through Explorer Scouts and was a Young Leader, whilst I became an atheist when I was 17.

When I was 18 and applying to become a Scout Leader in [place name removed], I wrote down 'atheist' on the application form under religion. It didn't even cross my mind that this would be problematic. But when I had my form checked over, I was told that I would have to change 'atheist' as the appointments committee would not be able to give me a warrant as an atheist. After that, I decided that if an association 'crying out for volunteers' was willing to turn me down on account of my faith, I did not want anything to do with them. Now, my younger brother is in the same situation.

I can't understand how the Scout Association is turning away willing volunteers because they do not have a faith. I would not want my children to attend an association where faith is 'taught' by unqualified and biased adults, and where not having a faith is unacceptable.

Person 7 (Parent)

I thought you might like to see these emails. I think they're trying to tell me its okay for my son to make a promise that we don't believe in - a lie and then change his mind and not believe in God once he is a beaver (if God was real I don't think it would be too happy about this!). This is a real shame because he would have really enjoyed Beavers and we've never felt discriminated against for being Atheist before.

Original e-mail:

Please can you help me, can my son join beavers when we are atheists? My son is going to his first beaver meeting on Thursday. The application form say we must have a religion and says he has to make a promise to do his duty to God. We are atheists but we still have moral and ethical values and while I would love [name removed] to join beavers and enjoy the friendship and adventure and helping others that come with Scouting, it would be morally wrong for me to lie on the form about having a religion and asking my son to make a promise that is a lie would be wrong on many levels. Is there a different promise he can make? I would like to speak to the leader about it on Thursday and would like to know the official information before we go. I don't want to argue about it I just want my son to get the same opportunity as those who have religion.

Reply from the Scouts:

Thank you for your email. To become a member of The Scout Association, young people are required to make the Promise. In Beavers, this includes a statement to 'love God.' Although this is very much down to personal understanding (ie it does not mean you have to be a member of any particular faith), the statement does imply a belief in a higher being. Therefore, Atheists are generally unable to make this Promise.

As Scouting is a faith based organisation, there are not any alternatives for those young people that are unable to make this Promise. However, Scouting does recognise that as young people develop, they may question or change their beliefs, and we do not think that these members should be excluded from Scouting. The only requirement is being able to make the Promise.

We recognise that this means that not everyone will be able to join Scouting. However, this aspect is one of our fundamentals and the shared belief is something that brings Scouts across the world together.

I understand that this may be frustrating to hear and apologise if you are disappointed.

Person 8 (Applicant to be Assistant Leader)

I am expecting to have to leave scouts as an assistant leader after 2 years because I am an avowed atheist. It came up in my original interview, where we discussed the fact that I have no problem teaching and assisting with religious content, and I was accepted and treated as a member. I have never changed my stance from atheist, and have helped all my Explorer Scouts gain their 'faith' badges. But I have just recently completed the documentation for my full appointment, and following a conversation with my leader, am expecting to be given the 'lie or leave' decision. I doubt I shall take the 'lie' route, but I am interested to understand the legality of this situation.

Person 9 (Applicant to be Assistant Leader)

I've been in the Scouts since age 6, and now at age 23 am on my way to becoming a warranted assistant leader. Unfortunately (for them) I am also a dedicated atheist and aspiring journalist. I bloody love the Scouts and everything it's given me in life, and truthfully believe that it gives kids one of the best possible starts in life. However when I hear about budding leaders being turned away for applying reason to an iron age dogma, it switches on the expletive-armed antitheist that's bubbling away inside me.

Person 10 (Potential Scout volunteer)

I found this discrimination against atheists so extraordinary that I just called the Scouts myself to check! My husband was a scout throughout his childhood – even getting the Queen's Scout award (the highest possible). There is no doubt that it greatly benefited him and gave him the opportunity to learn skills he'd never have had a chance to learn otherwise. Now he'd love to volunteer but won't because of this discrimination against atheists. The woman I spoke to at Scouts headquarters flatly denied its policy was discrimination (she said I was being 'unhelpful' in calling it that) and said there were many other volunteer positions other than leader which my husband and I could do. I said that we felt uncomfortable joining an organisation which didn't value our beliefs and felt we were not suitable to lead children. She said she thought we were making a bigger fuss than necessary and didn't see the point in continuing the conversation.

This whole policy is nuts to me – they say they are desperately short of adult volunteers and they don't mention religion anywhere on their website! Being a scout is not a religious activity – I completely understand why I would not be a good Sunday School teacher – but I do believe my husband and I could guide children in outdoor activities!

Given their only insistence is on 'belief in a higher being' presumably they'd prefer a Satanist or a cult leader to us...

Person 11 (Cub volunteer and parent)

I am writing to share the tale of how I am endeavouring to be true to my atheist beliefs and yet support my children in their wishes to be part of one of the Scout Association.

My eight year old son was keen to join the scouts when we moved to a new area, unfortunately the scouts have a waiting list and the chances of a place becoming available seemed slight. So I had a chat with the leader of the troop, and asked how I might be able to get [name removed] into cubs, the answer was to volunteer as a cub leader.

My atheist beliefs are not something I impose upon my children, who I leave free to choose what they believe, and at the moment they attend a Church of England school and are happy to embrace all that.

I am to be invested this evening which is where you make your promise to 'God', I have given this much thought as I do not wish to lie, however being an atheist is not an option. My decision is to make my promise to 'my Dharma'. I am not Buddhist but my understanding is that I will be making a promise to uphold an ethical value system.

I have no desire to reveal myself as an atheist as it would could result in my child losing his place, and the scout movement is astonishing in terms of its reach and use of volunteers to benefit many young people. I try to be ethical and honest at all times and I have really struggled with this.

Person 12 (Parent)

I am currently having issues with the Scout Association over what I believe to be discrimination against my son. He joined the Scouts over a month ago and is currently working towards his investment ceremony. At this point, I enquired about the promise which is made, assuming incorrectly that since we are in the 21st century, there would have been a change in the obligatory use of the term 'god'. I was rather surprised to find that the supposedly inclusive organisation allows changes for every major world religion but not for atheists or agnostics. I have been corresponding with the Scout Association over this but feel I am now hitting my head against a brick wall. I asked if my son could substitute a term for nature for 'god' but was told that this would be unacceptable as it is not considered a 'higher power'.

Person 13 (Parent)

My six year old boy has recently started at the scouts/beavers and I was keen for him to be involved. I thought I would just check on the religious stand point before he gets too involved at which point I found out that he will be required to promise that he will love god! Imagine my disappointment...well I am sure you can. I enclose my discussions with the scouts so far, I wonder if you have any comments on the situation with the scouts.

A couple of extracts from Person 13's e-mails to the Scouts:

I do find the situation rather disappointing for a secular charity which seems to promote acceptance, sense of community and social development etc. It seem that your policy could really do with a rework as at the moment it does appear rather exclusionary and discriminatory in a way that would no longer be accepted on issues of nationality or race.

Of your 30 Million members I can only speculate (as can you) how many make the promise but don't fully believe in the last part of that promise! It is so disappointing to hear that the scouts feel that faith is the thing bonding these members rather than a shared ideal of learning, understanding, tolerance, self exploration, self improvement, bettering humanity, helping the disadvantaged and also the planet!

Person 14 (Cub Scout Pack Leader)

I read your information regard the scout association. I am currently a leader of a cub scout pack in [place name removed] and have been told that I cannot be a leader or progress as I do not believe in god. I am still there but it has been made clear that I must attend church etc in order to stay in the organisation.

Person 15 (Parent)

First e-mail to BHA:

I've read your page on this, and indeed it affects me. I'm a little unclear as to how this isn't illegal under section 7 of the Equality Act 2010, but then: I'm not a lawyer. It is my view that scouts could be of huge benefit to my son - especially since he is autistic, and a: needs help and more exposure to social settings, and b: it has a good range of activities, which is good for people who may find some very hard (compare, for example, sports clubs which only really do one thing). I would of course be more than willing to provide my time to support his additional needs (I'm also an ex-scout, and a school governor, with relevant CRB checks etc), but both my son and I would be expressly denied membership (although as an assistant I could claim 'associate membership', this sounds like a two-tier discrimination system).

Second e-mail to BHA:

Just to say - I found the exemption they are presumably using (schedule 16). If they are claiming exemption as a 'single characteristic association', then that is damned weasel-esque. There's nothing 'single characteristic' about 'you can be anything except...'. Even if legal, it is... Just a horrible approach to integration. Sigh.

Person 16 (Parent)

I am dismayed to have just read your information about the Scouting Movement which states that they will not admit atheists nor provide an alternative oath which does not refer to god. My seven year old son has recently joined the local Beaver group, which he is really enjoying, and I was somehow under the impression that they would provide an alternative for children who do not which to swear that they will do their duty to god.

Sadly, having just checked on your website, it appears that this isn't the case. My son has been to three meetings so far, but has not yet got a date to be 'invested'. We were given all the paperwork explaining about the promise etc. I went through it with him and when he saw the bit about god he immediately shook his head and said that he didn't want to say that bit. Last week I spoke to the leader about it and she said, 'well, it is a religious organisation, they have to go on church visits and things like that'. She agreed that she would check with her partner who is also a scout leader, but she didn't give me any grounds for optimism.

I have never been keen on the Scouting Movement myself, seeing it as a quasi-militaristic organisation, but we live in a small village so there are limited options for our children to get involved in social activities that aren't entirely sport related. I would far prefer my son to go to Woodcraft Folk, but there's no group nearby and our attempts to set one up a couple of years ago proved overly ambitious. So it now looks like he is going to be put in a horrible position where he either has to swear something which he doesn't believe in or not take part in a group which he enjoys.

Person 17 (Parent)

Hello. Below is an e-mail conversation I have had today with the scouts association. I thought you might like to see it. To be honest its like banging your head against a brick wall.

Original message:

I have a 6 year old son. Last night he went to his first beavers meeting. He enjoyed it and would like to join. The only trouble is that we don't believe in any gods. I don't feel that its fair that after teaching my son the truth about religion, that we should then expect him to go to beavers and announce that he 'loves god'. I have read that the scouting movement is supposed to be 'inclusive and tolerant'. So in light of this, can you tell me if there is a way around this religious indoctrination. Is it possible he could 'Love the World' instead?

Reply from the Scouts:

Our policy states that to be a youth member of The Scout Association, a young person is required to make the Promise. They are also 'encouraged to make every effort to progress in the understanding and observance of the Promise to do their best to do their duty to God' (as detailed in the Religious Policy).

However, Scouting is available to many faiths and therefore the phrase 'to do my duty to God' in the Promise, may mean a belief in a Higher Being that is not linked to Christianity or another main Faith, but may represent the individual's personal understanding and beliefs. However, it does rely on them feeling comfortable with the existence of a Higher Being, even if they do not link this to a particular faith. It is important to say that if a young person is not comfortable making the Promise, they may also struggle with the content of many activities provided by the Association, especially with the spiritual development and faith elements of the programme.

Next message from Person 17:

Basically, what you are saying is that, the scouts is a religious association and is prepared to discriminate against those that don't believe in a god. That doesn't seem very tolerant to me. If I ran a similar organisation and discriminated against people on the basis that if they believe in god they can't be a member, I'm sure there would be an outcry. Is that not the opposite of what the scouts is supposed to be about? How come its ok for an organisation like the scouts do it.

Reply from the Scouts:

I appreciate your comments. If your child is comfortable in making the promise then they will be able to become a member of the Association. If they feel that they cannot make the promise for whatever reason regrettable they will not be able to join as a youth member.