

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA)

www.galha.org

2010 Election Manifesto

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Introduction

Humanism is a broad movement. We make a virtue of the fact that, unlike most religions and ideologies, we lack a defining “text” or document. We seek a society in which no religion or belief system is privileged and where all enjoy freedom of belief and expression, provided that this is not used to threaten or harm others.

Similarly gay men, lesbians bisexual and transgendered people hold a wide range of opinions on the major social and economic issues of the day.

Consequently this “manifesto” touches only on the areas that most affect us as voters with a Humanist outlook on life who happen to be gay.

Education	Questions for Parties and Candidates
<p>In line with mainstream humanist thinking, GALHA believes that, while some maintained schools run by religious groups may offer a good education, the overwhelming balance of argument is against such schools. Key factors include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) We believe that it is wrong in principle for children to be taught that a given religious outlook is superior to other religions or to non religious belief systems. On the contrary, children should be encouraged to form their own views based on the evidence and arguments. (2) Religious schools threaten to increase social divisions by making it less likely that children will mix with children from other cultural backgrounds. (3) Homophobic bullying can be more rife in faith-based schools than in non faith based ones. <p>We also believe that, so long as faith-based schools remain in existence they should not be allowed to discriminate against children on grounds of religion, as this only introduces social selection by the back door.</p>	<p>Do you support the replacement of faith-based schools by ones which do not privilege any particular belief system?</p> <p>Do you agree that, so long as faith-based schools remain, they should not be allowed to discriminate between children based on the children's religion or that of their parents?</p>
<p>While <i>all</i> forms of bullying in schools are intolerable, we believe that certain types of bullying are particularly harmful, because they are more likely to be sustained and repeated. Examples of this included <i>racist</i> and <i>homophobic</i> bullying.</p> <p>All schools should be required to have a comprehensive anti-bullying policy with explicit provision for the most prevalent forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying.</p>	<p>Do you believe that all schools should be required to have a comprehensive anti-bullying policy, which explicitly includes measures to combat homophobic bullying?</p>
<p>We believe that pupils who are LGBT do not always receive full support and advice about sexuality and relationships. All schools should be required to include advice relevant to the LGBT minority.</p>	<p>Do you believe that education should include advice about same-sex relationships?</p>

Equality	Questions for Parties and Candidates
<p>The current Equalities Bill represents an important step forward. However, the concessions made to religious lobbyists, allowing them to discriminate in appointing people whose job function is not primarily a religious one are highly regrettable.</p> <p>While we accept that, for example, religious leaders can be expected to follow the teachings of their sect (allowing for a ban on women Catholic Priest, or gay Anglican bishops or Moslem leaders) it should not be possible for, say, a faith school to turn down a candidate as a geography teacher because he is a humanist, or for a church social group to sack a youth worker who turns out to be gay.</p> <p>This issue is all the more important in view of the way religious groups are seeking ever wider involvement in society, in areas such as education and social provision, employing large numbers of people in what are in essence “secular” roles, with a real danger that we end up creating a theocratic “state within a state”.</p> <p>We call upon parties to amend the Equalities Act to limit exemptions to job functions which involve direct promotion of the religion in question.</p>	<p>Do you believe that religious organisations should be able to dismiss or discriminate against employees or candidates on grounds of sexual orientation or religious affiliation, even for positions which are not directly related to promoting that religion (e.g. youth workers or clerical staff)?</p>

The Constitution	Questions for Parties and Candidates
<p>The modern idea of democracy is not compatible with a situation where any religion enjoys a position of constitutional privilege. Consequently we call for the disestablishment of the Church of England and its associated links and privileges. This includes the implication that the Queen (or any other Head of State) should no longer be head of the church, that Anglican Bishops should no longer automatically be represented in parliament, and that the Crown should play no further role in the appointment of church officials.</p>	<p>Do you favour disestablishment of the Church of England?</p> <p>Do you agree that it is wrong for any religious group to be entitled to privileged representation, as currently with the Anglican bishops in the House of Lords?</p>

The Family	Questions for Parties and Candidates
<p>Marriage has long been an important social institution conferring status, and important rights and responsibilities, which are well understood throughout society.</p> <p>While Civil Partnerships have been an important step in allowing gay couples to exercise similar rights and responsibilities, the creation of separate parallel institutions maintains the sense that gay people are somehow a group “apart” from the rest of society.</p> <p>The division can also create confusion given that Civil Partnerships are not as well understood as marriage. It also raises questions as to whether civil partners really will continue to enjoy the same rights as married couples in future. – (E.g. There is already a debate as to whether they should receive any financial allowances that may be granted to married couples in future).</p> <p>In consequence we believe that civil marriage should be available to same sex couples.</p> <p>GALHA also recognises that there are some couples, both gay and straight, who do not wish to marry but nonetheless wish to give their relationship legal recognition and protection. We therefore see the case for Civil Partnerships remaining as an option and being extended to include heterosexuals.</p>	<p>Do you believe that any new entitlements or responsibilities accorded to married couples (e.g. married tax allowances) should be extended to Civil Partners?</p> <p>Do you support full same-sex marriage?</p>
<p>GALHA understands that parenting can be a joy and a burden that should be available equally to all sections of society.</p> <p>GALHA welcomes the steps taken to facilitate lesbian parenting and believes the potential for lesbian mothers should be further encouraged.</p> <p>GALHA also believes that gay men should also be enabled and encouraged to assume their potential as parents, whether of their own biological children or by adoption.</p>	<p>Do you believe that the Government should look at ways of enabling and encouraging more LGBT people to assume the responsibilities of parenthood?</p>

The EU and Foreign Affairs	Questions for Parties and Candidates
<p>GALHA is concerned that outside of Western Europe and a small number of other countries, LGBT people are subject at best to severe discrimination at worst to persecution (both within and without the law), with penalties including imprisonment and even death, often at the behest of fundamentalist religions.</p> <p>Not only does Britain have a moral duty to help LGBT people in these parts of the world, where possible, but so long as LGBT people face widespread oppression elsewhere their position here will remain precarious.</p> <p>We therefore call upon the next government to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make defence of gay rights an explicit priority in its conduct of international relations, concentrating especially on countries with the worst records • Use every opportunity to lobby for gay rights both in bilateral relations and through international forums such as the Commonwealth and the UN • Guarantee asylum to all people who can show that they are at risk of persecution as a result of their sexual orientation • Use Britain’s membership of the European Union to promote full equality in those member states (and potential members) where LGBT rights are not yet fully recognised. 	<p>Do you believe that promoting and protecting LGBT rights in other countries should be an explicit part of the UK’s foreign policy?</p> <p>Do you believe that Britain should use its influence in international bodies (The EU, The Commonwealth, The UN etc.) to promote and protect LGBT rights?</p> <p>Do you believe that Britain should offer asylum to all those who can show that they are at risk of persecution based on their sexuality?</p>

Health	Questions for Parties and Candidates
<p>We believe that health services and research should take full account of the health of the LGBT people. In particular we are concerned that HIV infection rates remain high among gay men.</p> <p>We believe that the government should devote resources to targeted education about the risks of HIV and what behavioural and social changes are most likely to address these.</p> <p>We believe that the NHS resources currently used to provide hospital chaplains would be better deployed in providing non-religious support for patients or that those positions are open to the non-religious.</p>	<p>What measures do you favour to reduce the incidence of HIV and other infectious diseases?</p>

Assisted Dying	Questions for Parties and Candidates
<p>Despite advances in medical care, too many people still face prolonged physical or mental pain and indignity especially towards the ends of their lives. Indeed the current law actually encourages people to end their lives while they still have the ability to do so, which can result in premature, and even botched attempts.</p> <p>We believe that people with serious medical conditions should be entitled to request and receive assistance in ending their lives, on a purely voluntary basis.</p> <p>We are convinced that based on experience in other countries this can be achieved with suitable safeguards.</p>	<p>Do you broadly favour the right of terminally ill people to be assisted in ending their lives, where they give informed consent and subject to procedural safeguards?</p>

Further information on GALHA’s activities and campaigns is available at www.galha.org