

2017 General Election - Seven questions for humanists

Here are seven suggested questions for you to ask your local candidates, along with points of detail to help you to do so. You could ask these questions at hustings, on the doorstep, or by writing to your candidates directly. You can find a guide for how to raise issues locally after the questions.

'Faith' school admissions

Will you support fully inclusive admissions in English schools, free from discrimination on the basis of religion?

- More than 1.2 million places at state schools are subject to religious selection.
- No other public service is allowed to discriminate on religious grounds.
- Faith-based selection fosters social segregation.
- For the past ten years, new 'faith' schools can only be able to discriminate in the selection of 50% of pupils, but there are now plans to remove this 50% cap.
- We call upon MPs to maintain the 50% cap and support inclusive admissions more broadly.

School assemblies

Will you support ending compulsory daily worship in English schools?

- The law requires 'broadly Christian' daily worship in schools.
- This discriminates against non-Christian pupils, parents, and staff.
- Schools are diverse communities of all faiths and none.
- Inclusive school assemblies would be a more effective way of building shared values.

Humanist marriages

Will you support legal recognition of humanist marriages in England and Wales, as is the case in Scotland?

- The Government has stalled in giving legal recognition to humanist marriages, despite being given the power to do so by the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act 2013.
- In 2015, the number of humanist marriages in Scotland overtook those of the Church of Scotland. Legal recognition was granted there in 2005.
- A consultation on the matter found 90% of respondents in favour of a change in the law.
- We call on MPs to give thousands of non-religious couples in England and Wales the same rights as religious couples, as is already the case in Scotland.

Human Rights

Will you support keeping the Human Rights Act and remaining part of the European Convention on Human Rights?

- The Human Rights Act protects our basic human rights.

- This includes the right to freedom of expression and the right to freedom of religion or belief.
- Repealing the Human Rights Act or pulling out of the European Convention on Human Rights would endanger the basic human rights of millions of people.

Assisted dying

Will you support the right to die for people who are terminally ill or incurably suffering?

- Being able to die, with dignity, in a manner of our own choosing must be understood to be a fundamental human right.
- There are currently several cases in the courts arguing that the prohibition on assisted dying is incompatible with our human rights legislation.
- We would like Parliament to introduce legislation to allow terminally ill and incurably suffering people to have access to a medically assisted death.

Women's sexual and reproductive rights

Will you support the decriminalisation of abortion throughout the UK?

- Unlike most western democracies, the UK treats abortion as a criminal matter.
- In England, Wales, and Scotland, the Abortion Act 1967 creates narrow situations where a woman can have an abortion, but only where two doctors give her permission. No other comparable medical procedure has this requirement. This requirement harms women by making it harder for them to access or delaying abortions, which are safer the earlier they are performed.
- In Northern Ireland, a near-total ban is in place, causing thousands of women to travel abroad to regulate their sexual health, or to attempt to terminate their own pregnancies without medical supervision.
- We're calling upon MPs to bring the UK into the 21st century by taking abortion out of criminal law altogether, repealing provisions from the Offences Against the Person Act 1861.

Bishops in the House of Lords

Will you support ending reserved seats for Church of England bishops in the House of Lords?

- The UK is the only democratic sovereign state in the world with reserved seats for religious representatives.
- 26 Church of England bishops have a big say in shaping our law.
- Privileging one religion is unjustifiable in our diverse and increasingly diverse society.
- The bishops have no special claim to moral or ethical superiority.

Engaging candidates on humanist issues

During an election candidates are keen to meet local people and groups. This offers several opportunities to lobby and engage them on humanist issues.

Visits

In the last few weeks of campaigning before the election, look up if candidates are planning any visits to local groups and centres in your area. These will usually be advertised on their websites and social media. Go along to these visits and put your questions to the candidate. Candidates will also be knocking on doors in the local area to try and drum up support. This is also an opportunity to question them on key humanist issues.

Attend local hustings

Often candidates will participate in local hustings, where they will discuss a range of issues. This is an opportunity to raise humanist concerns which would not normally make the agenda. Check local newspapers and community groups publications to see if a hustings is being organised near you.

Local press

Candidates will be particularly sensitive to matters being raised in the local press (print, online, and broadcast) around election time. This presents a good opportunity to raise humanist issues by, for example, writing to your local paper.

Social media

A lot of candidates will be using Twitter and Facebook to promote their campaigns. Posting about humanist issues will raise the profile of Humanism in the local area and with the candidates. You can also directly tweet candidates to ask them to support humanist causes.

Please note that from the dissolution of parliament until the result of the election is known, no constituency officially has an MP. MPs who are hoping to be re-elected will often keep in touch with their former constituents, although they cannot do this in any official capacity and cannot hold surgeries.

**British Humanist Association
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