

A Humanist Manifesto for the 2010 General Election

Human Rights

We want a society where there is a culture of respect for human rights. Only in such a society can freedom of religion or belief be fully protected in a framework which treats all individuals equally. We want a government that will commit to building such a culture and protecting the Human Rights Act. We want a government that will increase human rights education and help to make human rights a tool in protecting people from oppression and discrimination.

Faith schools

We want state maintained faith schools (effectively 100% publicly funded) to be absorbed into the notionally secular state sector. Faith schools undermine social cohesion, discriminate in admissions and employment (potentially affecting up to 1 in 3 teaching posts) and may teach that a single world view is the correct one, without ever exposing pupils to other world views or philosophies, disregarding children's autonomy and their right to a balanced education. We believe that the interests of neither society nor children are best served by state-sponsored sectarian education.

Equality

We want a society which is based on equality and respect for diversity with robust equality laws against irrelevant discrimination, not least in the context of the 'religion or belief' and 'sexual orientation' equality strands. We want a government that values all individuals and reflects this in policy and legislation and which does not privilege the demands of religious people over the needs and rights of others.

Local Issues

We want a society where all individuals feel empowered as members of a democratic community to influence decisions made about their lives. This can only happen in a society where people are not labelled or divided by their beliefs and where all voluntary and community groups and all volunteers are treated equally. We want a government that will recognise the contribution made by secular and humanist groups within the voluntary and community sector. We want the government not to pay undue attention to religious groups (with Ministers having panels of 'faith advisors') and not to give money as specialist grants for faith groups. We want local authorities not to champion exclusive 'interfaith' work or to privilege religious groups over the rest of the voluntary sector (including secular and humanist groups) in access to policy making.

Ethical Issues

We want a society where issues of ethical policy are debated openly and where decisions made on such issues are based on reason, evidence and shared human values. We want a government that will defend the right of each individual to make decisions about her/his own life. Laws should not be based on religious or other dogmas and individual freedom should not be curtailed where the interests of others are not significantly affected. Thus (for example) assisted dying for mentally competent, terminally ill adults should be legalised and the exemptions allowing ritual slaughter without pre-stunning should be repealed. We also want a government that uses scientific evidence when debating changes to laws regarding abortion and human tissues and uses reason when deciding policy on controversial issues.

Religion and Education

We want the privileges that religious beliefs enjoy in inclusive community schools removed. For example, all state schools are required to provide daily collective worship of 'a broadly Christian character ... concerned with reverence or veneration paid to a divine being'. We want schools to instead provide inclusive assemblies, which focus on shared values. We also want RE to be radically reformed so that it teaches objectively about both religious and non-religious perspectives, such as Humanism.

Constitutional Reform

We want a secular state. By this we mean a state where public institutions are separate from religious institutions and treat all citizens impartially regardless of their religious or non-religious beliefs. This would include, for example, a separation of church and state so that the Head of State was not also Head of the Church of England and an end to Bishops sitting as of right in the House of Lords. We want a government that shares our ideal of an open society.

Public Services

We want a government that will guarantee that people receiving public services are protected under equality and human rights law regardless of who is the service provider. We want public services to remain secular and for any organisation contracted to deliver a service to do so in a manner that respects the rights of all their service users and all their employees. We want a government that will guarantee that all contracted organisations are banned from proselytising and from using loopholes in equality law to discriminate against their employees or their clients or to promote a particular religion or belief.

DOORSTEP QUESTIONS

WE SUGGEST asking parliamentary candidates of all parties, in person or by writing, a selection of these questions as neutrally as possible, to extract answers that will help you to make a rational decision about how to vote. Afterwards, tell the candidate what you thought of the answers - that way you may influence future policy. Please notify Pepper Harow, c/o the BHA, of any interesting responses.

1. Should government departments treat humanist, secular and religious organisations equally in policy making, funding decisions and consultations?
2. Should religious organisations be contracted to deliver public services?
3. What do you think the government's policy should be on faith schools?
4. What do you think about exemptions for religious organisations from aspects of anti-discrimination and equality legislation?
5. Would you vote to retain or remove bishops from the House of Lords?
6. How would you vote on abortion / assisted dying for the terminally ill?
7. Will you defend the Human Rights Act?
8. Do you think dialogue work that doesn't include non-religious people (e.g. 'interfaith' work) is desirable?
9. Do you think that religious leaders should have privileged access to policy and decision makers?
10. Do you think that publicly funded faith schools should be allowed to discriminate in their admissions and employment?

AND HAVE A LOOK AT...

- ✦ Campaigns at www.humanism.org.uk/campaigns for more on these and other issues.
- ✦ <http://cli.gs/r6jeeG> for local statistics on belief.

YOU CAN ALSO...

- ✦ Find out who your MPs are and how to contact them at www.writetothem.com
- ✦ Find out what they have been doing at www.theyworkforyou.com and www.publicwhip.org.uk
- ✦ Write to them at their constituency address or House of Commons, SW1A 0AA
- ✦ Consult and / or contribute to a secular web compilation of MPs' views at www.skeptical-voter.org

ABOUT US...

The British Humanist Association (BHA) is the national charity supporting and representing non-religious people who seek to lead ethical lives without supernatural or superstitious beliefs. Committed to human rights, democracy, equality and mutual respect, the BHA works for an open and inclusive society with freedom of belief and speech, and for an end to the privileged position of religion – the established church in particular – in law, education, broadcasting and wherever else it occurs.



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