Humanists UK

OUR STRATEGY
2021–2025



2021
25





OUR VISION

BY ADVANCING THE HUMANIST APPROACH TO LIFE, WE INSPIRE AND SUPPORT NON-RELIGIOUS PEOPLE TO BE HAPPY, CONFIDENT, AND ETHICAL, AND WE WORK WITH THEM FOR A BETTER SOCIETY



INTRODUCTION

In 2021 we celebrated our 125th anniversary. It was a moment to celebrate and also to contemplate. What started out as a small group of late Victorian ethical radicals grew in the twentieth century to a movement at the forefront of social change, with outsized influence. Our movement was pivotal in so many progressive advances, from women's suffrage, to the introduction of the NHS, to the decriminalisation of abortion and homosexuality. We have also had a transformative effect on UK social life, in particular through the revolution in ceremonies which has seen humanist funerals and weddings surge in popularity and spawn many emulators, even among the religious.

As the twenty-first century rolls on, we live in a very different world from our pioneering forebears. The humanist values of which we were once the controversial proponents are now mainstream for millions of people in the UK. This is cause for optimism and pride but, although much has been gained, there remain many obstacles to progress.

Our most obvious challenge is the persistent strength – and in some ways the rise – of political religion, of cultural conservatism, extreme nationalism, and the many other types of dogma and intolerance that put up barriers to human freedom and choice. Other barriers to our work include the ongoing resistance to equal treatment of humanist points of view in UK public institutions like schools and the BBC. Wider ideas that have underpinned our successes in the past, like the simple notion that human beings have rights, are also facing renewed opposition. Yet these frustrations only give us cause to redouble our efforts.

Our new strategy is consequently one of growth but also of consolidation, building on our many successes in the provision of community services and in other fields like education, but tailoring our campaigns to the need not just to work for a better society but also to defend the gains – not least in equality and human rights – that our efforts and the work of others have brought about in past decades.

It also sets our sights on the future. We have an organisation, in terms of resources and people, that is in the best condition it has been in our long history. Together, we know that we can take on the challenges of the next five years with confidence, fortitude, and every chance of success.



ANDREW COPSON
Chief Executive

STRATEGIC AIM 1

MORE PEOPLE KNOWING WHAT HUMANISM IS AND MORE NON-RELIGIOUS PEOPLE WITH HUMANIST BELIEFS AND VALUES RECOGNISING THEMSELVES AS HUMANISTS

We're committing to an extensive programme of education, public awareness, and dialogue to increase and deepen understanding of the humanist approach to life.



The humanist approach

The humanist approach to life can be found throughout recorded history around the world, and it's the approach to life of many millions of people in the UK today.

What is humanism?

We want more people to recognise the term humanism and to know what a humanist is.

In short, humanists are people who:

- trust to reason and the scientific method when trying to understand how the universe works
- believe we can give meaning to our lives and find happiness in the here and now, accepting this is the one life we have
- make our ethical decisions based on reason and empathy, guided by concern for the welfare and fulfilment of human beings and for other sentient animals
- make a positive contribution to building a better society

Reaching humanists

Most people in the UK don't have any religious beliefs or identity. Opinion polls tell us that nearly a third of people have a humanist approach to life. But only 7% identify as humanists.

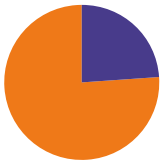
That is still a lot of people – and more than belong to any of the non-Christian religions. But still there is a big gap between the number of people living humanist lives and the number of people who call themselves humanists.

We want to reach and make contact with everyone who shares our approach to life and our new strategy sees a doubling of the financial resources we are putting into this task.



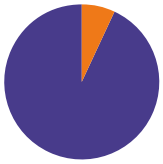
53%

OF THE POPULATION SAY THEY HAVE NO RELIGION



24%

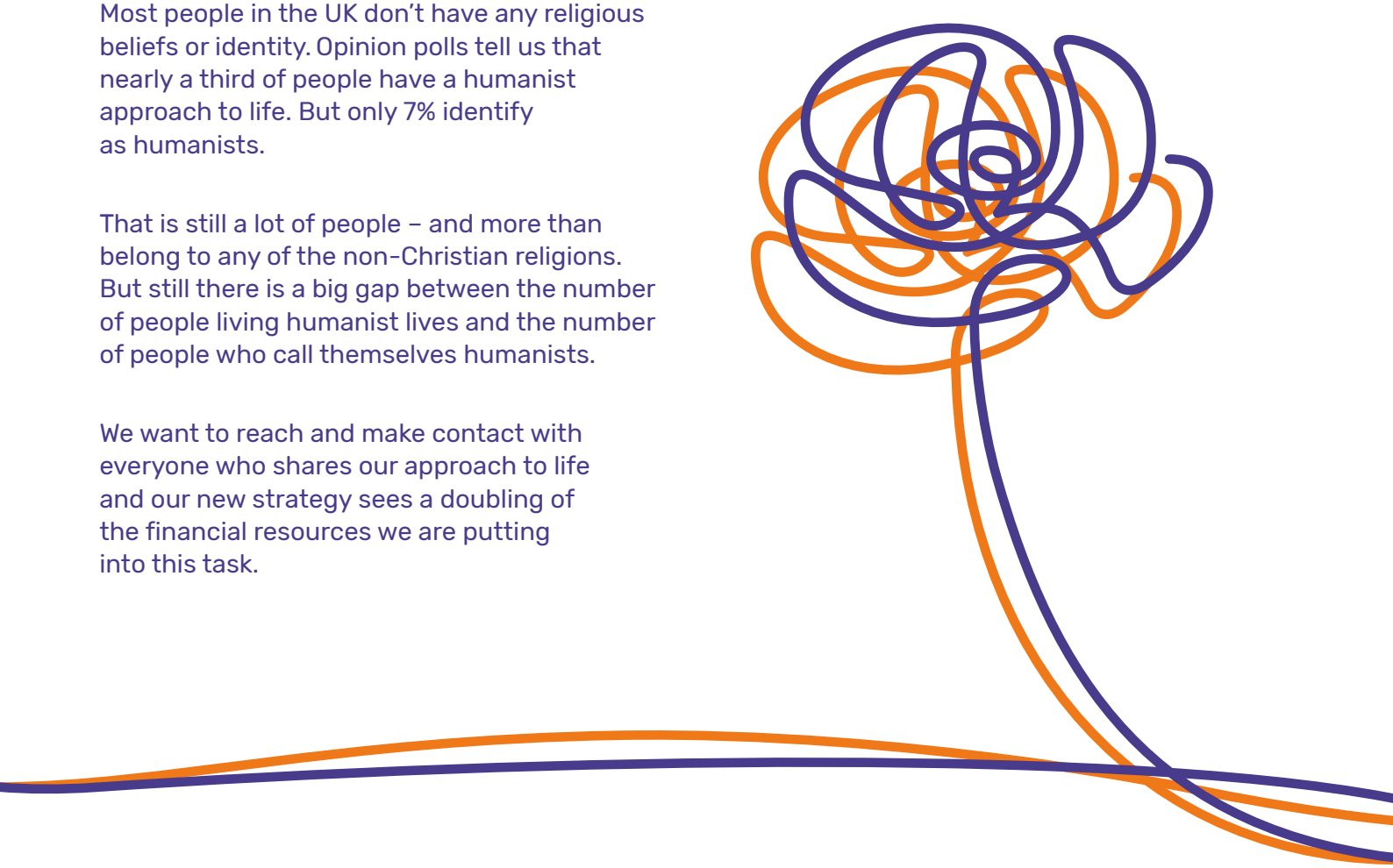
OF THE OVERALL POPULATION – HALF OF THE NON-RELIGIOUS – HAVE HUMANIST BELIEFS AND VALUES



7%

OF THE POPULATION ALREADY CALL THEMSELVES 'HUMANISTS' – THAT'S NEARLY 5 MILLION PEOPLE

Data drawn from YouGov and British Social Attitudes Survey (both 2021).



Understanding Humanism: our work with schools

We've always thought long-term about public understanding of humanism, which is why we provide resources for schools and support for teachers through Understanding Humanism.

We'll be training more speakers from more diverse backgrounds, producing more innovative resources with videos and animations, and increasing our teacher training programme to improve the teaching of humanism in all schools.

Humanist resources for everyone

It's not just children we want to know what humanism is – it's everyone. As the voice for humanism in the UK, we're particularly interested in getting non-religious people with humanist values to consciously encounter humanism for the first time. An approach to life that not only has a name, but a history, and an important role to play in shaping a better society.

Understanding Humanism

HUMANISM FOR EVERYONE

SCHOOL VISITS
In the last five years, **150,000** pupils have had a visit from one of our trained school speakers.

SCHOOL SPEAKERS
Our network of over **220** school visitors help teachers plan and deliver lessons and assemblies on humanism.

LOCAL CURRICULUMS
Nearly **130** humanists sit on local education bodies, assisting councils to draw up inclusive teaching specifications for RE.

SCHOOL RESOURCES
Teachers have downloaded Understanding Humanism resources more than **140,000** times since 2016.

ONLINE COURSES
Our online courses featuring Alice Roberts and Sandi Toksvig have been massively popular, supporting over **20,000** learners since 2018.

PODCAST
Our humanist interview podcast *What I Believe* ranks in the top 1% of podcasts globally, with over **180,000** listeners since 2020.

OUR EVENTS
We've sold over **25,000** tickets to our events since 2016, with our YouTube videos being watched over **3 million** times in the same period.

HUMANIST BOOKS
Our *Little Book of Humanism* and *Little Book of Humanist Weddings* have sold **27,000** copies commercially since 2020.

SOCIAL MEDIA
Across our various platforms, we reach approximately **70 million** people every year.

STRATEGIC AIM 2

MORE NON-RELIGIOUS PEOPLE LIVING HAPPIER, MORE CONFIDENT, AND MORE ETHICAL LIVES

We're committing to help non-religious people get the resources and support they need to be more fulfilled, whether that's ceremonies, pastoral care, a local like-minded community, or new programmes built on humanist thinking about how to lead a happy life.



Our impact

We've worked to improve people's lives since our earliest days. Our very first service, humanist ceremonies, emerged at a time when the non-religious were only a tiny minority.

Our newest services, meanwhile, have been designed for a very different society – one in which 53% of the population say they have 'no religion'.

Under our new strategy, we'll not only provide humanist services directly to non-religious people, but also accessible resources on how to live well, and advice and guidance in difficult situations, and opportunities to connect with like-minded people.

Meeting the needs of today's non-religious

Throughout our history we've evolved to meet the challenges of our time – from adoption services, soup kitchens, and housing associations at a time when non-religious people were excluded from those services, to the specialised support we offer 'apostates' today through Faith to Faithless.

Our support will always go where it's needed most. That's why we're increasing the investment in our support for apostates, including by developing and piloting new means of direct support.

"HUMANISTS UK HAS HELPED CONNECT ME TO SOMETHING BIGGER, SOMETHING REAL: A COMMUNITY OF THOUSANDS OF HUMANISTS ALL WORKING TOWARDS A FAIRER SOCIETY."

HANNAH HART,
HUMANIST CELEBRANT



Humanist Care

Humanist Care is the division of Humanists UK responsible for the work we do to provide direct support to the non-religious. It includes the Non-Religious Pastoral Support Network, which provides accredited personnel in hospitals, prisons, and the armed forces, as well as Faith to Faithless, and our ongoing casework for non-religious asylum seekers.

Humanist Ceremonies

Our network of trained and accredited humanist celebrants create and conduct a range of ceremonies to mark life's key milestones including weddings, vow renewals, funerals, and naming ceremonies. Every single ceremony is unique, hand-crafted to the needs, wants, and specifications of the people who work with our celebrants to mark life's most memorable occasions.

Our weddings, funerals, and naming ceremonies attract an average feedback score of 4.8/5. We will be stepping up our marketing efforts so more non-religious people can benefit from our high-quality ceremonies.

Humanist Ceremonies

Pastoral support

In 2015 we introduced a new programme of accreditation for humanist carers through our Non-Religious Pastoral Support Network, providing pastoral support to the non-religious. We now have our accredited carers in 20% of prisons and 40% of NHS trusts.

We will expand this provision to provide teams of humanist pastoral carers in every NHS trust and prison and in new settings like the armed forces.

Non-Religious Pastoral Support Network



SAFEGUARDING TRAINING

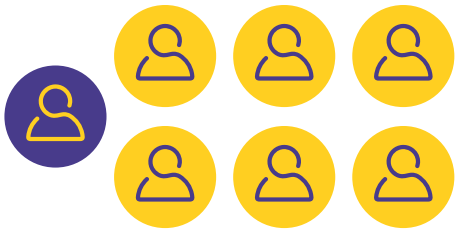
Between 2019 and 2021, we trained 293 frontline service workers in apostasy safeguarding, including NHS, social services, police, NGO, and crisis line workers.

Faith to Faithless

Support for 'apostates'

A growing number of people who leave high-control religions experience enormous isolation, abuse, and emotional trauma. Our service Faith to Faithless provides peer support and social gatherings for so-called 'apostates', as well as direct help and signposting through email and instant messenger, and training for frontline service workers.

This work helps thousands of apostates to reconcile with their beliefs and live happier, more confident lives. Dozens of the humanists we've supported have later gone on to train with us and provide apostate support themselves. In our new strategy we are doubling the financial resources we are putting into supporting apostates and piloting new ways of providing that support.



ONE IN SEVEN PEOPLE NOW SAY THEY WANT A HUMANIST FUNERAL WHEN THEY DIE.

YOUGOV, 2016

Humanist communities

The events we organise aren't just about promoting humanism – they're one of the ways we work to bring people together. In our new strategy we will be investing more in local organisation, to support local humanist communities in towns, cities, and villages. We will also be increasing our support for Young Humanists (our youth section), Humanist Students, LGBT Humanists, and Defence Humanists (to name just a few). Members can also participate in networks like Humanist Teachers, Humanist Lawyers, and Humanist Climate Action.

Our humanist groups and sections aren't just for their members. They also organise activities, such as humanist remembrance services, which have a wide footprint in their communities.

Humanist self-help

Over our history, we've sporadically published guides and texts from experts in philosophy and psychology on how to live a better life, making use of ideas from humanist philosophy and humanistic psychology – and our recent review has found there is an aching demand for more of this sort of resource.

In the next five years we will expand this range of materials. We'll be providing published guides and online resources and tools – all accessible, evidence -based, grounded in reality – to help people think for themselves about their lives. We aim to support people to navigate not only life's big questions, but some of its smaller hurdles too.

Asylum support

Since 2016 we have also introduced asylum support services, working with those seeking refuge in the UK from persecution for their non-religious beliefs. We've handled over 60 cases since the service began, with 30 applications for asylum approved and the rest still ongoing. This work comprises a small but crucial aspect of what we will do to secure the safety and wellbeing of non-religious people in the UK.

We've supported humanists from countries like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Mauritania, and Nigeria where humanists face assault, murder, persecution, and even state execution.



STRATEGIC AIM 3

MORE PEOPLE ENJOYING GREATER FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, OF EXPRESSION, AND OF CHOICE OVER THEIR OWN LIVES

We've always been a movement for social progress. Our new strategy focuses on the ideas we want to flourish in law and policy, the specific policies we work to advance, and the campaigns we run to build a better world in the here and now.



A tolerant world where rational thinking and kindness prevail

Too many people in the UK and the world are still constrained in their freedom and their choices by religion, tradition, discrimination, or outmoded laws.

Our members and supporters provide our mandate to advocate for real social, political, and legal change. Our public affairs work aims to influence popular opinion, policy, legislation, and case law to defend and advance freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief; freedom of expression; and freedom of choice. These freedoms should only ever be limited in the interests of the rights and freedoms of others in a fair and equitable society.

HOW WE CREATE CHANGE



Through the courts

We work with humanist claimants to champion human rights, challenging discriminatory laws and policies.



Through politics

We engage elected representatives and public officials, encouraging leaders to act in the interests of fairness and on the basis of evidence.



Through public opinion

We publish hard-hitting reports exploring our issues, and champion the humanist view of society through mainstream and social media.

All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group

All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group

Our work in the UK Parliament is supported by over 110 MPs and peers who are members of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group. We have similar networks in the other parliaments and assemblies, too, as well as a network of humanist councillors across the UK.

Patrons and influencers

Our policies and campaigns are given a high public profile by the support of our 190+ highly respected patrons, including the likes of Stephen Fry, Sandi Toksvig, and Jim Al-Khalili.

LASTING CHANGE FOR A FAIRER SOCIETY:
ACTIVE CAMPAIGNS

We have selected six strategically important active campaigns based on their significance to humanists, their social impact, and our prospects for success in the current environment. They reflect areas of public debate where a rational, humanist influence is sorely needed, and where we know we'll have the biggest impact.

Outside of these six campaigns, we keep a close eye across over 20 key areas of policy – ready to leap into action to defend freedom of thought, choice, and expression, or to stand for the rights of the non-religious.



1 Legal recognition for humanist marriage across the UK

In Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the Channel Islands, legal humanist weddings are not just a reality but an enormously popular choice for couples. In England and Wales, they are still not legally recognised.

In 2013 Parliament gave the Government the power to do so but ministers have repeatedly dodged calls to enact this provision over several years.

2 Campaigning to reduce the proportion of children at religious schools who face religious selection

Since 2002, when the expansion of state religious schools began in England, we have led the campaign for the inclusive alternative. We want a halt to the expansion and to see an end to schools selecting pupils on religious grounds or teaching a religiously skewed curriculum. The majority of parents agree with us.

In the next five years, we will work through the courts and through government, nationally and locally, for a future of more inclusive schools.

3 Balanced approaches to religions and worldviews in schools

In Wales, we recently won a great advance when the Senedd changed the law to replace RE with 'Religion, Values, and Ethics', and made it clear in the new law that humanism had to be taught about. In 2015 we won a similar victory in court in England.

In the next five years we will work to have that ruling implemented in curriculums across the UK, giving all children a broader and more balanced education.

4 Increased UK support for persecuted humanists abroad

The climate for humanists around the world is one of increasing discrimination and persecution. The UK Government has said that it wants to promote freedom of religion or belief for minorities across the globe. We will be working to make sure that includes humanists.

We will strengthen our existing positive relationship with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and work with Humanists International to make sure that the UK is a strong advocate and a safe haven for persecuted humanists.

5 Legal assisted dying in England and Wales

For over a century we have supported assisted dying for adults of sound mind who suffer from terminal or incurable illnesses. In the last few decades public and medical opinion has shifted radically in favour of our position. In 2021 there is almost no moral issue which unites society as much as support for assisted dying.

We will continue building public and political support for legislative reform, and seek legislation or an inquiry into the law – making sure that the voices of those incurably suffering are put at the forefront of our national debate.

6 Abolishing blasphemy laws in Northern Ireland

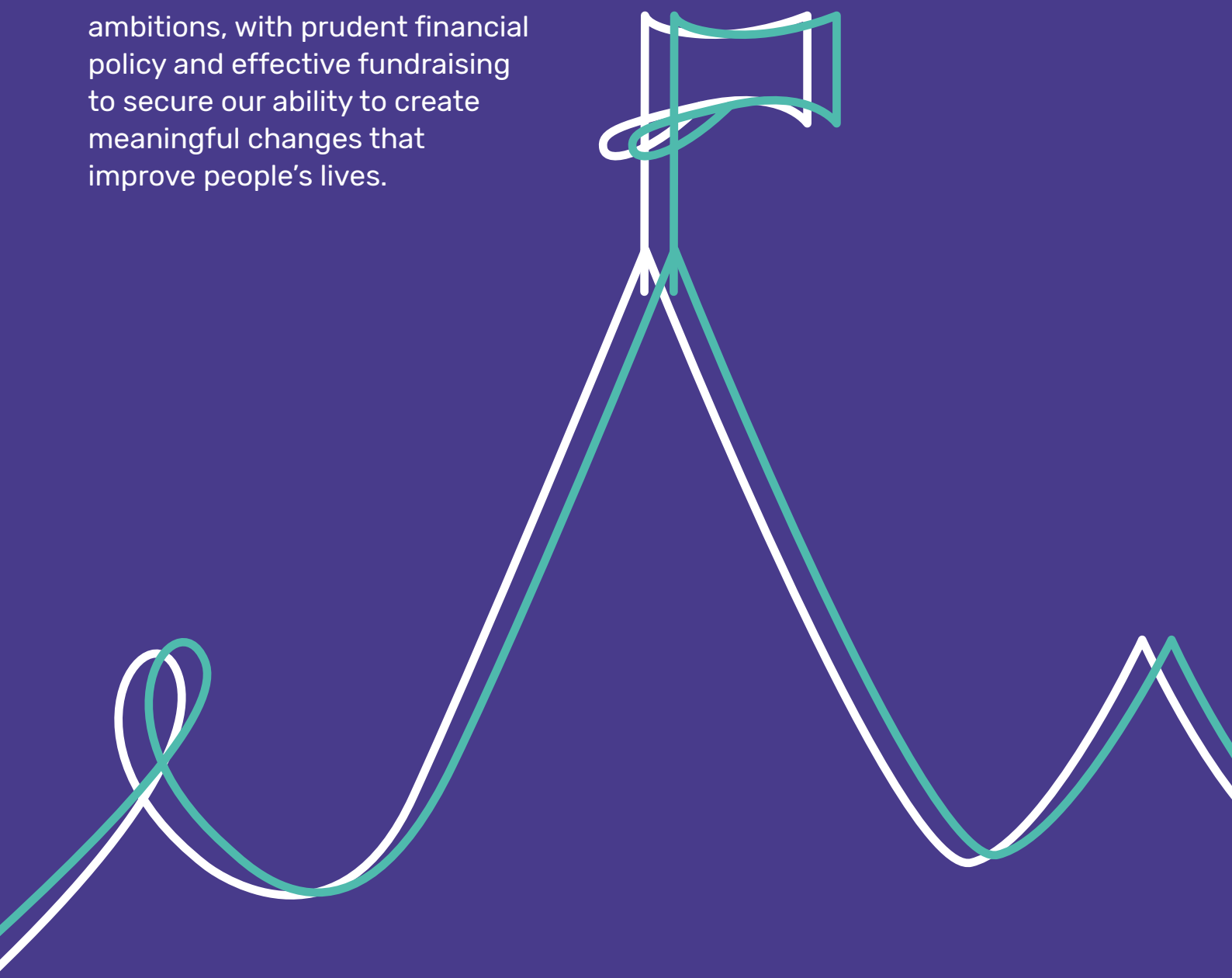
We supported our sister organisation in Scotland in getting the Scots blasphemy law abolished in 2021. Following this and the abolition of blasphemy laws in England and Wales in 2008, Northern Ireland is now the last part of the UK with laws forbidding 'blasphemy'. As part of the global campaign against blasphemy laws, we've now focused our attention here.

We have already built up significant support among Northern Ireland parties and politicians in the last few years and will work to turn this into legal change.

OUR ORGANISATION

A GROWING MOVEMENT AT THE FOREFRONT OF SOCIAL CHANGE

We want always to be a vibrant, growing community with high standards and bold but realistic ambitions, with prudent financial policy and effective fundraising to secure our ability to create meaningful changes that improve people's lives.



We have big ambitions for our work and for society. Achieving these means having big ambitions for ourselves as an organisation, too.

Our people

Since 2016, our number of members and supporters has more than doubled, from 45,000 to over 100,000. We're going to maintain that growth, reaching out in new ways to everyone who shares our aims and our approach to life.

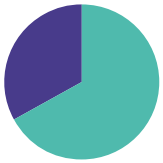
Since 2016, the number of people working under our banner as employees, volunteers, celebrants, or pastoral carers has doubled from just under 500 to just under 1,000. We are going to increase that engagement still further, and find new ways for our supporters to get involved in all of our diverse work, as activists, advocates, volunteers, and service providers.

We also want to increase our diversity by making sure that we appeal to humanists whatever their cultural background or ethnic identity. 5% of non-religious people have a black or other minority ethnic identity, and while this is true for 7% of our personnel, only 3% of our celebrants do. We will take initiatives to increase these proportions and gather more data to help us better represent the non-religious in all their diversity.

Our resources

Unlike many religious organisations which have huge historic wealth, or service-providing charities that have contracts for their work, all of our projects and programmes are funded by individual supporters.

Since 2016 our donation income has grown from £1.6 million to just over £3 million. We know we can't take future growth for granted in uncertain times, but we aim to keep increasing the income we can spend on our activities.



67%

WE HAVE AN APPROVAL RATE OF 67% AMONG THE NON-RELIGIOUS. WE INTEND TO MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE UPON THIS.



3m

SINCE 2016 OUR INCOME HAS GROWN FROM £1.6 MILLION TO JUST OVER £3 MILLION.

Our reputation

We have an approval rate of 67% among non-religious people in Britain. We want to build on that to make sure that we remain trusted and gain new audiences as well.

Many of the causes we pursue are controversial and we don't shy away from that, but we also know that people sometimes misrepresent or don't understand our work. We will invest more time in dialogue, and stay true to our values by always asking ourselves whether we are acting with integrity and respect.

We have a proud history to live up to as one of the oldest and most active organisations campaigning for racial equality, LGBT rights, women's rights, and children's rights. We will never rest on our laurels, and we will continue to learn from our achievements (and our mistakes), putting humanist values into action as we strive to be an inclusive, accessible, and diverse organisation.

"I WOULD LIKE TO THANK YOU AND YOUR STAFF SO MUCH FOR ALL THE HARD WORK AND TIMELY ADVICE AND COOPERATION IN MAKING MY CASE SUCCESSFUL. I KNOW IT COULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED WITHOUT YOU. WHAT WAS PROBABLY THE MOST STRESSFUL SITUATION TO DEAL WITH WAS MADE SO MUCH EASIER WITH ALL YOUR TIME, PATIENCE, AND POSITIVE ATTITUDE." Bangladeshi humanist asylum claimant

OUR VALUES

IN ALL OUR WORK, WE STRIVE TO EMBODY OUR VALUES BY:



- engaging in dialogue and debate rationally, intelligently, and with evidence
- recognising the dignity of individuals and treating them with fairness and respect
- respecting and promoting freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law
- taking opportunities to combat all forms of prejudice and unfair discrimination
- cooperating with others for the common good, including those of different beliefs
- celebrating human achievement, progress, and potential
- accepting that human beings are part of a wider natural world which must be treated sustainably for the sake of current and future generations

Our values are not just a plank of our strategy, but form part of the code of conduct for all our personnel, including those providing services to the public.



We want to form positive relationships with all those who share our values and aims, including public bodies, other charities, news outlets, and NGOs.

We have positive engagement with national and devolved governments, and want to deepen those relationships. Wherever possible, we'll try to make sure our community is making a real contribution towards national and international efforts for a better world.

“I WAS A HUMANIST WITHOUT KNOWING IT FOR MANY YEARS BEFORE I FOUND HUMANISTS UK – WHEN I DID, IT WAS SORT OF LIKE FINDING A HOME.”

CLAIRE RAYNER, FORMER PRESIDENT



Chief Executive Andrew Copson

Chair Tamar Ghosh

Vice Chair Ann O’Connell

Treasurer John Adams

President Professor Alice Roberts

Vice Presidents Professor AC Grayling,
Professor Jim Al-Khalili,
Shaparak Khorsandi,
Polly Toynbee

“I’M A HUMANIST BECAUSE I WANT TO CHANGE THE WORLD.”

SANDI TOKSVIG

Contact us

Humanists UK
39 Moreland Street
London EC1V 8BB

humanists.uk

info@humanists.uk

Humanists_UK
Humanists UK
Humanists_UK
Humanists_UK

This document was first published in March 2022

Humanists UK is the operating name of the British Humanist Association.
We are a charitable company (no. 228781), formed in 1896 and incorporated in 1928, and registered in England and Wales.
Our governing document is our Articles of Association.

Humanists UK