

# HUMANISTS UK POLLING ON PASTORAL CARE IN THE UK



Humanists UK commissioned YouGov to poll 4,000 British adults to explore their views about chaplaincy and pastoral support, with responses cross tabulated by religion or belief. It appears that this is the first ever polling done on the question.

In what follows, the questions that were asked and their responses are indented, followed by an analysis.

## Perceptions of the Religious Identity of Chaplains

For the following question, please imagine someone said to you they were a 'chaplain'.

Which, if any, of the following types of people would you think this person could be? (Please select all that apply)

Answer	Percentage of Respondents
Christian	83%
Muslim	5%
Jewish	6%
Buddhist	4%
Hindu	5%
Sikh	4%
A person belonging to another religion	7%
A non-religious person	5%
None of these	2%
Don't know	9%

\* Total for all answering with a non-Christian religious person – 10%

When Humanists UK was first considering its role in pastoral support, a formative question that it found it had to answer was about terminology: would it choose to use the term 'humanist chaplain', as some humanist groups have done in other countries, or would it reject the term due to concerns about what people understand 'chaplain' to mean? On the one hand, the former approach would certainly have removed a barrier in helping the now Non-Religious Pastoral Support Network working with the national chaplaincy groups, as terminology has proved an issue there. On the other hand, it

might have introduced a different barrier, and hindered the ability of humanists to work effectively with patients.

Feedback Humanists UK received from stakeholders during the early stages of the pastoral support initiative's development suggested that rejecting the term 'humanist chaplain' was the appropriate path to take. This poll appears to support that decision. The overwhelming majority of people understand the term to be exclusively Christian; and although many non-Christian religious groups have chosen to adopt it for their own use in recent years, most members of the public have not understood the term as potentially applying to those groups. Comparison of the results shows this holds true across the English regions, Scotland, and Wales. So not only can we see, again from the cross tabulation, that just 8% of the non-religious believe a non-religious person can be a chaplain – we also see that actual adoption of the term would not change this.

What is even more interesting is that this Christian-only understanding is essentially a consensual one amongst those of all religions and beliefs, with even the non-Christian religious taking this view. While 82% associate the term 'chaplain' with Christianity, just 24% associate it with any non-Christian religion, and there are no more members of each non-Christian religion associating the term with their own worldview than with any other non-Christian religion. This suggests that non-Christian religious groups should reconsider using the term.

## **Uptake of Chaplaincy services**

**For the following questions, by 'pastoral support', we mean professional emotional and moral support provided at difficult times.**

**Currently hospitals, prisons and universities have chaplains working at them to provide pastoral support to patients, prisoners, students, staff and their families. These chaplains are all religious and most are Christian. At some of these institutions anyone can access this support, whilst at others, support is only offered to people who belong to the same religion as them.**

**Have you ever personally made use of the support offered by chaplains in a hospital, prison, or university? (If you have never been in, worked in, or visited someone in one of these institutions, please select the 'Not applicable' option)**

Yes, I have – 9%. No, I haven't – 62%. Don't know/can't recall – 2%. Prefer not to say – 1%. Not applicable – I have never been in, worked in, or visited someone in one of these institutions – 26%.

Most people have not used chaplains, but the interesting findings here come again from the comparison. 14% of Christians and 11% of those of other religions have used a chaplain, but just 4% of the non-religious have – with the difference relating entirely to individuals who have been to such an institution but not used the services.

This finding is significant because sometimes chaplaincy groups claim that so-called 'generic' chaplains are capable of catering equally to those of religions other than their own, or specifically to the non-religious in addition to the religious. The evidence shows

that this is not the case: Christians are three and a half times more likely to have used a chaplain as the non-religious. This supports at a national level the research done by David Savage in 2015 on usage of chaplaincy services within Guy's and St Thomas's NHS Foundation Trust. It does not ascribe a cause to this: is it because chaplains cannot adequately cater to the non-religious, or is it because the non-religious do not give them the chance? This could be an avenue for interesting further research, but in a sense it doesn't matter, as either way the conclusion is clear: the way to ensure adequate pastoral support is provided for the non-religious is to ensure there are non-religious pastoral support workers available.

## **Views on the need for Non-Religious Pastoral Support providers**

**As mentioned in the previous question, some chaplains only offer their support to people who belong to the same religion as them. Some prisons, hospitals and universities are now introducing trained non-religious pastoral support providers who can give the same help to non-religious people as these chaplains give to religious people.**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?**

**'Prisons, hospitals and universities which have chaplains should also have a dedicated non-religious pastoral support provider as well'**

Strongly agree – 26%. Tend to agree – 43%. Tend to disagree – 8%. Strongly disagree – 4%. Don't know – 20%.

There is strong support – 69% to 12% – for the introduction of non-religious pastoral support. And this is true amongst those of all religions and beliefs. Christians agree by 66% to 16%, the non-Christian religious by the same figures, and the non-religious themselves by 73% to 8%. It seems clear that those working in the chaplaincy industry who take a contrary view are failing to represent others who belong to the same religion.

## **Willingness to use a Chaplaincy or a Non-Religious Pastoral Support service**

**As a reminder, some prisons, hospitals and universities are now introducing trained non-religious pastoral support providers who can give the same help to non-religious people as chaplains give to religious people. Please imagine you were either in or visiting someone at a hospital, prison, or university and there was both a chaplaincy service and a non-religious pastoral support service available...**

**If you felt unhappy, distressed or concerned, how likely or unlikely do you think you would be to access support from each of the following? (Please select one option on each row)**

**- A chaplain**

Very likely – 12%. Fairly likely – 24%. Fairly unlikely – 21%. Very unlikely – 28%. Don't know – 15%.

### **- A non-religious pastoral support provider**

Very likely – 10%. Fairly likely – 31%. Fairly unlikely – 21%. Very unlikely – 20%.  
Don't know – 15%.

Interestingly, overall, people are slightly more favourably disposed to seeing a non-religious pastoral support worker than a religious chaplain. 42% (rounded) are likely to see the former, compared to 42% (rounded) unlikely; on the other hand, 36% say they are likely to see the latter, compared to 49% unlikely.

This is, unsurprisingly, particularly true amongst the non-religious. 14% are likely versus 73% unlikely to see a chaplain; while 45% are likely versus 40% unlikely to see a pastoral support worker.

In addition, it appears from the data that religious people would be more willing to see a non-religious pastoral support worker than non-religious people are to see a chaplain. Those of non-Christian religions are essentially equally willing to see either.

Amongst Christians, 39% are likely versus 45% unlikely to see a non-religious pastoral support worker, while 57% are likely versus 29% unlikely to see a religious chaplain. Amongst the non-Christian religious, 46% are likely versus 36% unlikely to see a non-religious pastoral support worker, while 48% are likely versus 38% unlikely to see a religious chaplain.

If one were being provocative, one could almost argue that those advocating 'generic' chaplaincy as the way forward to defend the Christian status quo, should be cautious about doing so. To the extent to which there is support for 'generic' provision, it is much more for that generic provision to be non-religious pastoral support, rather than religious chaplaincy! But, in reality, what the data supports is neither.

### **Polling data**

The polling data can be found at

<https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Results-for-Humanists-UK-Chaplains-313-01.8.2016.xlsx>