

MHCLG INDEPENDENT FAITH ENGAGEMENT REVIEW: CALL FOR EVIDENCE



Response from Humanists UK, December 2020

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ABOUT HUMANISTS UK

At Humanists UK, we want a tolerant world where rational thinking and kindness prevail. We work to support lasting change for a better society, championing ideas for the one life we have. Since 1896, our work has been helping people be happier and more fulfilled. By bringing non-religious people together we help them develop their own views and an understanding of the world around them. Together with our partners Humanist Society Scotland, we speak for 100,000 members and supporters and over 100 members of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group. Through our ceremonies, pastoral support, education services, and campaigning work, we advance free thinking and freedom of choice so everyone can live in a fair and equal society.

We are submitting this response in consultation with our relevant programme and sections, and include detail about them below.

The Non-Religious Pastoral Support Network (NRPSN) was founded in 2016 to provide high-quality pastoral, spiritual, and specific non-religious care in the NHS, HMPPS, and the Armed Forces to non-religious people experiencing challenging life circumstances. To this end it has trained and accredited a network of over 300 pastoral carers who are operating both in a voluntary capacity across these three services, and in paid positions within NHS Chaplaincy and Pastoral Support teams. Membership of the NRPSN is open to all those who hold a non-religious worldview that is consistent with and worthy of respect in a democratic society. To date we have 22 pastoral carers operating or awaiting CTC clearance in 20% of prisons across England and Wales. Similarly, there are now nine non-religious pastoral carers employed in ten posts by NHS trusts, with a staff member or volunteer in over 40% of trusts – a number that is growing at a rate of about 10 percentage points a year. The NRPSN is ready to expand its non-religious pastoral support to the Armed Forces, and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) is considering this.

Defence Humanists is a growing body of service people, their families, veterans, and civilian members of the MoD who seek to represent the interests of all those who subscribe to



non-religious beliefs. Defence Humanists currently has more than 500 members and supporters. This is larger than the number of both Jewish and Sikh personnel. It is supported by a committee composed of serving personnel from each of the Armed Forces including reservists and the civil service. Defence Humanists is a section of Humanists UK, while its sister body, the Defence Humanist Network, is the network of service people recognised within the MoD. Defence Humanists organises events and community activities for its members and leads Humanists UK's participation in Remembrance Day events and similar activities around the UK. It aspires to work with the MoD to ensure provision of non-religious pastoral care in the Armed Forces.

Faith to Faithless is a programme of Humanists UK which works to support, and raise awareness of the issues faced by, those who leave high-control religious groups or cults. Deciding to leave a religion can often mean rejection from your family and community, with little understanding of where to turn next. 'Apostates', as these people are sometimes called, may end up homeless, isolated, and at risk of abuse. Faith to Faithless provides an apostate support programme through facilitated peer support groups and other 'meet-ups', provides a platform for apostate voices to be heard, and raise awareness of the issues they face, and trains statutory and support organisations like the police, social services, and mental health organisations to better understand the issues apostates face, and the sorts of policy and practice implications this might have for them.



CONTEXT: RELIGION OR BELIEF IN THE UK

Overall demographics

The British Social Attitudes survey (BSA) records that the majority (52%) of adults say they belong to no religion. This trend is rapidly increasing, having increased from 43% over the last decade. Just 12% now say they are Anglicans, 7% Catholics, 19% other Christians, and 9% other religions. Since 1983 there has been a dramatic decline in the number of Christians, particularly Anglicans, and a significant rise in those belonging to no religion.¹

There are several different ways of measuring the religiosity of the population, one of which is belonging. Other ways include practices/behaviour, beliefs, and views on public policy matters.

As well as belonging, over the last two decades BSA has analysed behaviour and belief.² Further key findings include:

- Extent of religious feeling: just 7% say they are very or extremely religious, with 23% saying they are somewhat religious. Conversely, 34% say they are very or extremely non-religious, with 11% saying they are somewhat non-religious. 19% say they are neither.
- Tolerance of difference: some 90% of the population would say they would accept a person from a different religion or with a very different religious view from their own marrying a relative of theirs, with just 10% saying the opposite. Interestingly, those with no religion are much more accepting than the religious. 91% of the non-religious would accept this, with 50% definitely accepting; while 87% of the religious would accept this, but with just 36% definitely accepting. The public also perceives this to be the case: 70% think 'People with very strong religious beliefs are often too intolerant of others', with just 11% disagreeing. The non-religious are more likely to think that than the religious.
- Generational demographics: research suggests religious decline in Britain is generational. The report quotes Voas and Chaves³ who found that two religious parents have a roughly 50% chance of passing on their faith to their children. One religious parent has a 25% chance of passing on the faith, whereas non-religious children almost invariably inherit their parents' lack of affiliation.
- Behaviour: a large majority of people (66%) say they never attend religious services, apart from special occasions such as weddings, funerals, and baptisms. Around 11% of the population claim to attend weekly religious services – although it should be noted that actual recorded attendance is somewhat lower than this; and only half (49%) of people claim to pray (compared to 56% in 2008 and 67% in 1998).

¹ 'Latest British Social Attitudes survey shows continuing rise of the non-religious', Humanists UK, 2019: <https://humanism.org.uk/2019/07/11/latest-british-social-attitudes-survey-shows-continuing-rise-of-the-non-religious/>

² NatCen, 'Religion, Identity, behaviour and belief over two decades'. *British Social Attitudes Survey No. 36*: https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39293/1_bsa36_religion.pdf

³ Voas, D. and Chaves, M. (2016), 'Is the United States a counterexample to the secularization thesis?', *American Journal of Sociology*, 121: 1517–1556



- Concerns and distrust: Almost two-thirds (63%) believe religions bring more conflict than peace. Just 11% have complete or a great deal of confidence in religious organisations, with 49% having very little or no confidence at all. Around a third (35%) feel religious organisations have 'too much power' or 'far too much power,' an increase of 5% since 2008. 79% say religious leaders should not try to influence how people vote in elections, an increase by 4% since 2008. It was also found in 2008 that 71% think religious leaders should not try to influence government decisions, with only 15% thinking the opposite. And 54% said Britain is deeply divided along religious lines, with 17% saying the opposite.

Furthermore, each year Humanists UK commissions YouGov to poll the public on where their morality and ethics come from, and whether they look to science or faith to understand the universe. In November 2020, the results found that:

- Just 10% say 'Faith is needed for a complete understanding of the universe', as opposed to just relying on science and evidence (67%);
- Just 18% say 'What is right and wrong is unchanging, whatever the circumstances', as opposed to saying it 'depends on the effects on people and the consequences for society and the world' (62%);
- Just 8% say 'People need religious teachings in order to understand what is right and wrong', as opposed to 'Our empathy and compassion give us an understanding of what is right and wrong' (73%).⁴

Other surveys further show:

- Belief in religious tenets: a 2013 YouGov survey found that just 27% of the population believe that Jesus Christ was the son of God, just 26% believe in the Biblical account of the crucifixion, just 22% believe in the devil, and just 33% believe in life after death.⁵
- The Ipsos MORI Veracity Index 2020 found that little over half of respondents (54%) trusted the clergy to tell the truth, a drop of nine percentage points in the past year alone, and 29 percentage points since 1983.⁶
- Other research shows that religion is not a very important factor in most people's day-to-day lives, or their decision-making. For example, a 2010 YouGov survey asked parents to pick the three factors that are/were 'important to you when choosing which school to send your child/ children to'. Of the eleven given options, only 9% picked religion.⁷ (This stands in stark contrast to a third of state-funded schools being religious.)
- Finally, it seems to us to invariably be the case that on key public policy debates involving religion or belief, where our position is at odds with most of the large religious organisations,

⁴ Polling carried out by YouGov for Humanists UK on 23-24 November 2020. Sample size 2,000.

⁵ YouGov. Survey results. 2013:

http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/3s35pyaa5c/YG-Archive-131125-Prospects.pdf

⁶ 'Public trust in the clergy has dramatically decreased in recent years, survey finds', 2020, *Church Times*:
<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/4-december/news/uk/public-trust-in-the-clergy-has-dramatically-decreased-in-recent-years-survey-finds>

⁷ YouGov / Daybreak Survey Results, 13 September 2010:

http://cdn.yougov.com/today_uk_import/YGArchives-Life-YouGov-DaybreakReligion-130910.pdf



most people, including most religious people, share our position. This is true on issues ranging from faith schools to collective worship to bishops in the House of Lords, to key ethical debates such as on assisted dying. We will explore this over our following answers.

Humanism

Humanism is different from the major religions in being a descriptive label for a set of beliefs that have existed throughout history and across the world. Often when people come to self-identify as a humanist they say they have 'discovered' a term that has long applied to them. This doesn't happen with religions but is more akin to finding out about the term 'homo sapiens', for example.

A 2019 Humanists UK-commissioned YouGov poll of British adults found that around 7% of the population primarily uses the term 'humanist' to describe their non-religious worldview. But around 29% of the population has a non-religious outlook on life that matches the humanist one and furthermore, 17% of respondents self-define as humanist when this fact is pointed out to them.⁸

⁸ Polling carried out by YouGov for Humanists UK on 6-7 November 2019. Sample size 2,000.



CONCERN ABOUT THE SURVEY QUESTIONS

We are concerned about the way in which this survey has been constructed, in particular its typically exclusive focus on faith, and question order and appearance, all of which make it difficult for us and our members to know how to respond.

It is unclear if the consultation is about how the Government engages with religious groups or how it engages with religious groups and humanists. The webpage description for the consultation says: 'how best the government should engage with faith groups in England' and 'Because the review is specifically about faith and religion, priority will be given to responses that fit within those parameters'.⁹ However, some questions are inclusive and refer to 'belief' alongside 'faith'. Aside from the fact that this makes it unclear as to whether the survey is trying to capture answers that are inclusive of humanism, and all the problems this creates for us and our members in knowing to respond to this, it also has a chilling effect on the likelihood of non-religious people responding. Many will feel switched off by the exclusive language and potentially subject content too. Further, most questions are phrased in an uninclusive manner, often only referring only to 'faith'. As stated above, this may or may not be deliberate depending on the aim of the consultation, however we fear that this uncertainty will have a large impact on the likelihood for non-religious responses and therefore we hold concerns about any conclusions drawn from the review. An example of this is the question 'During the Covid-19 pandemic are you aware of a faith organisation or religious community which has supported your neighbourhood through running a community project or offering support?'

There is no clear way to assess how many non-religious people may have clicked on or started the consultation and decided it is not for them, however, having asked our members to respond, we received many emails expressing concern about the questions and language used throughout, and also asked how the survey was publicised to ensure it captured a breadth of views across the religion or belief spectrum.

Finally, the logistics of navigating the online survey mean that some questions only appear if respondents answer an earlier question. While this makes sense in some places (for example that only those with experience of the military respond to the military chaplaincy question), in others it is perplexing.

For example, this question:

'Do you believe local councils and local public services like schools, the NHS and emergency services look for, and take opportunities to create, productive partnerships with local faith organisations?'

is only available if the previous unrelated question,

⁹ Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government. 'Independent Faith Engagement Review: call for evidence'. 2020:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/independent-faith-engagement-review-call-for-evidence>



‘Could the Charity Commission do more to support registered faith charities?’

is responded to with either ‘yes’, ‘no’, or ‘don’t know’. However, respondents are not forced to respond to the Charity Commission question which means that they press ‘next’ to go to the next section of questions without ever being aware of further questions. This means that many questions will have been missed by respondents who were not aware they were skipping questions.

With the above in mind, we urge that the final report of the Faith Engagement Review report must be fully inclusive of the non-religious in its language and in its content, including its recommendations. We are available to provide assistance to ensure this.



SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The final report of the Faith Engagement Review** must be fully inclusive of the non-religious in its language and in its content, including its recommendations.
- 2. Government engagement with religion or belief groups:** The Government should ensure that humanists are represented at faith and belief roundtables and outreach efforts and should ensure its policy and communication is inclusive throughout.
- 3. Faith and belief literacy:** Steps should be taken to ensure widespread understanding of religion and belief groups throughout local and national government, parliament, and public services, and including that civil servants and politicians are aware of the issues facing vulnerable apostates.
- 4. Public services:** The Government should amend the Human Rights Act to treat religious groups delivering public services on behalf of a public authority as a public authority, and the Equality Act 2010 should be amended to suspend the exemptions for religious groups when they are delivering public services.
- 5. Hate crime:** The Government should ensure that hate crime legislation includes protection for non-religious beliefs such as humanism.
- 6. Humanist marriages:** The Government should as a priority legally recognise humanist marriages in England and Wales, in line with the rest of the UK, Ireland, and Channel Islands.
- 7. Open school admissions:** State-funded schools should be open to all regardless of religion or belief, with pupils from different backgrounds educated together, free from discrimination.
- 8. Pluralistic ethos in schools:** Schools should avoid promoting any one religious or humanist perspective, serving all members of their local community equally and without prejudice.
- 9. Inclusive assemblies:** Compulsory religious worship should be replaced with assemblies that enrich all children irrespective of their differing beliefs.
- 10. Broad, balanced, and objective teaching about religions and humanism in schools:** The curriculum should cover a range of religions and humanism in a balanced, objective way. Humanism should be included on an equal footing with major religions.
- 11. Safe school environments:** All private settings providing full-time education should be registered. They should teach a broad and balanced curriculum and provide a safe, hygienic environment for pupils that is inspected in the same way as state schools.
- 12. Fair employment in schools:** There should be no religious discrimination in the employment of teaching or non-teaching staff.
- 13. Ensure provision of non-religious pastoral support** by trained and accredited pastoral carers in hospitals, prisons, and in the military.
- 14. Parliamentary changes:** The Government should remove the automatic right of bishops to sit in the House of Lords, to ensure that all peers are appointed equally on the basis of religion or belief. It should also urge the Parliamentary Procedure Committees to review the practice of saying prayers before the start of parliamentary business.
- 15. Public broadcasting:** The Government should urge the BBC to include equal coverage of religious and non-religious views, in its coverage, including by reorganising BBC Religion & Ethics into a division focused on religion or belief.



RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Question 6: In your opinion, are Faith and Religion overall positive things for society?

Scale response from 0 (extremely negative) to 10 (extremely positive)

N/A

Question 7: Please expand

It is almost impossible to put a figure on how positive faith and religion are for society: we think that that is a very difficult thing to objectively measure, and can also be approached from many different ways.

But what we will say is that we think there is widespread consensus amongst the public at large that the place and behaviour of religious groups in our society is not positive. This can be seen from some of the British Social Attitudes surveys we cite in the demographics section of our response, with strong majorities saying that religious leaders should not try to influence government decisions, nor influence how people vote; most thinking that religions bring more conflict than peace; and only a minority having any confidence in religious organisations. These attitudes are even shared by most religious people – for example:

- 65% of religious people think religious leaders shouldn't try to influence government, while only 19% think they should;
- 74% of religious people think religious leaders should not try to influence how people vote, with only 11% taking the opposite view;
- only 20% have complete or a great deal of confidence in religious organisations, with 28% having very little or no confidence at all;
- 55% of religious people say that society is divided along religious lines – a view held by a lower proportion (53%) of non-religious people;
- 56% say religion brings more conflict than peace, while 21% say the opposite.

That last statistic, if anything, tells us that in the views of most religious people, faith and religion are not, overall, positive things for society. If the results returned to this consultation suggest otherwise, then that would tell us that the respondents to this survey are not representative of the views of people, or indeed of religious people, amongst the general public.

In saying this, we wish to make it clear that we are not at all opposed to individuals holding religious beliefs or exercising them in a way that does not contravene the rights and freedoms of others. One of our values is 'cooperating with others for the common good, including with those of different beliefs'.¹⁰ But we are concerned that the rights of non-religious people, and indeed many religious people themselves, are regularly trampled upon, on account of the excessive privilege of religious groups in society in many of the key areas discussed in this consultation, including

¹⁰ 'Our values', Humanists UK: <https://humanism.org.uk/about/our-values/>



education, human rights and equality, the constitution, and elsewhere. We will explain why we say this in more detail in subsequent questions, but in brief, this includes:

- Faith groups are uniquely able to discriminate against employees on the basis of religion – even when providing public services;
- Faith groups are uniquely able to discriminate against service users on the basis of religion – even when providing public services;
- Faith groups are uniquely able to discriminate in admissions to state schools – in spite of polls showing in spite of 72% of the population opposing religious selection, with just 15% supporting it – even 68% of Christians oppose it, with just 19% supporting it;¹¹
- Faith groups are uniquely able to discriminate in how they teach the school curriculum – in spite of widespread public opposition to there being state faith schools *at all* – 58% think they shouldn't receive such funding;¹²
- One faith group, the Church of England, uniquely has its leaders sitting and voting in the House of Lords, as of right, in spite of spite of 62% of the public saying that no religious leaders should have 'an automatic right to seats', and only 8% supporting the status quo of Anglicans uniquely retaining that right.¹³

Most of these rights to discriminate come from unique exemptions in the Equality Act 2010, or alternatively, the fact that the Human Rights Act 1998 does not extend to religious groups, when they are contracted out to provide public services. We highlighted these issues as long ago as 2007 in our report *Quality and Equality: Human Rights, Public Services and Religious Organisations*.¹⁴ Nothing has changed since. In fact if anything, the issues have only got worse, as the number of public services contracted out has increased, and the proportion of faith schools has grown.

We therefore recommend that the Government should amend the Human Rights Act to treat religious groups delivering public services on behalf of a public authority as a public authority, and the Equality Act 2010 should be amended to suspend the exemptions for religious groups when they are delivering public services.

Question 8: During the Covid-19 pandemic are you aware of a faith organisation or religious community which has supported your neighbourhood through running a community project or offering support?

We will respond to this question under our response to question 9.

¹¹ Populus survey of 2,000 British adults for the Accord Coalition, completed 14–16 October 2016:

https://accordcoalition.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/0mFaith-Schools_02.pdf

¹² Opinion survey for the *Observer*, June 2014, cited in: <https://accordcoalition.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Databank-of-Independent-Evidence-on-Faith-Schools-April-2014.pdf>

¹³ Kaya Burgess, 'Public want religion kept out of politics', *The Times*, 25 December 2017:

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/public-want-religion-kept-out-of-politics-t3rk055cx>

¹⁴ *Quality and Equality: Human Rights, Public Services and Religious Organisations*, Humanists UK, 2007: <https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/BHA-Public-Services-Report-Quality-and-Equality.pdf>



Question 9: Before the Covid-19 pandemic were you aware of a faith organisation or religious community having made a positive contribution to your neighbourhood?

It should be noted that when responding to the online survey it is not possible to select 'no' and have a 'please expand' box appear in order to enter details of how humanists have made a positive contribution to the neighbourhood during or prior to the pandemic.

These questions therefore ignore the contribution of the non-religious to the pandemic. We mobilised our 100,000 members and supporters, volunteers, and local groups and urged them, if they have the time, health, and the ability to, to volunteer with Covid-19 mutual aid groups and/or the NHS, including to donate much-needed food and hygiene products to those in need. Our non-religious pastoral carers working in hospitals and prisons were designated key workers and provided support to non-religious people in these settings. We facilitated new industry-wide Coronavirus guidelines for funeral celebrants¹⁵ and our celebrants continue to offer high-quality, personal, and non-religious funerals. They typically conduct 10,000 funerals a year, and have been designated key workers. We repackaged our education resources to support parents who were homeschooling. We have used our large social media channels, which reach millions of people every week, to promote the Government's advice, combat insidious fake news, and share inspiring calls for volunteering.

Question 10: Do you feel Government engages meaningfully with people of faith?

Scale response from 0 (not at all) to 10 (extremely well)

Question 11: Do you think Government understands people of faith?

Scale response from 0 (not at all) to 10 (extremely well)

Question 12: Looking at your previous two answers, please expand on why you think this?

We're not sure how to answer the two previous questions. We think the picture is very mixed, and varies a lot from department to department. There have certainly been some positive moves in recent years, but there is still a long way to go.

Positives include:

- that MHCLG, at the start of 2020, renamed its 'faith team' to be its 'faith & belief team', and appointed a civil servant to be responsible for humanism;
- that FCDO is to be commended for its work on freedom of religion or belief, and its inclusion of us in relevant initiatives;

¹⁵ 'New funeral guidelines issued: live streaming, delayed memorials, and gestures to replace hugging', Humanists UK, 23 March 2020: <https://humanism.org.uk/2020/03/23/new-funeral-guidelines-issued-live-streaming-delayed-memorials-and-new-gestures-to-replace-hugging/>



- similarly, the Home Office took a very inclusive approach when it worked with us and others to develop and deliver new compulsory training for asylum assessors on freedom of religion or belief – which we believe to be the most comprehensive in the world;
- that DCMS, since 2018, has allowed a representative of Humanists UK to take part in the National Service of Remembrance in Whitehall (although the service itself is still very Anglican);
- that the Civil Service has included humanists in its faith & belief initiatives, including recognising Humanists in Government, and similarly the Defence Humanist Network is recognised by the MoD;
- that NHS England has been very supportive of an inclusive approach to chaplaincy and pastoral care, and this is reflected in its 2015 guidelines;
- that we have been included in consultative groups around the Covid-19 pandemic, for example the Department of Health and Social Care’s Moral & Ethical Advisory Group, and other similar groups across other parts of the UK.

However, many problems remain. These include:

This can be seen in, for example, in:

- the fact that humanist marriages are not legally recognised in England and Wales, in spite of the fact that religious marriages are, that there have already been three government reviews into the matter, and that they are recognised everywhere else in the UK and Ireland. We call on the Government to legally recognise humanist marriages;
- the fact that the Government is persistently refusing to acknowledge that humanism should be taught in RE, alongside the major religions, or that humanists can sit on SACREs – instead deferring the decision to local authorities. This stands in stark contrast to the Welsh Government, which has not only said this *is* required, under the Human Rights Act 1998, but is actively changing education law to make this explicit. We recommend that humanism is fully included in RE;¹⁶
- the fact that there are only a very small number of humanists employed as pastoral carers by NHS Trusts, and none at all in prisons or the Armed Forces, in spite of hundreds if not thousands of religious chaplains employed in such roles (and overwhelmingly Christian chaplains at that). We urge the Government to ensure provision of non-religious pastoral support in these settings;
- the fact that MHCLG has a minister responsible for ‘faith’ and not ‘faith and belief’. The title should be updated to be inclusive of humanism and in parity with the Faith and Belief team the Minister leads;¹⁷
- the fact that the FCO, under the previous Prime Minister, chose to commission out a review into Christian persecution abroad, with no similar review or level of engagement of those of other religions or beliefs; and that review led to several recommendations that focused just

¹⁶ ‘Success! New Welsh curriculum is fully inclusive of humanism’, Humanists UK, 23 March 2019: <https://humanism.org.uk/2019/05/01/success-new-welsh-curriculum-is-fully-inclusive-of-humanism/>

¹⁷ ‘Lord Stephen Greenhalgh’, GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/people/stephen-greenhalgh>



on Christianity, or just on religion, when there was no obvious reason for this. We call for the review findings to be implemented in an inclusive manner, and for a similar review to be commissioned on global non-religious persecution;¹⁸

- the fact that, in general, government consults and engages more with religious leaders, at higher levels, than with representatives of the non-religious, and often uses faith-exclusive language. As we have previously stated we urge the Government to ensure that humanists are represented at all relevant faith and belief stakeholder events.

We recommend that swift changes are made in the areas discussed above to remedy these situations.

Kruger review

Then there is the recent Kruger review, commissioned by the Prime Minister. In his report, Danny Kruger MP says that public servants are reluctant to partner with faith groups and less likely to formally contract with them to deliver publicly-funded services. He states this comes from ignorance about religion and 'faith phobia': an active objection to the principle of faith communities working in partnership with government as some believe religion belongs to the private sphere. He says this is wrong as it forgets 'the religious foundations of our politics' and that there are no 'value-free zones', stating that 'secular public servants bring their philosophy to work', who

'Like religious people they have a moral vision, strive for personal righteousness, and wish that everyone thought like they did; unlike religious people they don't always recognise their own religiosity. The exclusion of faith, in all but its ceremonial aspects, from our public life means that the orthodoxies of technocratic secular liberalism have total sway. The public square should be more plural than this.'

Similarly, with regard to offers to partner, he says: 'This commitment is often regarded suspiciously as "proselytism". Yet the fact that most religious people wish the whole world to agree with them does not mark them as different from secular liberals, who also wish their theology to be universal. A tolerant society has space for all.'

This obviously reflects a deep confusion of the word 'secular', which simply means treating everyone equally on matters of religion or belief. Further, it is clearly wrongheaded of Kruger to argue that people who are trying to treat everyone equally are in some way imposing 'their own religiosity' on others.

He goes on to talk about faith groups helping with various social problems in our society (e.g. problem debt, or children in care, or prisoner rehabilitation, or rough sleeping) or a national mission such as providing foster places for every child in care in England. Either way, the faith group would work with the Government to agree a way of working, including where appropriate a set of proven

¹⁸ 'Government publishes report on Christian persecution', Humanists UK, 8 July 2019:
<https://humanism.org.uk/2019/07/08/government-publishes-report-on-christian-persecution/>



interventions and methodologies, which it would deliver with the permission of the relevant statutory agencies. The faith group would commit to fully funding this work from its own resources.

Our concerns with this would be twofold. The first is that we wouldn't want to see faith groups usurp a role that is properly played by the state itself, e.g. in providing essential services, nor do so in a discriminatory way. It is notable that faith groups do not fall under equality or human rights laws, when it comes to discriminating on the basis of religion or belief or some other protected characteristics, in terms of their employment or service provision. Those exemptions shouldn't apply to any such work.

And the second is that, if that first concern is resolved, then we would want any such initiatives to be inclusive of the non-religious.

And on that note, at a recent meeting Kruger had with various civil society groups to discuss his report, one of our staff asking him if he would comment on the role that humanist and other non-religious belief groups will play in his proposed new deal, acknowledge the strong contributions the non-religious community has and continues to make to civil society and in meeting society's challenges, and if he could use inclusive language that acknowledges includes both religion and belief groups.

His response was that he wouldn't commit to using inclusive language as he thinks there is something quite specific about faith groups. He thinks there is a category difference. He thinks there are occasions when humanists could be invited to contribute to these discussions and times when only faith groups are required. And he said that he imagines that we were not best pleased with the report as he wants more faith involvement, even though our staff member had said nothing to that effect.

This is obviously quite disappointing on several levels, and therefore we hope it is a place where we can see the Government take a different view.

This very review

This very review is an example of poor engagement, and reflects a lack of understanding of religion or belief. If the Government was properly committed to social cohesion across religion or belief actors, and a cohesive policy of engagement and understanding, then it would not choose to run a consultation that focuses so exclusively on just faith groups – groups it already disproportionately engages with – but would recognise that the non-religious are an important part of a landscape that cannot be so neatly subdivided, without causing more harm than good. We further outline our concerns about this in a dedicated section focusing on the survey questions. Such a review should be overseen by a Faith & Belief Engagement Adviser, rather than a Faith Engagement Adviser.

Question 13: Could the Charity Commission do more to support registered faith charities?

N/A



It should be noted that when responding to the online survey it is not possible to select 'no' and have a 'please expand' box appear in order to enter details of how the Charity Commission could do more to support registered faith charities.

Question 14: Please expand

We are unsure about what more the Charity Commission could or should do to support registered faith charities.

Question 15: Do you believe local councils and local public services like schools, the NHS and emergency services look for, and take opportunities to create, productive partnerships with local faith organisations?

N/A

Question 16: Please expand

We are unsure how to answer the previous question, but are concerned that it might be looking for responses that could be used to argue that local public services don't look for or take enough opportunities to create such productive partnerships.

Our own view, with regard to councils, is that they generally don't think about the matter much either way. When we have asked councils in the past to tell us which contracts or funding they have given to religious groups, they invariably say they can't tell us, as they haven't even asked groups they're funding whether they're religious or not.

In fact, this is a problem, because of the exemptions such groups enjoy from equality and human rights laws – as outlined in our response to question 7. For example, the exemptions from employment equality legislation allow religious employers to discriminate against potential applicants for jobs on grounds of religion or belief, as well as sexual orientation, and to discriminate against current employees on those same grounds in ways such as barring them from promotion or dismissing them. In addition, citizens do not have the protection of the Human Rights Act 1998 when their services are delivered by private or charitable organisations, many of the latter are religious, working under contract for a public authority. They would have those protections if their services were provided by the public authority itself. We are aware that such problems frequently arise because we often receive complaints from those either working within religious groups, or someone who is using their services, about concerns regarding discrimination based on religion or belief.

To give some examples: in a memorandum to the Joint Committee on Human Rights in 2006 the Salvation Army, an evangelical Christian organisation, stated, 'whilst it is appropriate for the state to be religiously neutral, this is impossible for an organisation such as The Salvation Army, which delivers its services as a direct outworking of the Christian faith.'¹⁹ The Salvation Army holds central

¹⁹ *Quality and Equality: Human Rights, Public Services and Religious Organisations*, Humanists UK, 2007: <https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/BHA-Public-Services-Report-Quality-and-Equality.pdf>



Government contracts to provide services to vulnerable trafficked women, but openly propagates discriminatory views about homosexuality and openly admits that its mission is to proselytise.

In 2008 we successfully supported a former employee to take their employer, Prospects, a Christian charity which provides support for people with learning disabilities, to an employment tribunal on the ground of constructive dismissal and discrimination on religion or belief.²⁰ This was because the publicly funded charity employed a number of non-Christian staff and volunteers – including those who were transferred to them under TUPE regulations – but then recruited only practising Christians for almost all posts and told existing non-Christian staff that they were no longer eligible for promotion.

Further, in 2011, Richmond Council awarded a tender to provide counselling services to teenagers on issues including contraception, unwanted pregnancy, and homophobic bullying, to the Catholic Children's Society. The Catholic Children's Society gave up working with new adopters after the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations came into force in 2007, which meant that they would no longer be able to discriminate against same-sex couples wanting to adopt. For it to therefore hold a contract opposing homophobic bullying was highly surprising. Previously this contract was provided by 'Off the Record' a local, inclusive, and secular charity that had provided this service for twenty years.²¹

In 2001, the Church of England launched the *Dearing Report*,²² a landmark report that set out its vision for schools for the next ten years, and more generally got the Government to start faith schools on a growth trajectory. It had as one of its key recommendations that 'Church schools should nourish those of faith; encourage those of other faiths; and challenge those of no faith.'

Its follow-up was the 2012 *Chadwick Report*. That report outlines as a 'key premise that applies equally to children of the faith, of other faiths and of no faith', that Church schools must 'Work towards every child and young person having a life-enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ'.²³ At the first General Synod after the report's launch, the then Church of England Bishop of Oxford, who was the lead bishop for education, underlined this, saying:

'I want to persuade you in the time we've got available that very little is of greater importance for the long-term good of the Church of England, and the Church in England actually, than the way we respond to the *Chadwick Report* – the *Church School of the Future Report*.

²⁰ 'Tribunal Victory for Employee in Landmark Religious Discrimination Case', Humanists UK. 16 May 2008: <https://humanism.org.uk/2008/05/16/news-104/>

²¹ 'Children's counselling service handed to anti-gay Catholic group', Humanists UK. 15 April 2011: <https://humanism.org.uk/2011/04/15/news-790/>

²² Lord Dearing CB, *The Way Ahead: Church of England schools in the new millennium*, Church of England, 2001: https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/dearing_report_the_way_ahead.pdf

²³ 'New Church of England report seeks expansion and evangelisation of state-funded schools', Humanists UK, 23 March 2012: <https://humanism.org.uk/2012/03/23/news-794-2/>



'I want to convince you that if we miss the importance of this report, the Christian story is in danger of continuing to fall away, as it were: to slide out of our cultural memory. But if we seize the moment, we could be embedding that story back into the life of our nation in a way that we haven't been able to do for some decades – I put it really quite as strongly as that.

...

'Let me just pull out then three major themes that underline all those 26 recommendations [of the *Chadwick* report]. First, we have to grasp that our Church schools are absolutely and irrevocably at the heart of our mission. We've said that from the *Dearing* report onwards, but I'm not sure we've really owned it. In Oxford, we have 55,000 people on our electoral rolls and we have got over 52,000 children every day in our Church schools. Children with all their life before them, with or without faith. Nationally we have a million parishioners every day in our schools. And these schools have a whole hinterland of families, well disposed towards the Church of course, in most cases.

'What an opportunity – but are we up to it? Do we train our clergy for that opportunity or do we see engagement with schools as optional? We clergy ought to have a camp bed in these schools I think. I say sometimes to our clergy that 'You can't say that doing funerals is an optional extra, and we can't say that doing schools is an optional extra.' It's absolutely at the heart of our mission. We don't have to bemoan the fact that our Sunday school is struggling if there are 300 children at the local Church school.

...

'So in an age of creeping scepticism about religion, we need this confidence that we have the greatest story ever lived, one with never ending relevance to human life. So we need to make sure that our schools are so rooted in that story – in the life, death and new life of Jesus Christ – that people will be thrilled and challenged by what they see. And it will affect beliefs, behaviour, and values – the whole deal. We're working on a new scheme for teaching Christianity in our schools because actually we've come under a lot of criticism for that. And on what a curriculum would look like that truly reflected the Christian faith right the way through its life, not just in RE and collective worship.

'So this third big theme is seriously developing the distinctiveness of our schools, and there's lots on that throughout the report, so that the spiritual core is evidenced in what our Church schools do and are. And that's how the Christian story will be embedded in our culture and how we can grow our influence through our schools.'²⁴

Similarly, at the launch last month of this year's report of the GRA:CE Project,²⁵ the Archbishop of York said 'we are learning to become a missionary church in everything we do'. That throws into question the intent of any communal services it provides.

²⁴ 'Church looks to use its schools as tools for evangelisation', Humanists UK, 10 July 2012: <https://humanism.org.uk/2012/07/10/news-1070/>

²⁵ Hannah Rich, *Growing Good: Growth, Social Action and Discipleship in the Church of England*, Theos and the Church Urban Fund, 2020: <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/GRACE-CUF-v10-combined.pdf>



If the law was amended to prevent discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1998 by religious groups that are contracted to provide public services, then we would have much less concern about such contracts being given. Only then can such productive partnerships be fostered, free from discrimination.

Then, conversely, are the needs of the non-religious, which are frequently overlooked. That spans from the frequent failure to include humanists on local SACREs (most SACREs in England have a humanist member, but most of those are co-opted, i.e. uniquely denied a vote), or humanism in the agreed syllabus (only around a sixth of syllabuses are highly inclusive of non-religious worldviews); the fact that most NHS trusts do not even have a non-religious pastoral carer, never mind about a staff member; and the fact that a third of state schools are religious, and such schools very rarely teach about non-religious worldviews other than to disparage them, and also much less frequently invite in humanist school speakers.

Question 17: Do you feel that freedom of religion or belief is under threat in the UK today?

Yes

Question 18: Please expand

When it comes to freedom of religion or belief, the UK is one of the worst countries in the western world. Every year, Humanists International produces a ranking of how much countries discriminate against the non-religious. The UK is ranked 132nd out of 196 countries – below almost all of the other western countries.²⁶

Why this is can be seen from discrimination across public policy and public life.

School admissions

Discrimination in admissions, employment, and the curriculum are advanced by one-third of state-funded schools, on the basis of religion. Amongst OECD members, only Ireland, Israel, and Estonia permit religious discrimination in state school admissions²⁷ – and it should be noted that Ireland has recently ended religious selection in Catholic primary schools, which make up the overwhelming majority of those that were selecting.²⁸ Such selection is highly unpopular, even amongst religious people.²⁹ But instead of reducing it, the Government is instead introducing 100% religiously selective voluntary aided schools that will increase discrimination, increase segregation, and increase social division. This is despite the Department for Education's (DfE's) Equality Impact Assessment fully acknowledging that VA schools with a religious character will 'benefit pupils of

²⁶ *Freedom of Thought Report 2019*, Humanists International: <https://fot.humanists.international/>

²⁷ Pauline Musset, 'School Choice and Equity: Current Policies in OECD Countries and a Literature Review', OECD, 2012, page 15, table 2.3:
http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/school-choice-and-equity_5k9fq23507vc-en

²⁸ 'Ireland scraps religious selection in Catholic primary school admissions', Humanists UK, 5 October 2018:
<https://humanism.org.uk/2018/10/05/ireland-scraps-using-religion-as-a-selection-criteria-in-catholic-primary-schools/>

²⁹ See response to question 7 for polling.



those faiths, and their parents, by making it easier for them to gain places at state-funded schools' and that, in many cases, this 'benefit [will] not be experienced by children or parents of other faiths or non-religious convictions'.³⁰

Collective worship in schools

Further, the other two-thirds of schools are required to hold daily Christian worship, regardless of the religion or belief of the pupils concerned (who may almost never be from Christian families, given that the British Social Attitudes Survey records just 22% of young adults nowadays are Christian, yet a third of schools are Christian). The UK is the only country in the world that requires daily Christian worship in its state schools as standard. This is very unpopular – when given a list of 13 activities that could be covered in school assemblies, and ask if they would or would not make appropriate topics, 51% of parents said that religious worship would not be appropriate, with just 29% saying the opposite. This made it easily the least appropriately viewed activity of the 13 choices.³¹

The school curriculum

Then there is the fact that more frequently than not, the school curriculum fails to teach in any detail at all about non-religious worldviews, such as humanism – instead only focusing on the major world religions. Faith schools almost never teach about non-religious worldviews at all, except to criticise them. SACREs often also exclude humanists, and the Government has been unwilling to say that this is wrong.

The BBC

There is the fact that the BBC produces hundreds of hours of programming every year specifically about different religions, and even for religious people, but no programming specifically about or for the non-religious. When we have challenged BBC officials about this, the response we have got has invariably tried to claim that all programming outside that produced by the Religion & Ethics team is non-religious. This bizarre claim that the weather is non-religious or the football is non-religious is a distraction. There have almost never been any programmes specifically focusing on what non-religious people believe, what they share in common, or the history of non-religious thought in the UK.

This issue was identified by the Commission on Religion or Belief in Public Life in its final report which recommended that the Charter renewal should mandate the BBC to 'reflect the range of religion and belief of modern society, for example by extending contributions to Radio 4's daily

³⁰ 'Government washes its hands of discriminatory impact of new fully religiously selective schools', Humanists UK, 20 December 2018: <https://humanism.org.uk/2018/12/20/government-washes-its-hands-of-discriminatory-impact-of-new-fully-religiously-selective-schools/>

³¹ YouGov poll of 1,600 British adults for Humanists UK. 'Parents say religious worship is least appropriate activity for school assemblies, new poll reveals', Humanists UK, 9 August 2019: <https://humanism.org.uk/2019/08/09/parents-say-religious-worship-is-least-appropriate-activity-for-school-assemblies-new-poll-reveals/>



religious flagship *Thought for the Day* to include speakers from non-religious perspectives such as humanists.³²

Religion in Parliament

As previously pointed out, we have 26 bishops in the House of Lords, as of right, voting on all our laws, in a Parliament that already has a higher share of Christians than society as a whole. This arrangement is extremely unpopular.³³ The only other sovereign state in the world that has religious leaders in its legislature, as of right, is Iran.

Furthermore, outside of the pandemic, those who get seats in the House of Commons (of which there are only two for every three MPs) are those who attend parliamentary prayers – meaning those who don't want to attend such prayers have to choose between being forced to, or not getting a seat, limiting their ability to participate in popular debates or e.g. prime minister's questions, and their ability to serve their constituents' needs.³⁴

The Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life recommended in its landmark 2015 final report that 'The pluralist character of modern society should be reflected in national and civic events so that they are more reflective of the UK's increasing diversity, and in national forums such as the House of Lords, so that they include a wider range of worldviews and religious traditions.'³⁵

Humanist marriages

Then there is the persistent failure, in England and Wales, to extend legal recognition to humanist marriages. This has been the subject of three government reviews over the last seven years, and persistent delay. The Government has still not committed to changing the law in this way, and on the schedule of the present review, won't do so until 2023. This is in spite of the fact that 68% of the English and Welsh public are in favour of such a change in the law, with only 13% opposed – including a majority of all religion or belief groups.³⁶ It is also in spite of the fact that Scotland brought about legal recognition in 2005, Ireland in 2012, Northern Ireland in 2018, Jersey in 2019, and Guernsey will in 2021.

³² Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life. 2015. *Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good*: <https://corablivingwithdifference.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/living-with-difference-community-diversity-and-the-common-good.pdf>

³³ Again, see polling outlined in our response to question 7.

³⁴ This, and other similar problems with how Parliament operates, are outlined in more detail in *Time for Reflection: A report of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group on religion or belief in the UK Parliament*, 2020:

https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/APPG-report_religion-in-parliament_Jan2020_print.pdf

³⁵ Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life. 2015. *Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good*: <https://corablivingwithdifference.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/living-with-difference-community-diversity-and-the-common-good.pdf>

³⁶ 'Humanist marriages least likely to end in divorce, official statistics reveal', Humanists UK, 10 March 2019: <https://humanism.org.uk/2019/03/10/humanist-marriages-least-likely-to-end-in-divorce-official-statistics-reveal/>



Over 1,000 couples have a humanist wedding in England and Wales every year without legal recognition – putting humanist marriages behind only civil, Anglican, Catholic, and Methodist marriages in terms of popularity.³⁷ And yet still the Government has refused to support such recognition. This summer the High Court ruled that this failure to extend legal recognition is ‘discrimination’, essentially mandating the UK Government to fix it at the end of the present review at latest.³⁸

The coronavirus pandemic has caused further problems in this area. Restrictions introduced in September unfairly limited humanist weddings to six attendees whereas religious ceremonies were permitted up to 15 attendees.³⁹ Although this issue has now been remedied by the Government providing for humanist weddings in its latest regulations, it exposes how vulnerable humanists’ rights to marry in line with their beliefs are in comparison to their religious counterparts, and stresses the urgent need to legally recognise humanist marriages without delay. Similar issues have also arisen in Wales, where such weddings were banned during the recent firebreak lockdown.

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Chaplaincy and pastoral care

Finally, there is the ample provision of pastoral care to religious people in general and Christians especially in hospitals, prisons, and the Armed Forces, running to hundreds if not thousands of paid posts, without similar provision of non-religious pastoral care. This is in spite of the fact that 69% of people think that non-religious pastoral carers should be provided alongside religious chaplains in such institutions, including a majority of religious people. Their provision would be more popular than the provision of religious chaplains.⁴¹ The Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life called for ‘equitable representation’ in hospital and prison chaplaincy services ‘for those from non-Christian religious traditions and for those from humanist traditions’ in its final report.⁴²

Upholding human rights and judicial review

Although not specifically focused on freedom of religion or belief, we are also concerned about the UK Government’s intentions to potentially weaken the human rights and judicial review frameworks, which was described in the 2019 Conservative Party manifesto as a commitment to

³⁷ ‘Humanists UK wedding numbers continue to grow, show new figures’, Humanists UK, 16 May 2019: <https://humanism.org.uk/2019/05/16/humanists-uk-wedding-numbers-continue-to-grow-show-new-figures/>

³⁸ ‘High Court rules humanist marriage recognition failure is ‘discriminatory’, but stops short of formal breach due to ongoing review’, Humanists UK, 31 July 2020: <https://humanism.org.uk/2020/07/31/humanist-marriage-case-outcome/>

³⁹ ‘Government provides specifically for humanist weddings in latest coronavirus regulations’, Humanists UK, 13 December 2020: <https://humanism.org.uk/2020/10/13/government-provides-specifically-for-humanist-weddings-in-latest-coronavirus-regulations/>

⁴⁰ ‘Humanist weddings in Wales banned during firebreak lockdown, while religious marriages can continue’, 24 Humanists UK, 24 October 2020: <https://humanism.org.uk/2020/10/24/humanist-weddings-in-wales-banned-during-firebreak-lockdown-while-religious-marriages-can-continue/>

⁴¹ 2016 YouGov polling of 4,000 British adults for Humanists UK: <https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Humanists-UK-polling-on-pastoral-care-in-the-UK.pdf>

⁴² Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life. 2015. *Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good*: <https://corablivingwithdifference.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/living-with-difference-community-diversity-and-the-common-good.pdf>



'update the Human Rights Act and administrative law'.⁴³ We have built a coalition of over 100 charities, trades unions, and human rights organisations in calling for the protection of these vital constitutional safeguards.⁴⁴ We all believe that while every system could be improved, and protecting rights and freedoms for all is a balancing act, the Human Rights Act is a proportionate and well-drafted protection of the fundamental liberties and responsibilities of everyone in this country. Judicial review is an indispensable mechanism for individuals to assert those rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief.

Question 19: Have you ever felt that your freedom to express your faith, religion or belief was under threat?

Yes. Our members and supporters have faced threats or actual violence on account of holding non-religious beliefs. However, due to limitations in the laws concerning hate crime, we are only able to evidence hate crime to those on account of not holding religious beliefs rather than positively holding humanist beliefs.

The Public Order Act 1986 (as amended by the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006), Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and the Criminal Justice Act 2003 define 'religious hatred' as 'hatred against a group of persons defined by reference to religious belief or lack of religious belief.' Therefore the definition does not cover hatred motivated because of someone positively holding a non-religious worldview, such as humanism. This is at odds with the Human Rights Act 1998 which positively includes non-religious worldviews that are analogous to humanism. It is also at odds with the Equality Act 2010. Even then, the fact that the law refers to 'religious hatred' leads to widespread confusion about the inclusion of 'lack of religious belief'. There is, therefore, plainly a gap in the current legislation should be addressed by clarifying the wording in the above Acts to instead cover 'religious or belief hatred', with those religions or beliefs protected being those that fall under the protections of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Due to the gap in protections outlined above, there is no central police recording of hate crimes committed against humanists, and we are not currently aware of any major study that has been undertaken to investigate the scale of hate crimes targeted at humanists.

We have received threats against us. For example, in August 2018, a serrated metal tin lid was posted to Humanists UK in a handwritten unstamped envelope. We reported this to the Metropolitan Police as a hate crime, who subsequently visited our offices and assessed the security we have in place. Additionally, twice in recent years we have been sent in the post envelopes containing white powder (intended to be mistaken for anthrax).

We also frequently receive threats of supernatural violence over email. Although we do not report such content as direct physical threats to the safety of our staff. Below is an example of the type of emailed threats we receive:

⁴³ The Conservative and Unionist Party, *Manifesto 2019*, p48. 2019: <https://www.conservatives.com/our-plan>

⁴⁴ 'Protect Human Rights and Judicial Review', Humanists UK, 2020: <https://humanrightsact.org.uk/>



'Dear All Non Believers, You live in Joyful Material world surrounded by gay Music sports & the Like. And worship dead Darwin as your guide. We live in the Universe of truth & Bow down to the Supreme Creator ALMIGHTY GOD . Pls stop criticism of Religious Schools & worshipping a mortal Darwin. Certainly this universe is coming to an end awaiting arrival of Holy Prophet Jesus & Holy Imam Mehdi Holy Quran agrees with Science: The Big Bang will meet big Crunch. This is clearly written in all Holy Scriptures. Then Universe will be as before as long as ALMIGHTY ALLAH wants.

'Then HE will recreate another permanent universe & revive all to assemble on the field of Judgement. They will be known by black ugly & bright faced people. Non believers & sinners ugly dark & the Holy ones bright faced. Read Holy Quran how the blessed will live forever in Paradise with their Parents & relatives & friends in ever lasting life in paradise & Unbelievers in hell. Their skin will be burnt & they will have repeated new flesh to burn & suffer. Fear ALMIGHTY GOD & accept Peaceful Islam as believers when there is time. Thanks.'

Below are some case studies that have been collected either by Faith to Faithless or as part of Ellen Johnson's study into apostasy and hate crime which found that 81% of apostates had experienced at least one experience of hate crime⁴⁵. In addition to these case studies, many ex-Muslim apostates specifically report experiencing fear of violence incited by Imams who call for or refer to Quranic passages calling for death to apostates.

1. 'My experience when it comes to ex-Muslim witnesses, they are often threatened violently, I know this guy he had his dad on the phone, calling his uncle saying that our son has decided to become a Christian and you need to come round and help me to kill him. He escaped, he had to change his last name.'
(female, Ex-Jehovah's Witness)⁴⁶
2. 'My parents have been consistently harassed for keeping contact with me. JWs claim shunning is a personal decision – it isn't.'
(female, ex-Jehovah's Witness)⁴⁷
3. 'When I left Islam arguments regularly broke out with my family about my non-religious life style choices and beliefs. Once I had left Islam they became very suspicious of me that I was doing things that were non-religious. I was terrified of being caught doing things non-Islamic, such as drinking because I thought I would be beaten up for it so I hid my lifestyle as much as I could but I was not able to hide everything including that I removed the Islamic attire that was expected of me and I was caught with a boyfriend – both of which escalated in violence. I also faced emotional blackmail, threats of violence if I didn't comply, emotional abuse, and sex shaming. There were a few incidents over the first year of my

⁴⁵ Ellen Johnson, *Apostasy, Human Rights and Hate Crime in England and Wales: A Mixed Methods Study*, 2019. p34. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3475161

⁴⁶ Ibid p36.

⁴⁷ Ibid p40.



apostasy where arguments about me leaving Islam escalated into violence and I ended up with bruises around my body.'

Ex-Muslim Faith to Faithless service user

4. "Ahmed" began to have doubts about his faith at the young age of 12, but kept them to himself until he was in his late teens. Around this time his family began to suspect something was different about him as he reduced the number of prayers he attended at the mosque. The final straw was when they found he was visiting websites where Islam was being debated. Although he had already left the faith, he claimed he was doubting in order to not be removed from his home. His family could not answer his questions and told him to speak to their local Imam. The Imam came to the house and sat down with him for a friendly discussion. They had a debate that left the Imam more and more frustrated with the questioning, and he eventually realised that Ahmed had already left the faith. The Imam then had a private discussion with the family, where they asked him what they should do. He said that his child needed to be taught Islam properly, and if he had indeed left Islam he should be cut off from the family. The family did not know what to do and began to significantly curtail Ahmed's ability to see friends, who the family accused of misleading him. His father also began to physically assault Ahmed when he did not go to mosque for prayers.'

Ex-Muslim Faith to Faithless service user

5. "N" left Islam quite young (15 years old), from a [S]omali background where she had to leave home due to taking off her hijab. Her family physically abused her for taking the hijab off, and she is certain she would be at risk of honour abuse or death if she told them she was an Ex-Muslim.'

Ex-Muslim Faith to Faithless service user

6. "W" was born into a Jehovah's Witness family and embraced the belief that he was one of God's chosen people. He became an active preacher. He witnessed members of his congregation suffer severe punishments, including public humiliation, social expulsion, and enforced alienation from family and friends. "W" then suffered punishments and disownment that led to a mental health crisis and suicide attempt.'

Ex-Jehovah's Witness Faith to Faithless service user

7. 'A leader of Faith to Faithless is a public figure on Twitter and other social media platforms where he is regularly and repeatedly harassed for being an Ex-Muslim. These include... extreme comments (such as 'people like you are apostates and apostates should be executed for their crime').'

Faith to Faithless leadership team member



In our response to the Commission for Countering Extremism's call for evidence⁴⁸ we also highlighted that we support those facing extremists online including in the UK in the form of death threats and threats of violence, and also our workers, speakers, and advocates are also attacked via social media on a daily basis and we see some mainstream religious organisations condoning the extremist views of those who are anti-apostate. We also provided two examples of abuse targeted at non-religious people which have been placed below:

Case study 1: Sara

Sara had been wearing a hijab (head covering) since she was nine years old. At nine she wanted to be like her mother, and was happy to wear it. However, as she got older, especially in her teens, she started realising she didn't like the concept of the headscarf. She started to take it off when she left her home for school or to be with her friends. Sara's family found out that she had been removing her hijab, and she was physically assaulted by her father and older brother. They began to control everything she did, including where she went and who she spoke to. Sara told one of her close friends that she did not believe in her faith, but the friend told Sara's parents. Her family brought an imam home who told Sara that she could be punished by her family for not praying or following religious rituals. Eventually Sara ran away. As she had never lived by herself anywhere, she was put in very risky situations and ended up being placed in a women's shelter.

Case study 2: Jonathan

Jonathan grew up in a very strict, fourth generation Jehovah's Witnesses family. All his friends and acquaintances were Jehovah's Witnesses, and he wasn't allowed to socialise with people from outside the religion. Jonathan had watched his mother be physically abused by his father his entire life. One day he decided he'd had enough, and pushed his father off his mother when he was beating her. His father physically assaulted him, and locked him inside a room for days without food. He was told to pray for forgiveness. Jonathan eventually managed to get out, and ran away. He was homeless for a few weeks before he managed to find somewhere to stay. Jonathan was 'disfellowshipped' by the church and never sees or speaks to his family. He no longer has any religious belief.

Question 20: What more can Government do more to ensure all people have Freedom of Religion or Belief?

Following on from our previous answer, there are a number of actions that the Government can take to ensure all people have freedom of religion or belief, including:

⁴⁸ 'Commission for Countering Extremism: Call for Evidence Joint Response from Humanists UK and Faith to Faithless'. Humanists UK. January 2019:
<https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018-11-2018-RTR-Commission-for-Countering-Extremism-Call-for-evidence.pdf>



1. As a priority, **legally recognise humanist marriages** in England and Wales, in line with the rest of the UK, Ireland, and Channel Islands.
2. **Open school admissions:** State-funded schools should be open to all regardless of religion or belief, with pupils from different backgrounds educated together, free from discrimination.
3. **Pluralistic ethos in schools:** Schools should avoid promoting any one religious or humanist perspective, serving all members of their local community equally and without prejudice.
4. **Inclusive assemblies:** Compulsory religious worship should be replaced with assemblies that enrich all children irrespective of their differing beliefs.
5. **Broad, balanced, and objective teaching about religions and humanism in schools:** The curriculum should cover a range of religions and humanism in a balanced, objective way. Humanism should be included on an equal footing with major religions.
6. **Safe school environments:** All private settings providing full-time education should be registered. They should teach a broad and balanced curriculum and provide a safe, hygienic environment for pupils that is inspected in the same way as state schools.
7. **Fair employment in schools:** There should be no religious discrimination in the employment of teaching or non-teaching staff.
8. Ensure **provision of non-religious pastoral support** by trained and accredited pastoral carers in hospitals, prisons, and in the military.
9. **Remove the automatic right of bishops to sit in the House of Lords** by repealing the Bishops 1878 Act and the Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015, to ensure that all peers are appointed equally on the basis of religion or belief.
10. Urge the Parliamentary Procedure Committees to **review the practice of saying prayers before the start of parliamentary business** which currently enables those who attend Anglican prayers to reserve seats in the House of Commons or first access to seats in the House of Lords.
11. Urge the **BBC to treat religious and non-religious views equally**, in its coverage, including by reorganising BBC Religion & Ethics into a division focused on religion or belief. Ofcom could help here.

Question 21: Are there areas of religious or faith-based practice which cause you serious concern?

Yes

Question 22: Please expand

As plain from our previous answers, we are seriously concerned about religious discrimination in schools, whether it be collective worship, faith-based admissions, or faith-based teaching. These concerns are widely held, by both religious and non-religious people.

We also wish to raise four further areas of concern, namely the lack of support for apostates; illegal schools; FGM; and opposition to abortion.



Lack of support for apostates

We are seriously concerned about the lack of support for apostates, i.e. those who leave coercive or high control religions. Such individuals often find themselves cut off from all their friends and family, and may be lacking the education and skills to survive in the wider world. They need support, but public services are generally ill-prepared to provide them with this help – often being entirely unaware of their unique needs. This is something that Faith to Faithless is working to change, but really needs some government support, to ensure that training can be delivered to a very wide range of public and third sector service providers.

Apostates are at high risk of facing hate crime. Research found that 81% of apostates indicated they had at least one experience of hate crime, with over 50% experiencing two types of hate crime. The majority of these crimes were perpetrated by either close family members or members of their former religious communities.⁴⁹ The research found that in particular ex-Muslims faced higher rates of hate crimes than other groups with more overt forms of abuse and threats of violence including kidnap to countries where apostasy is illegal. This shows why it is so vital that training on apostasy is provided to those offering public services.

Illegal schools

We believe around 6,000 pupils in England are in illegal or unregistered 'schools' with a religious character. These schools are illegal because they don't meet the minimum standards to register as an independent school. They don't meet those standards because they provide pupils with a narrow curriculum focused on the study of religious texts, generally to the exclusion (or near-total exclusion) of all other subjects. They are often fundamentalist, extreme, or isolationist in their outlook. However, existing loopholes in the current law allow settings that do not provide their pupils with an education that is 'suitable' for pupils of primary or secondary age to claim they are not schools and avoid proper regulation and oversight, effectively rewarding them for their bad practice. Many full-time institutions also insist they are actually part-time educational settings providing supplementary lessons for home-educated children, with both part-time settings and home education being almost entirely unregulated.

We welcome the Government's proposals to tighten the law on illegal schools, including which institutions must register as schools and what counts as full-time education, as well as to introduce a compulsory register of home-educated students.⁵⁰ We believe this should help to ensure vulnerable children are no longer able to slip through the regulatory cracks between different types of provision and stop illegal schools from operating. But progress on this issue has

⁴⁹ Ellen Johnson, *Apostasy, Human Rights and Hate Crime in England and Wales: A Mixed Methods Study*, 2019. p34. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3475161

⁵⁰ Department for Education, 'Regulating Independent Educational Institutions' (May 2020) <https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-frameworks/regulating-independent-education-institutions/>; and Department for Education, 'Children Not In School' (June 2019) <https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-frameworks/children-not-in-school/>



been extremely slow – we have been raising the issue pressingly for six years now⁵¹ – the proposals must be implemented as a matter of urgency.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

We are deeply concerned about FGM, defined as the medically unnecessary partial or total removal of female external genitalia, infibulation, or other injury to the genital organs. This procedure can cause severe medical complications including bleeding, difficulties with urination, cysts, infections, difficulties in childbirth, and an increase in infant mortality. We joined the ACTION: FGM coalition which produced a manifesto to end FGM by 2030 and are pleased the Government shares the same ambition to eradicate this practice.⁵² But prosecutions remain almost non-existent, in spite of evidence that FGM continues to happen in the UK, and new figures show that reports fell significantly because of delays and lockdown closures.⁵³

Anti-choice demonstrations outside of abortion clinics

We are concerned that the rights of women to seek safe and legal medical services are being violated by anti-choice protestors who harass and intimidate patients and staff at abortion clinics. We are a founding supporter of the Back Off campaign, coordinated by BPAS, which aims to change the law to make it possible to establish buffer zones around clinics.

The campaign was established due to an intensification of anti-choice protests around clinics. At such protests, anti-choice activists have accosted women without solicitation, shouted abuse, exposed them to distressing and graphic images, either in leaflets or on large banners, filmed people entering and leaving clinics without their consent, and blocked the entrances.⁵⁴

We believe that buffer zones would balance the competing rights between a patient's right to access safe and legal medical services without being harassed and intimidated for doing so, and those of the anti-choice activists to freely express their views. Such a measure does not ban or in any way prevent anti-choice activists from organising such activities, but offers those seeking abortions a meaningful choice about whether they wish to engage with these activities or not. Such measures have been successfully introduced in states in Australia, Canada, and the United States.

Question 23. Have you ever felt coerced by members of your own religious community into doing something against your wishes?

N/A

⁵¹ 'Illegal Faith Schools', Humanists UK.

<https://humanism.org.uk/campaigns/schools-and-education/faith-schools/illegal-faith-schools/>

⁵² 'Humanists UK joins coalition in calling for FGM to be eradicated by 2030', Humanists UK, 3 February 2020: <https://humanism.org.uk/2020/02/03/humanists-uk-joins-coalition-in-calling-for-fgm-to-be-eradicated-by-2030/>

⁵³ 'Coronavirus: Concern as FGM reports fall during pandemic', *BBC*, 26 November 2020: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55089000>

⁵⁴ 'Humanists UK calls for buffer zone outside abortion clinic in Ealing', Humanists UK. 26 March 2018: <https://humanism.org.uk/2018/03/26/humanists-uk-calls-for-buffer-zone-outside-abortion-clinic-in-ealing/>



Question 24: Is there anything about your faith community that you want to see faith leaders or the Government tackle?

N/A

Question 25: Do you hold currently, or have you held a formal position as a faith leader within a place of worship or a faith-based charity?

No

Question 26: Do you feel confident that local and national Government and public servants have a good understanding of different faiths, religious practices and issues?

No

Question 27: Please expand

We do not believe local and national Government and public servants have a strong understanding of humanism or about the non-religious. There are some bright spots, but also many poor areas – as outlined in our response to question 12.

Last year we were proud to launch Humanists in Government, a network that brings together non-religious civil servants to organise regular events and facilitate links between people working at the heart of policy-making and -delivering bodies.⁵⁵ We are optimistic that as this network grows and builds links between the wider faith and belief networks, that understanding will grow across the civil service. We also have run a number of successful training sessions for civil servants, both about humanism, and about apostate support.

Through our Faith to Faithless network we are aware that local and national Government has a long way to go in order to become aware of the problems facing apostates and may lack vital safeguarding knowledge. Our Faith to Faithless service offers training to public services to equip them with the knowledge about the issues facing those who are thinking of, are in the process of, or have left their religion in the UK. To date the network has run a total of 19 training courses to 26 different organisations and 275 individuals including police forces across the UK, universities, NHS trusts, and many more besides.

Finally, it is clear that some public bodies are not aware of their obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998, the Equality Act 2010, and other human rights frameworks which make it unlawful to discriminate against a person on the grounds of their religion or belief.

Question 28: In your personal experience do you feel the emergency services (police, fire brigade) and public health care professionals (e.g. GPs) have a good understanding and respect for different beliefs and all faiths?

No

⁵⁵ 'Humanists in Government network launched', Humanists UK, 10 April 2019: <https://humanism.org.uk/2019/04/10/humanists-in-government-network-launched/>



Question 29: Please expand

Reflecting our answer to question 27, we do not believe frontline services have a strong understanding of the issues facing apostates. We have trained more than 40 police officers across several forces, usually in hate crime units, but understanding is far too patchy.

Question 30: Do you feel confident that elected members in public office (MPs, Ministers, Local Councillors), have a good understanding of different faith, faith practices and issues concerning people of faith?

No

Question 31: Please expand

In our experience, understanding of the issues can be similarly poor amongst elected officials as amongst service providers. Our research indicates that MPs are on the whole more religious than the population at large, although this is not indicative that there is a problem with prejudice, it does indicate there may be a problem in terms of representation.

Question 32: In your opinion, how could Government and Public servants improve on their faith literacy?

The very omission of non-religious views inherent within this question demonstrates that the Government just doesn't have good religion or belief literacy. If it did, then it would recognise the impossibility of trying to understand religious perspectives while ignoring non-religious perspectives.

We strongly urge that any effort to improve 'faith literacy' must also include information, education, and training about the non-religious, including both humanism and on the issues facing apostates. This is because, as we've previously outlined, the state has an obligation to treat its citizens equally regardless of their religion or belief, and therefore to do this, it must have a strong understanding of humanism, and the issues facing apostates, as well as about religious people's beliefs and needs.

We would urge the Government to offer training on humanism and apostasy to its civil servants and to elected officials, and include such content in any diversity awareness training.

Question 33: More than a third of all state funded schools and academies are faith-based. Do you think that faith-based schools are good for society?

No

Question 34: Please expand

First, we just want to note, yet again, how incredibly unpopular faith schools are, faith-based admissions are, and collective worship is, even with religious people. We outline the polling evidence in our response to question 7. If most responses to this consultation come back as positive towards faith schools, then that would simply mean that the responses are unrepresentative of the public as a whole.



Likewise, concerns about faith schools are shared by organisations which include professionals and experts from a range of religious backgrounds. For example, the Accord Coalition works to ensure that admissions and recruitment policies in state-funded schools are free from discrimination on religion or belief is made up of a number of religious groups.⁵⁶ Further, the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life, which was made up of twenty commissioners including leaders from a range of religious backgrounds, made a number of recommendations in its final report including that 'Government should recognise the negative practical consequences of selection by religion in schools, and that most religious schools can further their aims without discriminating on grounds of religion in their admissions and employment practices, and require bodies responsible for school admissions and the employment of staff to take measures to reduce such selection', and 'State inspectorates should be concerned with every aspect of the life of faith schools, including religious elements currently inspected by denominational authorities.'⁵⁷

With that said, the harms caused by 'faith schools' (as they are popularly known) are manifest. They segregate children, not just on the basis of their parents' religion, but also along ethnic and socio-economic lines. They deny children freedom of religion or belief, by ascribing to them beliefs that they are too young to confidently hold themselves. And they are massively over-provided for, when compared to demand, or demographics.

Religious selection disadvantages the poor, ethnic minorities, and the non-religious

State-funded faith schools are legally empowered to religiously select pupils, and more places are selected in this way, in schools' oversubscription criteria, than there are places at private, grammar, or single-sex schools *combined*. It is morally questionable that tax-paying parents often struggle to find a local school for their child because of their religion or belief, or can't get them into their best local school. And even looking beyond that, such selection has an evidenced negative impact on a variety of disadvantaged groups as well as on community cohesion.

There is a wealth of robust evidence⁵⁸ showing that religious selection not only separates pupils by religion, but also along ethnic and socio-economic lines, as well as by prior attainment. In practice, this means that disadvantaged, vulnerable pupils are less likely to get a place at these schools, which tend to be less representative of their local areas than schools that do not select in this way.

To explain this in more detail, faith schools are socio-economically selective, because their religious admissions policies enable them to skim the richest, most advantaged pupils from their areas while the rest fail to meet or understand their more complex admissions criteria. Evidence from the Fair

⁵⁶ The Accord Coalition: <https://accordcoalition.org.uk/about-us/>

⁵⁷ Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life. 2015. *Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good*: <https://corablivingwithdifference.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/living-with-difference-community-diversity-and-the-common-good.pdf>

⁵⁸ For an overview see Fair Admissions Campaign, *Research into religiously selective admissions criteria*. 2017: <https://fairadmissions.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/2017-08-29-FINAL-Religious-Selection-Research-Survey.pdf> and Accord Coalition, *Databank of Independent Evidence on Faith Schools*. 2020: <http://accordcoalition.org.uk/research/>



Admissions Campaign shows that, overall, comprehensive secondaries with no religious character admit 5% more pupils eligible for free school meals than live in their local areas. But comprehensive Church of England secondaries admit 15% fewer; Roman Catholic secondaries 28% fewer; Jewish secondaries 63% fewer; and Muslim secondaries 29% fewer.⁵⁹ Research by the Sutton Trust has also established a trend for faith schools to be some of the most socially selective in the country, both at primary level,⁶⁰ and among top-performing comprehensives.⁶¹

Religious admissions policies have also been demonstrated to segregate along ethnic lines. For example, Catholic schools take 4.4% fewer Asian pupils than would be expected given the makeup of their local areas.⁶² Given the well-established relationship between poverty, disadvantage, and being a member of a Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic (BAME) group, the issue of supporting vulnerable children simply cannot be addressed in the absence of acknowledging the detrimental and disproportionate impact religiously selective admissions have in this regard. Indeed, this year Liverpool Council's Education and Children's Services Select Committee agreed to set up a scrutiny panel to investigate the impact faith school admissions are having on the ability of Muslim families to secure school places in the city after parents voiced concerns about the issue.⁶³ And all this is to say nothing of the religious discrimination that is inherent to permitting schools to select on grounds of faith.

As studies that control for pupil background show,⁶⁴ it is primarily religious selectivity, rather than a faith ethos, that accounts for any enhanced levels of attainment or performance that faith schools appear to have, for example, in national league tables. Nevertheless, the raw data tends to fuel the idea that faith schools are 'better' than other types of school and encourages parents (particularly the highly educated and those from more advantaged socio-economic groups) to use all the means at their disposal to gain a place, thus perpetuating what is effectively a self-fulfilling prophecy.

⁵⁹ Fair Admissions Campaign, 'Overview of issues to do with religious selection in schools'. 2015: <http://fairadmissions.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Overview-of-issues-to-do-with-religious-selection-in-school-admissions.pdf>

⁶⁰ Rebecca Allen and Meenakshi Parameshwaran (for The Sutton Trust), *Caught Out: Primary schools, catchment areas and social selection*. 2016:

https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Caught-Out_Research-brief_April-16-1.pdf

⁶¹ Carl Cullinane, Jude Hillary, Joana Andrade, and Stephen McNamara (for The Sutton Trust), *Selective Comprehensives 2017: Admissions to high-attaining non-selective schools for disadvantaged pupils*. 2017: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Selective-Comprehensives-2017.pdf>

⁶² Fair Admissions Campaign, 'Overview of issues to do with religious selection in schools'. 2015: <http://fairadmissions.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Overview-of-issues-to-do-with-religious-selection-in-school-admissions.pdf>

⁶³ 'Faith-based school admissions disadvantage non-religious and minorities, Humanists UK tells Liverpool Council', Humanists UK, 10 August 2020: <https://humanism.org.uk/2020/08/10/faith-based-school-admissions-disadvantage-non-religious-and-minorities-humanists-uk-tells-liverpool-council/>

⁶⁴ See Education Policy Institute, *Faith Schools, pupil performance, and social selection*. 2016: <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/faith-schools-pupil-performance-social-selection/>; or Stephen Gibbons and Olmo Silva, 'Faith Primary Schools: Better Schools or Better Pupils?', *Discussion Paper No. 72 from the Centre for the Economics of Education (CEE) at CEP* <http://cee.lse.ac.uk/cee%20dps/ceedp72.pdf>; or 'Secondary league tables unfairly benefit religious schools by ignoring pupil backgrounds say academics', Humanists UK, 24 January 2019: <https://humanism.org.uk/2019/01/24/secondary-league-tables-unfairly-benefit-religious-schools-by-ignoring-pupil-backgrounds-say-academics>



While the Government often claims that faith schools enhance parental choice, the opposite is often the case. Following the Liverpool Council announcement, we conducted a small postcode survey and found that the preponderance of religiously selective Church of England and Catholic schools in some areas of Liverpool means that those from non-religious and minority faith backgrounds are shut out of the vast majority of the schools with 'Good' or 'Outstanding' Ofsted grades in their local areas.⁶⁵ Just stopping and thinking about this makes this fact obviously true: if a new Catholic school opens in a local area, then that may increase parental choice for the 5% of parents who are nowadays Catholics, but it decreases such choice for the 95% who are not, when compared to if an inclusive school had opened instead. In other words, the presence of faith schools in our system increases *diversity of types of school*, but decreases *parental choice*.

A number of recent news stories from elsewhere in the country highlight similar difficulties, with some parents unable to secure a place at any local school⁶⁶ because they all have a faith character which the family does not share. And, conversely, other parents, particularly but not exclusively those in rural areas, being forced to send their children to religious schools they do not want because of the over-provision of such places in their area.⁶⁷ Indeed, our own President, Alice Roberts, was forced to send her children to a faith school, as all her local schools are religious.

Although these issues may affect families from a variety of backgrounds, they are particularly acute for the non-religious. Research we conducted found that 40% of all state faith secondary schools in England discriminate against non-religious families specifically by giving priority to families who are of any religion over the non-religious. This figure rises to 60% for Catholic secondaries.⁶⁸

Since 52% of British adults now identify as having no religion, with the number rising to 70% in those aged 18-24,⁶⁹ many vulnerable and disadvantaged children will be non-religious and therefore face additional barriers to securing a school place on this basis (the specific barriers religious selection places in the way of looked after and previously looked after children are discussed in more detail below).

⁶⁵ Letter to Councillor John Prince, Liverpool City Council, Annex 1, p.4-8. 2020: <https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020-08-06-RW-Email-to-Councillor-John-Prince-Liverpool-Council-merged.pdf>

⁶⁶ 'Mum fuming after son misses out on three schools due to his lack of faith', 3 March 2019, *Nottingham Post*: <https://www.nottinghampost.com/news/nottingham-news/mum-fuming-after-son-misses-2601395>

⁶⁷ 'Angry parents say children have been let down after they failed to get places at new high school', *Manchester Evening News*, 13 March 2019: <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/angry-parents-say-children-been-15961391>

⁶⁸ Humanists UK, *Non-religious need not apply: Targeted discrimination against non-religious families by state faith schools*. 2018: <https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018-05-10-LW-FINAL-Non-religious-discrimination.pdf>

⁶⁹ NatCen, 'Church of England numbers at record low'. 2018: <http://natcen.ac.uk/news-media/press-releases/2018/september/church-of-england-numbers-at-record-low/>



Religious selection has a damaging effect on social cohesion

In addition to the negative impact the segregation caused by religious selection has on the ability of individual children and their families to secure a school place, it also has a huge impact on communities, which are more likely to be fractured when children are denied the opportunity to mix with others who are different from themselves. This was explicitly acknowledged by the Government in the *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper*⁷⁰ and associated *Integrated Communities Action Plan*.⁷¹ Indeed, research from 2017 published on the DfE's own website⁷² shows that pupils in ethnically mixed schools are more trusting and have more positive views of children from different backgrounds than pupils in segregated schools. Elsewhere, the authors of that same study argue that 'faith schools, to the extent that they are segregated, deprive young people of the opportunity to mix across ethnic and religious lines' in a manner that thwarts positive attitudes to members of so-called 'outgroups'.⁷³

Despite all this, earlier this year the Government gave the go-ahead to the first voluntary aided school able to select up to 100% of its pupils on faith grounds in over a decade. By requiring proposals for new VA faith schools to explicitly demonstrate how they will 'attract applications from all parts of the wider community' and 'equip pupils with the skills, values and knowledge to become active citizens in wider society', the DfE appears to both recognise and attempt to mitigate for the unique risk such schools represent to integration and community cohesion. However, it has provided no reason to think that the measures it suggests – such as school linking programmes and the inclusion of individuals holding different religions or beliefs on governing bodies⁷⁴ – are as successful at promoting integration and social cohesion as studying alongside those from differing backgrounds every day.

If we are to have a tolerant society in which everyone is treated equally, it is imperative that our schools cultivate positive attitudes to others and eliminate prejudice, particularly towards marginalised and disadvantaged groups. They simply cannot do this while discriminatory faith-based admissions policies remain the norm.

⁷⁰ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper*. 2018. pp.26-27: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/696993/Integrated_Communities_Strategy.pdf

⁷¹ HM Government, *Integrated Communities Action Plan*. 2019: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/778045/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Govt_Action_Plan.pdf

⁷² Miles Hewstone et al. *Diversity and Social Cohesion in Mixed and Segregated Secondary Schools in Oldham*. 2017: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/634118/Diversity_and_Social_Cohesion_in_Oldham_schools.pdf

⁷³ Miles Hewstone et al. 'Influence of segregation versus mixing: Intergroup contact and attitudes among White-British and Asian-British students in high schools in Oldham, England' *Theory and Research in Education* (2018) Volume: 16 issue: 2, page(s): 179-203: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1477878518779879>

⁷⁴ Department for Education, *Voluntary Aided School Establishment Guidance and Criteria*. 2018. p.26: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/761880/VA_capital_scheme_guidance.pdf



Religious schools are massively over-provided

Over one-third of state-funded schools are religious. This breaks down to 23% Church of England, 10% Catholic, and 1% of other faiths (mainly other Christian schools), with the figures higher in primary than secondary schools. On top of that, most of the 7% of places that are in private schools are also at faith schools.

But the latest British Social Attitudes Survey records that amongst those aged 18-44 – i.e. of typical parent age – just 2.7% are Anglicans, 6.7% Catholics, and 15.5% other Christians. This means that a higher proportion of schools are CofE, Catholic, or of any Christian variety, than there are people of those beliefs. This alone suggests there is a massive over-provision of such schools, one that is only going to get worse as the number of Christians continues to fall.

And it's worth, of course, considering what parents actually think. Just 9% consider religion to be an important factor when picking their children's schools.⁷⁵ It's also worth noting that the *British Sikh Report*, which came out last month, found that an overwhelming 89% of British Sikhs think the faith ethos is not an important factor in school choice and less than half would send their child to a Sikh faith school.⁷⁶ In sum, it is entirely unhelpful to preserve policies which do nothing to facilitate parental choice and actively work against the interests of children and their families.

Question 35: Do you believe that Religious and Belief Education (often referred to as 'RE') is comprehensive enough within the English education curriculum to provide a good understanding of different faiths and beliefs?

No.

Question 36: Please expand

Despite being of central importance to social cohesion and the ability of children and young people to fully understand the beliefs and worldviews of others, RE is no longer fit for purpose. Owing to a general lack of esteem for the subject, many pupils fail to receive an adequate amount of education about religions, and even fewer receive an adequate amount about humanism. Indeed, the RE Council of England and Wales's (REC's) 2017 *State of the Nation Report* noted that 28% of secondary schools provide no dedicated curriculum time to RE.⁷⁷ This, coupled with inadequate levels teacher training and funding, means the little RE pupils do receive is often delivered by under-qualified staff, many of whom (some 56%) have no relevant post A-Level qualification in the subject.

⁷⁵ YouGov / Daybreak Survey Results, 13 September 2010:

http://cdn.yougov.com/today_uk_import/YGArchives-Life-YouGov-DaybreakReligion-130910.pdf

⁷⁶ '89% of British Sikhs think faith ethos is not an important factor in choosing a school', 24 November 2020, Humanists UK: <https://humanism.org.uk/2020/11/24/new-report-89-of-british-sikhs-think-faith-ethos-is-not-an-important-factor-in-choosing-a-school/>

⁷⁷ Religious Education Council. 2017. *State of the Nation Report*: <https://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/State-of-the-Nation-Report-2017.pdf>



RE has also failed to keep pace with changes to society over the past few decades. While Britain is increasingly religiously diverse and, according to the most recent British Social Attitudes Survey, 52% of people now identify as having no religion, RE syllabuses are often highly uninclusive of non-religious worldviews such as humanism – many exclude them altogether. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that many Local Authorities have Standing Advisory Councils on RE (SACREs) that do not include humanists as full members.

All the usual contemporary justifications for the subject of RE in the school curriculum – its contribution to social cohesion and mutual understanding, its presentation of a range of answers to questions of meaning and purpose, its role in educating about the history and present culture of humanity, and its role in the search for personal identity and values – can only be served by including humanist perspectives and non-religious students. If that doesn't change, then RE will increasingly lose relevance to the students studying it. Indeed, a poll out last month found 55% of the population saying the subject is 'not very' or 'not at all important', with just 12% saying it is 'very important'. Only drama, classics, and Latin were seen to matter less.⁷⁸

In 2018, the Commission on RE (CoRE) – organised by the REC (of which Humanists UK is a founder member) and conducted by 14 independent expert commissioners – published its final report examining the legal, education, and policy frameworks underpinning the regulation and teaching of RE in England. The report was the culmination of a two-year review, designed to 'improve the quality and rigour of religious education and its capacity to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.'

⁷⁹ Key recommendations are:

- 'The name of the subject should be changed to Religion and Worldviews'
- 'The National Entitlement to the study of Religion and Worldviews should become statutory for all publicly funded schools' – and, for maintained schools, should 'replace the requirement... to follow their locally agreed syllabus.'
- For faith schools, 'a requirement should be introduced to provide Religion and Worldviews in accordance with the National Entitlement'. This should be provided in addition to any faith-based education.
- The National Entitlement states 'Programmes of study must reflect the complex, diverse and plural nature of worldviews. They may draw from... non-religious worldviews and concepts including Humanism...'
- The National Entitlement should be supported by 'Non-statutory programmes of study for each of Key Stages 1–4... developed at a national level, at a similar level of detail as those for History and Geography in the National Curriculum.'
- Standing Advisory Councils on RE should be replaced by Local Advisory Networks for Religion and Worldviews, with the composition of the groups within it changed to, amongst

⁷⁸ YouGov poll of 1,600 British adults, 21-23 November 2020:

https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/4z6h44fd5j/P_Main_Political_Tracker_Survey_Rotation4_sr_2.pdf

⁷⁹ Commission on Religion Education. 2018. *Final Report: Religion and Worldviews: The Way Forward. A national plan for RE*: <https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Report-of-the-Commission-on-RE.pdf>



other things, make clear humanists should be included, and remove the privileged place for the CofE.

These proposals are strongly in line with Humanists UK's long-held policy positions and we urge the UK Government to fully implement the recommendations of this report. We particularly welcome the recommendation that the subject be reformed to ensure the full inclusion of humanism, and support the suggestion that, to recognise this change, RE should be renamed 'Religion and Worldviews'. Aside from the academic importance of this extended breadth, it better acknowledges the evolving nature of national demographics (especially the increasing prevalence of the non-religious) than current arrangements and will better equip young people for their future as persons and citizens.

The report of the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life similarly recommended that 'Governments across the UK should introduce a statutory entitlement for all schools within the state system for a subject dealing with religious and non-religious worldviews... The content should be broad and inclusive in a way that reflects the diversity of religion and belief in the UK.'⁸⁰

Significantly, the Welsh Government has recently announced plans to change the law on religious education to clarify the fact that, in line with the Human Rights Act 1998, the curriculum and the bodies that write and oversee the syllabus (known as ASCs and SACREs) should include humanism/humanists on an equal footing with religions/religious people. It is renaming the subject 'Religion, Values and Ethics' to reflect this broader scope.⁸¹

These changes arose as a result of a legal challenge taken by a humanist representative (and backed by Humanists UK) against the Vale of Glamorgan SACRE when it refused to admit her as a full voting member of the committee because it said that only religious groups could be admitted to Group A (the group that is made up of religious denominations other than the Church of England) and humanism is not a religion. When we won permission to have the case heard at the High Court on the grounds that, under the Act, 'religion' must be read as inclusive of both religion and belief, the Council backed down and admitted that there was a legal basis for a humanist to be included.

Following this, the Welsh Government issued guidance to all local authorities outlining its view that humanists may participate fully in SACREs and followed this up with the proposals set out above.⁸²

In contrast, the DfE in England has stubbornly refused to issue similar guidance, preferring to leave the question of whether or not a humanist may be fully included to individual local authorities. This

⁸⁰ Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life. 2015. *Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good*: <https://corablivingwithdifference.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/living-with-difference-community-diversity-and-the-common-good.pdf>

⁸¹ 'Wales to scrap right to withdraw from RE and RSE, rename RE to 'Religion, Values and Ethics'', Humanists UK, 21 January 2020 <https://humanism.org.uk/2020/01/21/wales-to-scrap-right-to-withdraw-from-re-and-rse-rename-re-to-religion-values-and-ethics/>

⁸² Letter from Kirsty Williams, Cabinet Secretary for Education to Local Authority Directors of Education, 3 May 2018 https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/KW_0783_18-en.pdf



is in spite of the fact that similar cases have arisen in England. For example, in 2019, in the Royal Borough of Greenwich where, following a decision to reject a humanist representative's request to join Group A, the representative once again issued legal proceedings and the Council backed down.⁸³ And, most recently in Southampton, where just last month a humanist representative's application to join the SACRE was rejected, once again because the Council believed this to run contrary to the law when, in fact, it does not.

It is imperative that this situation is addressed if religious education is to adequately reflect the beliefs of the non-religious – something that is required both by domestic and international law. This is best evidenced by the High Court ruling in *R (Fox) v Secretary of State for Education* (2015) which found that the UK Government had made 'an error of law' when it claimed a Religious Studies GCSE syllabus that left out the systematic teaching of non-religious worldviews like humanism would meet the statutory requirements for teaching RE at Key Stage 4. This was because, by stipulating that students only need learn about two religious perspectives, the syllabus specifications constituted a failure in the state's duty to 'take care that information or knowledge included in the curriculum is conveyed in a pluralistic manner' and 'accord equal respect to different religious convictions, and to non-religious belief'.⁸⁴

To put it plainly, the current policy violates human rights law and unfairly discriminates against the non-religious. We therefore believe that the UK Government must take action, in the first instance by issuing guidance, but then by amending the law, to make it clear that RE and the bodies that oversee it should be fully inclusive of humanism and humanists. Wales has done this. Why can't England?

Question 37: Do you think that faith-based or religious practices in schools have a positive impact on a child's education?

No

Question 38: Please expand

In addition to our concerns about faith schools, RE, and illegal schools, which we outline in response to previous questions (22, 34, and 35), we are also concerned about collective worship, faith-based exemptions to relationships and sex education, and illegal schools.

Collective Worship

The UK is the only country where daily Christian worship is compulsory in state schools, including those without a religious character, as standard. In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland parents may withdraw their children from this 'collective worship' – and in England and Wales pupils aged 16 or over may withdraw themselves – but the process can be difficult and those who are withdrawn are not generally provided with a meaningful alternative of equal educational worth.

⁸³ 'English council backs down after legal challenge to exclusion of humanist from RE body' Humanists UK, 2 August 2019: <https://humanism.org.uk/2019/08/02/english-council-backs-down-after-legal-challenge-to-exclude-humanist-from-re-body/>

⁸⁴ *R (Fox) and others v Secretary of State for Education* (2015): <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/r-fox-v-ssfe.pdf>



Instead, children are typically forced to sit outside classrooms... And through withdrawal, children also miss out on other important parts of the school day, such as notices... It is presumably because of the lack of these alternatives that take-up of rights to withdraw are so low.

The fact that the collective worship must be of a broadly Christian character means the practice discriminates against the 78% of British young people who do not identify as Christian.⁸⁵

In August 2019, parents surveyed in a YouGov poll commissioned by Humanists UK said that 'religious worship' was the least appropriate of 13 possible activities or subjects for school assemblies,⁸⁶ and we agree. We want the outdated requirement for collective worship to be repealed and replaced by a requirement for inclusive assemblies, which promote the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of all pupils, without discrimination, and regardless of religion or belief.

Parents have a legal right to withdraw their children from collective worship. And, since 2006, sixth-form pupils have been permitted to withdraw themselves from these sessions. However, this ignores the fact that under the Human Rights Act (1998), case law associated with it known as 'Gillick competence', and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), younger children also have the right to freedom of religion or belief. That right is not respected when religious worship is imposed upon them. In 2016, the UN Children's Rights Committee called for the repeal of the UK's compulsory collective worship laws on this basis,⁸⁷ and likewise the Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life also recommended that Governments should 'repeal requirements for schools to hold acts of collective worship or religious observance and issue new guidelines building on current best practice for inclusive assemblies and times for reflection'.⁸⁸

The issue is particularly pertinent for young people in the latter stages of secondary education who may have reached the age of 16 but, because they have not yet begun sixth-form, may still not be able to opt out of worship.

What's more, even when parents request an exemption, the process of withdrawal is often difficult (not least because the law is not always well understood by schools). Children who have been

⁸⁵ 'Latest British Social Attitudes reveals 71% of young adults are non-religious, just 3% are Church of England', Humanists UK, 04 September 2017: <https://humanism.org.uk/2017/09/04/latest-british-social-attitudes-reveals-71-of-young-adults-are-non-religious-just-3-are-church-of-england/>

⁸⁶ 'Parents say religious worship is least appropriate activity for school assemblies, new poll reveals', Humanists UK, 9 August 2019: <https://humanism.org.uk/2019/08/09/parents-say-religious-worship-is-least-appropriate-activity-for-school-assemblies-new-poll-reveals/>

⁸⁷ 'UN Children's Rights Committee calls for end to compulsory worship in UK schools', Humanists UK, 09 June 2016: <https://humanism.org.uk/2016/06/09/un-childrens-rights-committee-calls-for-end-to-compulsory-worship-in-uk-schools/>

⁸⁸ Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life. 2015. *Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good*: <https://corablivingwithdifference.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/living-with-difference-community-diversity-and-the-common-good.pdf>



removed from worship are rarely given a meaningful alternative of educational value during the time their peers are attending worship.

In 2019 two non-religious parents in England, Lee and Lizanne Harris (supported by Humanists UK), took a legal challenge against their children's school because it refused to provide just such an alternative. The Harrises won permission to have their case heard at the High Court, and the Trust that runs the school subsequently backed down. It then agreed to provide an inclusive alternative to the Harris children and any other withdrawn children whose parents wished them to receive it.⁸⁹

Although the case doesn't set a legal precedent, this logically ought to mean that something similar could be possible at other schools. But after the outcome was announced, the Department for Education denied this, issuing a statement saying there were no further implications for other schools as a result of the decision.⁹⁰ This is in contrast to the Welsh Government, which has acknowledged that statutory worship raises many human rights concerns, including children's rights, and that were it starting from scratch it would not enshrine the law as it is. Although it has still yet to change the law, saying that it doesn't have capacity to review the matter before the 2021 Welsh elections.⁹¹

Very few parents who would like to see a meaningful alternative to collective worship will be in a position to mount time-consuming legal proceedings that may risk alienating the family from their children's school. So this is clearly not the right way to ensure that children get the kind of inclusive provision to which they are entitled, an aim that would be far better met by a change to the law.

Faith-based exemptions to Relationships and Sex Education

We welcomed new regulations making relationships and sex education (RSE) compulsory in state-funded schools in England, however we are deeply concerned that schools are permitted to delay or omit content, including about LGBT people, on faith grounds, and parents are still allowed to prevent their children from receiving any sex education until the later stages of secondary school.⁹²

⁸⁹ 'School concedes in collective worship legal case – will provide alternative assemblies', Humanists UK, 20 November 2019: <https://humanism.org.uk/2019/11/20/school-concedes-in-collective-worship-legal-case-will-provide-alternative-assemblies/>

⁹⁰ 'Schools urged to offer inclusive assemblies after trust concedes collective worship challenge' *Schools Week*, 20 November 2019 <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-told-to-offer-inclusive-assemblies-after-trust-concedes-collective-worship-challenge/>

⁹¹ 'Disappointment as Welsh Government refuses to act on collective worship during current Assembly term' Humanists UK, 8 January 2020: <https://humanism.org.uk/2020/01/08/disappointment-as-welsh-government-refuses-to-act-on-collective-worship-during-current-assembly-term/>

⁹² Department for Education. *Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education: Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers*. 2020: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/908013/Relationships_Education_Relationships_and_Sex_Education_RSE_and_Health_Education.pdf



As a result of the coronavirus pandemic the Government has granted schools a degree of flexibility with respect to how RSE is implemented during the first two terms of the academic year. For this reason, we are concerned that some religious schools will use this grace period as an excuse to deny their pupils access to the new subject for as long as possible. Last year, we uncovered evidence that a state-funded Jewish school was pressuring parents to use the right to withdraw so the school could avoid their duty to teach RSE altogether.⁹³ This seems to us to be much more dangerous than the noisy protests that some Muslim families in Birmingham have been engaged in, to prevent such teaching from happening in schools there – because in Birmingham the teaching did go ahead.

Religious parents don't get to decide if their children will be LGBT. There will be as many LGBT children growing up in conservative religious households as any other. It's therefore vital that every state school is fully accepting of such children, teaching pupils about LGBT people and relationships, and educating to prevent homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic bullying.

Question 39: Do you think that secular or non-religious practices in schools have a positive impact on a child's education?

Yes

Question 40: Please expand

First, we think this question is extremely confused, in conflating secular practices, which is generally understood to mean things like teaching PE, geography, or English, with non-religious practices, such as teaching about humanism.

With that said, we campaign for an inclusive schools system, where children and young people of all different backgrounds and beliefs can learn with and from each other and everyone is treated equally on the grounds of religion or belief. We challenge faith schools' admissions, employment, and curriculum policies, as well as the privileged processes by which new faith schools continue to open. We therefore think that both the secular aspects of children's education, and the teaching about humanism, are positive. We note that none of the teaching about humanism is ever done from the perspective that humanism is true, unlike much RE in faith schools, or collective worship in other schools.

Question 41: Do you currently, or have you ever served within the British Military?

Humanists UK members in Defence Humanists serve within the British Military.

Question 42: Did you feel that the faith and belief of yourself and/or your colleagues was respected and valued?

No

⁹³ 'Jewish school caught encouraging mass withdrawal of pupils from RSE so school can foster 'good religious girls'', Humanists UK, 24 July 2019: <https://humanism.org.uk/2019/07/24/jewish-school-caught-encouraging-mass-withdrawal-of-children-from-rse-so-school-can-foster-good-religious-girls/>



Question 43: Please expand

As in the wider population, the number of non-religious people in the Armed Forces has increased rapidly in recent years. The number of non-religious UK Regulars has increased by over 100% between 2012 and 2020 and has grown from 16% in 2012 to 32% in 2020. Likewise the number of non-religious people in the reserves has increased from 18% in 2012 to 27% in 2020.⁹⁴

The Ministry of Defence has made some progress in supporting non-religious or humanist serving personnel through the Defence Humanist Network and its sponsorship of an annual humanist remembrance event. Both of these facts are very welcome.

However, despite the number of non-religious people in the armed forces totalling more than the number of people belonging to all non-Christian religions (3.4% for UK regulars and 2.6% for reserves in 2020), there is currently no pastoral support provision for the non-religious. Non-religious personnel only have access to pastoral care provided almost exclusively by Christian chaplaincy, which is not accredited to act in this capacity, nor is it suitable to meet their needs. Just as those belonging to a particular religion have needs related to their beliefs that require a denominationally specific approach, non-religious people also have spiritual and pastoral needs that should be approached equally. The effective monopoly on the provision of pastoral care that rests with the Christian churches could be seen as counter to the MoD view to embrace diversity and broaden the recruiting base.

Non-religious pastoral care is becoming well-established in other areas of the public sector, including by the National Health Service and (to a lesser extent) Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service. And there is substantial precedent in other nations' armed forces for humanist pastoral care provision. The Netherlands' armed forces have employed humanist pastoral carers for 55 years; the Norwegians and Belgians make such provision, and the Australian Navy has also recently reformed its chaplaincy to cater to the needs of non-religious personnel by employing non-religious pastoral carers.⁹⁵

Question 44: What, if any, was your experience with the military chaplaincy services?

As per the previous answer, currently humanist and non-religious personnel only have access to pastoral care provided almost exclusively by Christian chaplaincy, which is not accredited nor suitable to act in this capacity.

Question 45: Do you feel that all faiths are people of faith are treated equally in the British Military?

No

⁹⁴ Ministry of Defence, UK Armed Forces Biannual Diversity Statistics: 1 April 2020: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-armed-forces-biannual-diversity-statistics-2020/uk-armed-forces-biannual-diversity-statistics-1-april-2020>

⁹⁵ New Chaplaincy branch introduces non-religious care option'. *Navy Daily*, 11 May 2020: <https://news.navy.gov.au/en/May2020/Fleet/5849/New-Chaplaincy-branch-introduces-non-religious-care-option.htm>



Question 46: Please expand

First of all, the very language of this question is not treating all people equally, in excluding the non-religious. That in itself is a damning indictment of the very problems which this survey should be seeking to address.

If the question was asked in an inclusive way, then the answer would clearly be 'No', due to the reasons set out in our answer to question 43. Christianity is also predominant in military ritual and ceremonial, often to the discomfort of non-religious and humanist personnel.

We therefore recommend that the Ministry of Defence should commission an independent review of pastoral support for the armed forces which takes into account the changing religion and belief demographics and the need for a multi-faith and belief approach, including for personnel holding non-religious beliefs, and puts forward proposals for restructuring and modernising chaplaincy and pastoral support provided to the armed forces. This review should:

- be led by an independent figure;
- focus predominantly on the requirements of serving personnel;
- also consult faith and belief organisations, Service family groups and Service welfare and charitable sector organisations;
- conduct an Equality Analysis to assess current provision against the MOD's responsibilities under the public sector equality duty;
- explore the training, education and accreditation issues, in line with Defence Academy standards, associated with professional, uniformed pastoral care;
- draw on existing models from other nations' armed forces;
- look also for financial efficiencies through reform of existing structures;
- work to a strict deadline for delivery of proposals for consideration by Ministers, including a robust, resourced project plan for implementation.

Question 47: Do you have any personal or professional experience of the criminal justice system?

Yes. The Non-Religious Pastoral Support Network has trained and accredited a network of pastoral carers who are in volunteer positions in the prison service. The NRSPN provides like-minded support to those who identify as belonging to no religion. Within the HMPPS context, it works with all prisoners who are registered as 'nil religion', and also to those who register as holding a specific non-religious worldview, such as – but not limited to – humanism, atheism, and agnosticism.

Question 48: Do you feel that the faith or belief of prisoners, visitors and professionals is respected?

No

Question 49: Overall, how would you rate the Prison Chaplaincy Service?

Scale response from 0 (extremely negative) to 10 (extremely positive)



N/A

Question 50: Overall, how well is the Prison Chaplaincy service managed?

We are proud to have voluntary pastoral supporters in 15% of prisons across England and Wales. However we face persistent barriers in working with the Prison Chaplaincy Service, which means that there are no pastoral carers in the other 85%, and no paid staff, in spite of there being hundreds of paid religious chaplains.

To expand on the above, nearly a third (31%) of prisoners in England and Wales, some 25,000, have no religion.⁹⁶ Just as religious prisoners will have religious or spiritual needs related to their beliefs that require a denominationally specific approach, non-religious prisoners will have spiritual and pastoral needs that should be approached equally.

NHS England, NHS Wales, and the UK Department of Health and Social Care take a fully inclusive approach to seeing non-religious pastoral care provided in hospitals alongside religious chaplaincy. In 2015, NHS England's guidelines *Promoting Excellence in Pastoral, Spiritual and Religious Care*⁹⁷ mandated such equal treatment for the first time, and as a result there are now ten paid posts, with humanists in over 40% of NHS trusts.

The NRPSN recognises the good work of religious chaplaincy teams in providing high-quality pastoral, spiritual, and religious care to members of their respective religions. However, there are times when a Christian would wish to speak to a Christian, a Muslim to a Muslim, a Buddhist to a Buddhist, and similarly when a non-religious person would like to speak with someone who shares their worldview. The development of this non-religious provision is not about replacing religious chaplains, but to work alongside them to increase the overall package of care available, and enhance the choice of prisoners. In 2015, Dr David Savage, Chair of the NRPSN, conducted research into visiting patterns of religious chaplains at Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust. It showed that only 4% of visits in his hospital by religious chaplains were to the 40% of patients who are not religious, strongly suggesting their needs are not being met. Dr Savage concluded 'the data on repeat visits shows that chaplains were very willing to visit patients who were not religious or who had not specified a religion or belief. It is not that the chaplains did not want to see such patients. It could be that such patients did not want to see a chaplain. There may well be some occasions when patients want to talk to a like-minded carer.'⁹⁸

Research the NRPSN has done at Winchester Prison showed a similar level of demand for like-minded support. Prisoners reported that they appreciated the opportunity to meet with

⁹⁶ House of Commons Library Briefing Paper. UK Prison Population Statistics. 2020:

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn04334/>

⁹⁷ 'New NHS obligation to provide equal pastoral care to non-religious in England', Humanists UK, 6 March 2015:

<https://humanism.org.uk/2015/03/06/new-nhs-obligation-provide-equal-pastoral-care-non-religious-england/>

⁹⁸ Dr David Savage, "All faiths and none"? An Audit of Chaplains' Visits', *Health and Social Care Chaplaincy*, vol 3 no 1 (2015): <https://journals.equinoxpub.com/index.php/HSCC/article/view/26550>



like-minded people, talk about non-crime-related subjects that interested them, and to learn about others' point of view. This fostered a sense of belonging, encouraged reflection, and provided a support network: all things that religious prisoners can get from attending services and scripture study classes, but that non-religious prisoners are otherwise missing out on. These benefits help with rehabilitation and therefore are in the interest of HMPPS, the prisoner, and wider society to promote.

Polling strongly suggests that there is a demand for non-religious pastoral carers. In July 2016 YouGov, on behalf of Humanists UK, polled 4,000 British adults on whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: 'Prisons, hospitals and universities which have chaplains should also have a dedicated non-religious pastoral support provider as well'. 69% agreed and just 12% disagreed. Notably, these results remained unchanged when the religions of the respondents were factored in. Both Christians and non-Christian religious respondents agreed with the statement by 66% supportive to 16% opposed.⁹⁹

In 2016, the then Chaplain General of the Prison Service Mike Kavanagh commented, 'It can be especially valuable where humanists are part of the chaplaincy team. Including them can help some prisoners whose sense of themselves may not involve a "higher power" but rather a renewed sense of faith in human potential to do good and of the dignity of human being apart from any notion of transcendence.'¹⁰⁰

In 2001, the first full-time Muslim chaplains were appointed. This was followed in 2003 by the appointment of a new Prison Service Chaplaincy Council and the first national conference for chaplains, which was open to delegates from all religions. Many prisons now provide prayer spaces for other religions in addition to Christian chapels.

This demonstrates that the need for belief-specific pastoral support and chaplaincy provision, beyond Christian ministry, has been well understood and in fact positively promoted as good practice within HMPPS for over a decade. However, this understanding has not yet been extended to non-religious prisoners, who remain either unable to access appropriate pastoral support services or are only offered 'generic chaplaincy' provided by religious chaplains. Some religious providers may feel that they can talk to non-religious prisoners as well as a specific non-religious provider. However, there is clearly a breach of the established principle of like-minded support that is extended to other groups, with non-religious prisoners receiving less favourable treatment. This position also seems in conflict with other developments within HMPPS Chaplaincy HQ, which has now included 'humanism' in its World Faiths training programme.

It can clearly be seen that there are issues in the patterns of employment from the table below, which analyses all 118 adverts for chaplaincy/pastoral support roles that were issued between

⁹⁹ 2016 YouGov polling of 4,000 British adults for Humanists UK:

<https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Humanists-UK-polling-on-pastoral-care-in-the-UK.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ Mike Kavanagh, 'Contextual Issues: Justice and Redemption'. In: Swift, C., Cobb, M., Todd, A., (eds.) A Handbook of Chaplaincy Studies, p. 216. Routledge, 2016.



September 2018 and December 2020, and compares them to the demographics of the prison population.

Some adverts are specifically for one religious denomination (for example, an Anglican), whereas others may be for a denomination (e.g. Christian), or for anybody who is religious, or for someone who belongs to one of a number of listed groups. The first row reflects the specific, targeted adverts, while the second includes those that are less targeted.

Religion	% of adverts specifically for this group	% of adverts that a person of this group can apply for	% of prison population (Feb 2019)
Anglican	34%	55%	16%
Roman Catholic	14%	36%	17%
Free Church	6%	27%	1%
Orthodox	0%	5%	>1%
Christian Science	0%	4%	>1%
All Christian denominations	1%	21%	47%
Muslim	11%	31%	16%
Hindu	0%	9%	>1%
Sikh	6%	15%	1%
Buddhists	0%	4%	2%
Rastafari	3%	16%	>1%
Jewish	>1%	6%	>1%
Pagan	2%	15%	1%
Quaker	>1%	14%	>1%
Spiritualist	0%	13%	>1%
Jehovah's Witness	0%	13%	>1%
Non-religious	0%	4% ¹⁰¹	30%

The table above shows that while there has been a positive growth in multi-faith chaplaincy, the non-religious are the only belief group that are underrepresented in the number of adverts that they can apply for compared to their size within the prison population. There seems to be no legal

¹⁰¹ This translates to 5 adverts where 'humanist' was listed alongside religious groups. It does not, therefore, include non-religious people who do not identify as humanist.



or moral argument as to why this should be the case. Despite 4% of adverts being in theory open to non-religious candidates (these were where humanist was listed alongside a list of religious groups), this has not resulted in the employment of a single non-religious pastoral carer. This is despite 30% of prisoners registering as non-religious.

Further, we are concerned that vulnerable prisoners are sometimes considered 'recruitable' to religions when they access prison chaplaincy for rehabilitation and support. Our non-religious pastoral carers working within prisons have raised to us that resources and activities offered to inmates are often designed to promote specific religious beliefs with the false underlying assumption that having a religion will aid rehabilitation. We therefore ask for the creation of clear guidelines on chaplaincy and pastoral support to safeguard the rights of a vulnerable group to exercise their freedom of religion or belief.

We also make the following recommendations to ensure HMPPS is inclusive with regard to religion or belief:

1. The NRPSN should be represented at HMPPS's Chaplaincy Council (or any equivalent body) to give non-religious prisoners a voice in the provision of pastoral and chaplaincy services, equivalent to their religious counterparts.
2. HMPPS should publicly support the presence of non-religious pastoral carers in prisons as good practice to prevent discrimination in recruitment, both for paid and volunteer posts, and in delivery of services to prisoners.
3. HMPPS should take steps to ensure that adverts for chaplains or pastoral carers do not unlawfully discriminate, for example in breach of the law on genuine occupational requirements found in the Equality Act 2010.

Question 51: Do you agree with the proposed definitions of Religion, Belief and Faith as set out above?

Religion is a particular and organised system of faith and worship in a supreme being or entity or supreme beings or entities. Someone can be born into a religious tradition, they can follow a religion, belong to a religion and they can even be religious in their lifestyle choices. Typically, religions will have places of worship such as Churches, Temples, Mosques and Synagogues, and will often have a national and international hierarchy. In almost every case, the world's major religions will have a creed, Holy Scriptures and other ancient texts.

Completely disagree

Belief is something one accepts as true or real; a genuinely held belief is more than just an opinion. Belief can be sincerely held, and it can often have a profound impact on someone's lifestyle. A belief can attain a level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance to be worthy of respect in a democratic society and can be compatible with human dignity and not conflict with the fundamental rights of others. Belief does not have to be rooted in the supernatural. A belief can be a worldview like atheism or humanism, but importantly it can also be within a faith or a religion.



Completely disagree

Faith is a subset of belief, it is a committed certainty in something based on spiritual conviction and divine truths, often these can be perceived by others to be beyond the normal limits of perception or of logical proof. Someone can have a faith without having a religious lifestyle, they may believe in a God or Gods, a “higher power” or “life after death” they may be a “spiritual” person. The important aspect is that they believe with conviction in something which is supernatural.

Neither agree or disagree

Question 52: Please expand on definition suggested for Religion

We think the definition of ‘religion’ found in paragraph 57 of the Supreme Court judgment *Hodkin*¹⁰² is a good one. Not only that, it is also the law, and flows from the European Convention on Human Rights. The UK has no plans to withdraw from the Convention, and therefore is legally bound to follow the definition in *Hodkin*. Given that, it seems strange to come up with another definition that does not have any legal force.

This definition of religion also goes awry in that it fails to recognise that some religions, for example some branches of Buddhism, are atheistic in nature. It also fails to recognise that religions do not have to be organised to merit protection under the Convention. That was established by *Eweida*.¹⁰³

We would commend to this review the OSCE’s *Guidelines for Review of Legislation Pertaining to Religion or Belief*, which were prepared by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights’ Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief in consultation with the Council of Europe;¹⁰⁴ and similarly, the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*, produced by the same Panel.¹⁰⁵ We would also point to the European Court of Human Rights’ own *Guide on Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights – Freedom of thought, conscience and religion*.¹⁰⁶ All of these documents were produced after substantial consideration by a broad range of experts. They reflect the law. They therefore should be the basis of any UK definition.

¹⁰² *R (on the application of Hodkin and another) (Appellants) v Registrar General of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Respondent)*: <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/docs/uksc-2013-0030-judgment.pdf>

¹⁰³ *Eweida and Others v. the United Kingdom judgment*, 15 January 2013: [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre-press#:%22itemid%22:\[%22001-115881%22\]](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre-press#:%22itemid%22:[%22001-115881%22])

¹⁰⁴ *Guidelines for Review of Legislation Pertaining to Religion or Belief*, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2004: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/13993>

¹⁰⁵ *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*, 2007: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/29154>

¹⁰⁶ *Guide on Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights – Freedom of thought, conscience and religion*, European Court of Human Rights, 2020: https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Guide_Art_9_ENG.pdf



Question 53: Please expand on definition suggested for Belief

Again, we are troubled by the use of a definition that is at odds with human rights law, and what the UK Government is therefore bound to follow. This definition has some elements that are common to human rights law, but appears to depart from it in several ways. For instance, the fact that beliefs only *can* be seriously held, rather than *must* be; and similarly with the two 'can's in the following sentence.

We are also troubled by the fact that the definition of 'belief' includes religions. We think it is much clearer for the term to be reserved for just non-religious beliefs. That is how the term is nowadays most commonly used and understood.

The definition of 'belief' here also appears to be fairly loose, and liable to let in the kind of beliefs that have been found to merit protection in employment tribunal cases. In this context, we don't think that that is particularly helpful. It would be better to reserve the definition for non-religious worldviews that are analogous to religions, such as humanism. We note that it is only such non-religious worldviews that have been found to merit protection under the European Convention (we discuss relevant case law in our response to question 27). Building on that, and our answer to the previous question where we point to *Hodkin*, we similarly suggest that an approach be taken that those beliefs referred to are those that are protected under the Convention. That is, after all, what the UK Government is legally bound to do.

Further, unlike our approach in the previous paragraph, we note that this definition introduces the word 'worldview' without defining it, i.e. it answers one question while prompting another. And it also refers to 'atheism' as a worldview. Atheism is simply the lack of belief in a god or gods. That makes it no more a worldview, as the term is generally understood, than theism is a religion.

Finally, we would again commend the OSCE and European Court of Human Rights' own guides and guidelines, as being the best sources to look at, for developing any definition that matches the law.

Question 54: Please expand on definition suggested for Faith

In our experience dealing with government, the term is used fairly interchangeably with the term 'religion'. There are clearly other uses that can be given to the term, and the last sentence of this definition sums those up well. But we do not understand why there is any need to define faith at all, given its irrelevance in the eyes of the law.

Question 55: If you would like to add any further thoughts not already provided within this call for evidence, please do so here:

No further comments.



For more details, information, and evidence, contact Humanists UK:

Richy Thompson
Director of Public Affairs and Policy
0781 5589 636
020 7324 3072
richy@humanists.uk
humanists.uk

