

HOW TO OPT OUT FROM RE AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP AS A TEACHER

Briefing from Northern Ireland Humanists, January 2026



ABOUT NORTHERN IRELAND HUMANISTS

Northern Ireland Humanists is part of 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. Our work helps people be happier and more fulfilled, and by bringing non-religious people together we help them develop their own views and an understanding of the world around them. Founded in 1896, we are trusted to promote humanism by 130,000 members and supporters and around 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.

How to opt-out from delivering RE and collective worship

As a teacher in a controlled school (excluding controlled integrated schools)

If you **teach in a controlled school**, excluding controlled integrated schools, in Northern Ireland, [Article 22 of the Education and Libraries \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1986](#) provides a route to be wholly or partly excused from:

- conducting or attending collective worship, and/or
- teaching Religious Education (RE)

To do this, you submit

1. a cover letter requesting withdrawal to the Board of Governors, and
2. a statutory declaration stating the request is made solely on grounds of conscience.

Witnessed by a lay magistrate

In Northern Ireland, you can have the statutory declaration witnessed by a lay magistrate. [NI Direct](#) states that lay magistrates will not ask you to pay anything for witnessing (in the context of official witnessing requirements).

- **How to book in with a lay magistrate:** NI Direct provides a [contact route](#) via the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service that can help you find a lay magistrate in your area.

Witnessed by a solicitor

If you prefer a quick in-office appointment, a solicitor can witness the declaration for a small fixed fee. [Phoenix Law](#) will charge between £30-£50 to sign a witness declaration, other solicitors are available.

What teachers need to do

1. Fill in the [cover letter](#) and [statutory declaration form](#) (these are also in this pack to copy and paste)
2. Book and attend a lay magistrate appointment (free) and have them witness the signing of the declaration.
3. Send both documents to the principal (asking them to table it with the Board), directly to the Board clerk/chair, or both.
4. Ask for written confirmation and the effective date of withdrawal to take place.
5. Move to practical arrangements: who is taking the RE cover and what happens during assemblies. In some cases, such as if there are staff capacity constraints, schools can get funding to cover the cost of employing an extra teacher to cover RE and collective worship.

As a teacher in other schools

There is no equivalent statutory right for teachers in **maintained** or **integrated** schools. Any withdrawal from teaching RE / leading worship is usually a **contract and HR matter** (job description, directed duties, internal accommodation), rather than a built-in statutory opt-out like Article 22.

A teacher could still ask to be reassigned away from those duties, but it's not an automatic statutory entitlement in those sectors.

For more details or information, contact Northern Ireland Humanists:

Boyd Sleator

Northern Ireland Coordinator

07918 975795

boyd@humanists.uk

humanists.uk

Model cover letter to Board of Governors

[replace or remove all highlighted text as necessary]

[YOUR NAME]
[YOUR HOME ADDRESS]
[YOUR EMAIL] | [YOUR PHONE] (optional)
[DATE]

For the attention of: The Chair and Members of the Board of Governors

[SCHOOL NAME]
c/o [PRINCIPAL NAME], Principal

**Re: Request under Article 22 (Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986) –
excusal from collective worship and/or Religious Education (RE)**

Dear Governors,

I am writing to make a formal request under **Article 22(2) of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986** to be [WHOLLY / PARTLY] excused from:

[DELETE AS APPROPRIATE]
- conducting collective worship
- attending collective worship
- giving Religious Education / undenominational religious education

Please find enclosed my statutory declaration, provided at the same time as this request, confirming that my request is made solely on the grounds of conscience.

I would be grateful for written confirmation once this has been accepted and the date it takes effect. I am also happy to discuss practical arrangements (for example: RE cover and what alternative arrangements apply during assemblies).

Yours sincerely,

[SIGNATURE]
[PRINT NAME]

Enclosure: Statutory Declaration pursuant to Article 22



Article 22 Statutory Declaration form

[replace or remove all highlighted text as necessary]

DECLARATION PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 22 OF THE EDUCATION AND LIBRARIES (NI) ORDER 1986 STATUTORY DECLARATION

I, [FULL NAME] of [HOME ADDRESS], do solemnly and sincerely declare as follows:

1. In accordance with Article 22 of The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 I wish to be [WHOLLY / PARTLY] excused from conducting or attending collective worship and from giving Religious Education / undenominational religious education.
2. I make this request solely on the grounds of conscience.
3. [OPTIONAL – KEEP OR DELETE] In addition, I make this request in line with my rights under the European Convention on Human Rights ("ECHR"), which must be given effect by virtue of the Human Rights Act 1998.

AND I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true and by virtue of the provisions of the Statutory Declarations Act 1835.

Declared at: _____

On: ____ / ____ / _____

[YOUR SIGNATURE]

[YOUR PRINT NAME]

Declared before me:

[WITNESS SIGNATURE]
[WITNESS PRINT NAME]

Witness qualification (tick one):

Lay Magistrate Solicitor

Witness contact / stamp (if any): _____

