

NSS calls on scouts to welcome non-believers – Sign the petition!

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The National Secular Society has launched a [petition](#) calling on the Scouts to make the religious oath in the Scout Promise optional. The Scout Promise in its present form requires new members to "do their duty by God", which acts as a barrier to prevent non-believers from joining.

Earlier this year, George Pratt, an 11-year old boy from Somerset, [was told](#) he could not join his local Scout troop because he didn't believe in God and didn't want to make the Scout Promise in its present form.

The Equality Act 2010 outlaws discrimination against a person on the grounds of their religion or belief (including non-belief). However, the Scouts successfully lobbied for an exemption which enables non-religious charities to refuse membership to anyone who does not sign up to a religious oath – providing this has been their custom.

Despite different variations of the oath being used to accommodate those of other faiths, the Scouts refuse to allow a secular variation to be used. An alternative promise, known as the "[Outlander Oath](#)", believed to have been written by Scouts founder Baden-Powell, was intended for those who, for reasons of conscience, could not recognize a "duty to God" and did not worship a deity. It omitted any reference to God or a monarch and, according to scout leaders, was in use as late as the 1990s.

Stephen Evans, campaigns manager at the NSS said: "It is unfortunate that the Scouting Movement has become less tolerant in recent years, in marked contrast to the rest of society.

"They persist in describing themselves as an "open and inclusive organisation" while refusing all calls to reconsider their insistence on the religious oath that clearly excludes atheists. Restricting membership in this way forces young people who wish to join the scouts to make a hypocritical and dishonest statement, or risk being refused full membership of the Scouts.

"In 1886, the founder of the National Secular Society, Charles Bradlaugh, won a long-fought battle to be admitted to parliament without the need to swear a religious oath that he did not believe. It's incredible that we're still having to challenge this sort of discrimination to this day. In the 21st century, it is simply unacceptable for the Scouts to single out atheists for exclusion – particularly while claiming to be an "open and inclusive" organisation."

Please [sign the petition](#) - add your voice to make sure scouting really is for all, regardless of religious belief."

[Sign the petition to open up scouting to non-believers at Change.org](#)

See also:

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