

challenging religious privilege

National Secular Society
Annual Report

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society

About the National Secular Society

The NSS is Britain's only organisation working exclusively towards a secular society. Founded in 1866, we campaign for a society in which all citizens enjoy equality of respect and freedom of conscience, regardless of religious belief, or lack of religious belief. Putting these principles into action requires the separation of religion and state and the neutrality of the state towards all religion and beliefs. We promote secularism as the best means to create a society in which people of all religions and none can live together fairly and cohesively.

About this report

Our annual report provides an overview of the National Secular Society's work from October 2012 to October 2013.

Secular Charter

Our campaigning and policy objectives are guided by our Secular Charter.

The National Secular Society campaigns for a secular state, where:

- There is no established state religion.
- There is one law for all and its application is not hindered or replaced by religious codes or processes.
- Individuals are neither disadvantaged nor discriminated against because of their religion or belief, or lack thereof.
- Freedom of expression is not restricted by religious considerations.
- Neither the state, nor any emanation of the state, expresses religious beliefs or preferences.
- Religion plays no role in state-funded education, whether through religious affiliation, organised worship, religious instruction, pupil selection or employment discrimination.
- The state does not engage in, fund or promote religious activities or practices.
- Public and publicly-funded service provision does not discriminate on grounds of religion or belief.
- There is no privileged position in society or advantage in law for any individual or group by virtue of their religion or belief, or lack thereof.
- The state does not intervene in the setting of religious doctrine or the running of religious organisations.

President's message



As this report reveals, it's been another extraordinary year for the NSS, with involvement in many campaigns that seek to further the cause of secularism.

This brings us to the vexed question of what the word "secularism" means.

It is often misused or deliberately misrepresented by those religious interests who feel their privileges are being threatened. Many religious organisations and individuals have tried hard to make secularism into a kind of dirty word as a means of demeaning and dismissing arguments that they don't like.

In this context, secularism is often preceded in the newspapers by a pejorative adjective that seeks to make it sound sinister or threatening. "Militant", "aggressive" and "fundamentalist" are some of the terms that our opponents like to attach to secularism in an attempt to ensure it is not perceived by those who are unfamiliar with it as anything constructive.

I call them our 'opponents', but really they needn't be. Secularists pose no threat to the religious freedom of believers. We support the individual's human right to pursue religion in any way they want to, within the law. We support religious freedom.

But then again, we hit the rocks of definition. What is religious freedom? Is it simply the right to organise, believe and worship in the way a faith dictates? Or is it, as some Christians seem to think, the right to impose your faith's dogmas onto other people?

When we see reports from Muslim-majority countries of Christians being murdered, jailed, accused of 'blasphemy' and being forced under torture to convert, we are horrified at the cruelty of imposing a single doctrine on everyone and taking away the right to worship in any other way.

Although in intensity, the two are quite different. Christians in the West do not seem able to see the parallel when they seek to impose their own faith onto children in schools. They don't see that when religious leaders constantly block a law on assisted dying (which polls repeatedly show is wanted by the vast majority in this country, even among many religious) they are imposing their doctrines on people who do not want them.

If they don't want abortions or contraception, they are free not to have them. If they disapprove of same sex relations, they have the freedom to refrain from them.

If they disapprove of embryo research, then they do not have to avail themselves of treatments that might result from it. If they think it is wrong to shop on Sunday or go to the theatre, then they are free to stay at home.

But for some Christians that is not enough. They want to impose their dogma others – even those who don't share their faith.

That is where secularism comes in and why it is important not just for the persecuted Christians in the Muslim world (and indeed, for the persecuted Muslims in the Buddhist world), but also for the majority in this country who do not wish to observe what they see as senseless religious strictures.

No-one should have a legal right to insist that others observe their religion. But that is what happens in our schools every day of the week, when the legal requirement to "take part in" religious worship is imposed on all pupils, forcing parents who do not want it into deciding whether or not to withdraw their child.

It isn't just the frenzied Islamists who do this, but – in their own quiet way – the evangelising educationalists of the Church of England and the Catholic Church.

So, we need a proper understanding of secularism.

It isn't atheism (although many atheists are secularists) and it isn't humanism (although many humanists share secular ideals). It is a necessary adjunct to democracy, one that ensures equality and full human rights for all. It does not allow privileges for anyone because of their beliefs, their politics or their heritage.

At this year's AGM we seek to bring the NSS closer to these ideals with some amendments to our aims and objectives. We aim to bring our Secular Charter (shown on inside cover) to the centre of our philosophy, as a guide to how we campaign and what we campaign for.

I certainly hope that we can do this so that it will strengthen the hand of the NSS to be the premier player in what is shaping up to be one of the most pressing issues of the 21st century.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Terry Sanderson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Religion in schools

Throughout the year the NSS has continued to promote the case for secularism in education – and to scrutinise, question and challenge the role of religion in schools. The contentious issue of ‘faith schools’ has remained a central focus of our work.

Public opinion appears to be on our side. A large scale opinion poll this year by [YouGov](#) showed that a majority of people in Great Britain is against government funding of ‘faith schools’. The poll revealed that only a third of the adult population approves of state funding for faith schools; nearly half actively disapproves. In addition, only a quarter of people who might have a school-age child said they would send him or her to a faith school. It also revealed that the reason parents choose to send their children to faith schools was because of their academic standards (helped along by their ability to select pupils), and not because of their religious ethos.

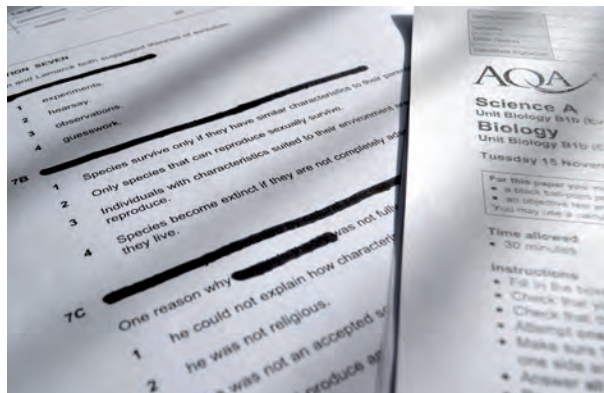
Despite this, the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, has again praised the ‘popularity’ of church schools and urged a ‘continuing partnership’ with the Church of England in the provision of state education.

The undue interference of religion in non-faith schools has also been the basis for much of our campaigning over the last year.

We spoke out publicly when we discovered that the Government had agreed a deal with the Church of England to expand its role in education. The arrangement grants the Church of England power to incorporate former Community schools with no religious character into its Diocesan Academy Chains. The Church will be legally obliged to preserve the character of non-faith schools, but bishops will be given the power to appoint governors at the schools, which could effectively mean thousands of secular state schools being run by the Church of England. A third of all publicly funded schools now have a religious character, with Church of England schools comprising 23% of all maintained schools in England and Wales. The Church is also by far the biggest academy provider, but it is clear that the Church’s ambition to grow the Mission of the Church extends beyond schools with a formal religious character.

Only a third of the adult population approves of state funding for faith schools. Nearly half actively disapproves.

[Yougov poll](#)



Evolution censored from exam papers

In September, the NSS revealed that teachers had redacted questions on evolution in exam papers at Yesodey Hatorah, a state-funded Jewish secondary school for girls in Hackney.

The Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Exam board (OCR) launched an investigation into exam malpractice at the school after we formally asked it to follow up unconfirmed reports that teachers had blacked out questions in this year’s GCSE science exam.

The exam board was determined to keep the findings of the investigation confidential. Only after the dogged persistence from our campaigns team did OCR acknowledge that malpractice had been found:

“We have tried to respect the religious and cultural sensitivities of this community whilst protecting the integrity of our exams. That said, we do not consider obscuring aspects of question papers to be good exam practice. We are raising the matter with the Department for Education and Ofsted as well as our fellow Awarding Bodies, through the Joint Council for Qualifications. We are also in the process of agreeing safeguards with the centre to ensure good exam practice in the context of today’s pluralistic society. Ofqual are also fully aware of our investigation and its outcome.”

We are pressing the Government for a response to the finding of this investigation.



Evangelism in schools

Our research into the activities of external visitors to school classrooms has found evidence of our state schools being used by evangelical groups as part of their missionary work, even setting up ‘prayer spaces’ in schools. We found that the activities of evangelical

visitors are often undertaken in schools without parents’ knowledge – undermining their right to a state education for their child that doesn’t run counter to their own religious and philosophical convictions.

The motivations and aims of religious groups, either complicitly or out of naïvety, are going unquestioned by head teachers, governors, Local Education Authorities and the Department for Education.

The report



In October 2013, we published our findings in a report which shone a much needed spotlight on the activities of evangelical Christian organisations working in schools. We hope they will now be less able to operate ‘under the radar’ and without sufficient scrutiny as they have done previously.

We sent the report, [Evangelism in State Schools](#), to the Education Secretary, Michael Gove, calling for:

- National guidance setting out best practice for working with external visitors and contributors and particularly religion and belief groups.
- All schools to publish and adhere to an external visitor’s policy which forbids proselytizing and evangelism and makes clear that parents should be given prior and relevant information about school visitors

It received widespread media coverage, appearing in most national broadsheets and provoked discussion on national and local radio.

Evangelical groups in schools – in their own words...

“We’d never ever got to grips with the relationship between education and evangelism. It’s the dark shadow in the closet of schools work. To the churches we talked evangelism. To the Head Teachers we talked education. We prayed the two would never meet.”
– Christian Schools worker

“[Our vision is to] establish a national project working with teachers to serve the national curriculum so that hundreds of thousands of students can swap talking about God in religious studies classes to talking to Him.” – Prayer Spaces in Schools

“Taking the Gospel relevantly is what we do. That has always been our vision, and it always will be.....until every young person in Britain has heard and responded to the good news of Jesus Christ.”
– Youth for Christ

“In an age when less people in this country are engaging with the Christian Church and its message than ever before OAC is committed to taking the Gospel of Jesus Christ to unchurched people, wherever they are, through open air evangelism, schools work, and other outreaches.”
– OAC Ministries

“[We have] been in schools; running clubs, teaching RE from a Christian perspective and taking Christian assemblies, building relationships with staff and students. This model of schools work means that the worker remains a visitor, coming in from outside to influence the school for the Lord.”
– Christians in Schools Trust

Religious education – the need for reform

We agree with the religious and academic voices that RE isn't working. Throughout the year there has been intense lobbying from the RE community for 'strengthened provision for religious education.' This has been led by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales which represents the collective interests of faith communities.

We do not consider that faith groups and the wider 'RE community', most with vested interests, should any longer determine what is taught in publicly funded schools. Instead, we have called on the Government to ask independent educationalists to devise a new programme of study to replace RE that allows pupils to take a more objective and religiously-neutral approach to the consideration of moral and ethical issues and probably also to include philosophy and citizenship.

This autumn we published our own briefing paper setting out the need for serious reform of the subject.

In a letter to the Education Secretary, Michael Gove, we called for:

- A change in the law to prohibit confessional teaching of RE and require schools with a religious character to teach about other major faiths and non-religious philosophies.
- RE to be replaced by a new National Curriculum subject under a different name for all pupils that covers a variety of religious, non-religious and secular worldviews.
- Any new programme of study that replaces RE to be determined by the same process as other National Curriculum subjects (by an advisory Committee supported by an expert panel of senior educationalists and academics).
- Teachers, academics, employers, higher education institutions, subject communities and other stakeholders (including faith groups) to be consulted, but not have undue influence on how education about religion is delivered.

We reject as false and self-serving a common justification for RE, that it is an essential element of encouraging cohesion. Encouraging religious tolerance and cohesion are important but are better addressed through citizenship education, rather than the detailed study of religious beliefs. We acknowledge the importance of providing young people with the necessary information to understand the significance of religion in society, and the importance of faith to many people, but the current arrangements for RE lead to educational bias, including the unspoken assumption that it is better to be religious than not.



This undermines both the integrity of our education system and pupils' and parents' religious freedom. We are pleased that our opposing voice agitating for change is being increasingly heard.

An interview with Bishop John Pritchard published in *The Times*, on 20 July 2013 concluded, for example:

"The National Secular Society said Christian and other religious bodies should not determine the content of RE and that schools should teach other world views, philosophy and ethics. Stephen Evans, its campaign manager, said: 'When religious groups are granted privileged input into what is taught in the classroom, RE too easily becomes a tool for them to promote their beliefs in state schools. Pupils and parents will be far better served by the Government taking education about religion out of the hands of vested interests'."

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NSS campaigns manager Stephen Evans, *The Times*, 20 July 2013

Faith-based free schools

The NSS has repeatedly emphasised to the DfE the need to closely monitor free schools when they are up and running to ensure that neither creationism nor other extremism is allowed to creep in later in contravention to the assurances given at the outset. Nevertheless, the DfE was left embarrassed this year by revelations that the Al-Madinah Muslim free school in Derby was forcing female staff to wear head coverings (even non-Muslims), and relegating girls to the back of its classrooms. It also emerged that lessons were routinely being scrapped to make way for prayers, and that singing was banned.

The NSS also drew attention to the school's prospectus, which openly stated:

"In each and every department, all efforts will be geared towards ensuring the books and resources conform to the teachings of Islam. Sensitive, inaccurate and potentially blasphemous material will be censored or removed completely. If and when teachers are required by the curriculum to convey teachings that are totally against Islam (such as Darwinism), the Director of Islamic Studies will brief the relevant teachers and advise accordingly."

The Government responded by ordering the school's governors to take "swift action" to address concerns over the way the school is run, or face closure. However, this incident reveals that the Government's *laissez-faire* approach to religious groups running schools is creating an environment where they can impose religious dogma on pupils with little chance of being challenged.

EC investigating complaints over teacher discrimination in faith schools

The European Commission has confirmed that it is formally pursuing complaints submitted by the National Secular Society alleging that UK legislation relating to state funded faith schools breaches European Directive 2000/78/EC, which establishes a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation. Our legal advice is that UK legislation allows discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief beyond that permitted by the Directive.

The complaints in respect of England & Wales centre on the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (SSFA) and Education Act 2011, and the extent to which they permit discrimination against teachers employed in state funded faith schools. We have long argued that the level of discrimination permitted in such schools against non-religious teachers and those not of the faith of the school goes beyond that which is permitted by the Directive. Separate complaints were filed in respect of Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Challenging discrimination in admissions

We were happy this year to assist local campaigners in challenging a number of proposals that advantaged children from religious backgrounds in admissions to non-religious schools.

In February we successfully challenged a proposal from Surrey County Council which would have indirectly given preferential treatment in community schools admissions arrangements to pupils whose parents regularly attend Church of England services.

We also assisted local campaigners in Solihull to oppose the nomination of religiously selective schools as feeder schools to a non-religiously designated academy.

After taking legal advice, we wrote to Solihull's Tudor Grange Academy in February informing it that we had been advised that the proposals were likely to result in local children being disadvantaged on grounds of religion and belief – and that as such, the proposals were likely to be both a breach of the admissions code and unlawful.

In April, the school responded by revising its decision. However, concerns remained over its revised proposals, as they still prioritised children from a church school with discriminatory over-subscription criteria, so we complained to the Schools Adjudicator. This particular church school had been undersubscribed for several years, as a result of which there had been no need to apply the oversubscription criteria. The adjudicator found that, for this reason, no indirect discrimination had occurred or would occur.

We remain concerned however about the prospect of religious selection creeping into community and other non-religiously designated schools' admissions policies and this is an issue we will continue to monitor.

“Dioceses have the privilege and opportunity to put local church and local school into the same box, as it were, and say that’s where the mission of the Church lies.”

Bishop of Oxford, the Right Rev John Pritchard,
Church of England bishop in charge of education

Freedom of expression

Reform of Section 5

This year saw an important and significant victory for freedom of speech in the UK. Following intense lobbying by the Reform Section 5 ‘feel free to insult me’ campaign, organised by the National Secular Society and the Christian Institute, the Government agreed to remove the word “insulting” from Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986. Major supporters of the campaign included Rowan Atkinson and Peter Tatchell.

In January, the Home Secretary, Theresa May, told the House of Commons that the Government would accept a Lords amendment to remove “insulting” from the Public Order Act. The Home Secretary’s decision to accept the Lords’ amendment was almost certainly influenced by the almost unprecedented routing of the Government in the Upper House when the matter was debated in December, due in large part to the success of the joint campaign. Peers voted for the removal of “insulting”, by 150 votes to 54, despite opposition from both Conservative and Labour frontbenches. It was the lowest pro-government vote in that Parliament.

The existence of the word “insulting” within Section 5 of the Public Order Act was a pernicious tool open to abuse, providing the law with a capacity to silence views that some people happened to dislike. We were therefore pleased that our campaign achieved this victory for free speech.

The fundamental principle of freedom of expression is absolutely central to the secular society we would like Britain to become. There is still much to do to uphold it, particularly at the local level in universities, as well as internationally, where there are worrying developments.



Freedom of Expression on Campus

In UK universities, the curtailment of free expression has continued. Over the past year, we have seen attempted segregation on gender grounds at student meetings in University College London (where NSS honorary associate Professor Lawrence Krauss was speaking) and Queen Mary’s. An atheist student group at Reading was disaffiliated after it refused to sign a statement which would have committed it to refraining from causing offence, in effect removing its ability to criticise religion.

At the London School of Economics, members of the LSESU Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Student Society were told they would be physically removed from the annual Freshers’ Fair unless they covered up t-shirts deemed “offensive”. Their t-shirts featured the award-winning satirical Jesus and Mo cartoons. Representatives of the LSE Legal and Compliance Team and Head of Security told the members of the group that the



Abhishek Phandis and Chris Moos of LSESU Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Student Society

wearing of the t-shirts could be considered “harassment”, as it could “offend others” by creating an “offensive environment”.

The NSS has actively supported those involved and offered to cover any costs that might be incurred by the group defending the fundamental principle of free expression.

The OIC and Blasphemy

After getting the go-ahead from the Cairo Islamic Summit held in London at the end of last year, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has been actively trying to get the “denigration of religions” recognised as a criminal offence internationally. At another meeting in London, on intolerance, OIC Secretary General Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu described ‘Islamophobia’ (a term, incidentally, created by the Muslim Brotherhood) as an issue of “utmost contemporary significance”. The OIC is intent on pressuring Western countries into banning any critical scrutiny of Islam and Islamic Sharia law; it opened a Permanent Observer Mission to the European Union this year, we believe with the hope of persuading the EU to enact legislation curbing free of expression on Islam.

Girl Guides & Scouts

We have seen historic reforms to the Girl Guides and the Scouts this year, with both organisations announcing a change to their promises, opening them up to non-religious members.

Despite describing themselves as “open and inclusive” organisations, both the Scouts and the Girl Guides had previously insisted that new members take a ‘Promise’ that included a religious oath. The NSS has long campaigned for an end to the exclusion of the non-religious in the Scouts and Girl Guides.

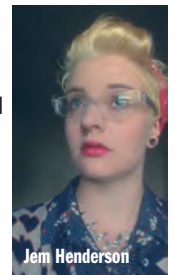
Both movements changed their policy after extensive consultations with people inside and outside the movements. The NSS made submissions to both consultations, and our secular argument was widely supported. We have been campaigning on this since 2007 and the NSS were part of a small delegation that met the Scout leadership in 2010.

Girlguiding UK launched a consultation on its intention to replace its religious promise – which had included the line “to love my God” – with a single secular oath for all Guides. The proposal prompted virulent opposition from Christians and we were involved in some of the fierce debates that ensued. One former bishop even suggested they set up a breakaway group.

When the new promise came into force on 1 September, a Girl Guide unit in Harrogate defied the movement by insisting it would stick to the traditional



wording. Jem Henderson, who had joined the Guides because of the new oath, was told she would be unable to take it. She contacted the NSS to seek our support, which we of course gave, assisting her with national publicity, which she handled magnificently. Following media pressure, and the intervention of the leadership, the rebel Guide leaders relented and agreed to use the new secular promise.



Jem Henderson

A month after the Girl Guides’ change, the Scout Association announced, following a lengthy consultation, that it was to introduce an additional version to the Scout Promise for those not wishing to take a religious one. This was an historic move, for whilst variations of the Scout Promise were previously made available for different faith groups, this is the first time in the UK Scouts’ 106-year history that the movement has introduced a Promise for members and potential members without a religious belief.

The NSS welcomed the changes made by both organisations, particularly the Girl Guides’ introduction of one secular Promise for all; we see it as a hugely positive and welcome development. The Girl Guides’ new Promise reinforces the notion that belief is a private matter and should not be an issue when seeking to participate in the movement; it ensures an open and inclusive movement that encourages independent and reflective thinking in its members.



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Human rights of women

The NSS has continued to highlight the rights and equality of women within the context of a secularist framework.

During the annual three EU presidents' lunch for leading non-religious and philosophical organisations, Keith Porteous Wood urged greater protection of women's human rights by the EU. Keith called for an EU intervention over the death of Savita Halappanavar, the woman who died in a Galway hospital after repeatedly being refused an abortion that would have saved her life. He argued that her tragic death painfully highlights the awful consequences that can result from laws that deny all women, not just Catholics, the right to abortion. He told the EU presidents that it was a scandal that this death could happen in an EU



country and that Ireland's laws could deny women's human rights in this way. He called on the EU to apply pressure on Ireland to amend its laws so as not to breach "the right to life" enshrined in Article 2 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Irish legislators revised the law, but did so grudgingly; changing it as little as they could. It remains an affront to the rights of women in Ireland.

We also contributed to the European Humanist Federation's lobbying efforts in support of a European Parliament Resolution on the Sexual and Reproductive Rights of women.

The importance of the secular framework in realising equality for women has also been highlighted in the UN context by policy officer, Elizabeth O'Casey. She has spoken about the role of culture and religion in undermining the rights of women and girls in a number of speeches she has made to the United Nations Human Rights Council during the year.

The NSS's conference on [secularism and feminism](#), and the relationship between the two causes, will take place on 7 December 2013.

BBC

We have had a further unsatisfactory year with the BBC. When the BBC released a story claiming that chaplaincy services had been cut in 40% of English NHS hospital trusts between 2009 and 2013, NSS volunteers had fortuitously just completed a more comprehensive survey suggesting an increase in chaplaincy headcount, at a time of huge cuts in nursing staff. We happily sent our study to the BBC, but they would not release theirs and persisted with their pro-religious "cuts" agenda. We were, however, able to secure good coverage of the disparity, albeit not on BBC national networks.



We have had yet another complaint rejected by the BBC Trust, this time concerning a *Thought for the Day* programme which criticised and misrepresented our Judicial Review at the High Court over council prayers. We noted that no other slot allows contentious views to be expressed without challenge, either from a presenter or opponent.

The BBC's pro-religious bias, about which we have been complaining for over 50 years, seems to be becoming more entrenched. *Thought for the Day*, which had been an interval in the *Today* programme produced by the Religion and Ethics department, appears now to be completely integrated into the

programme. It is described on its website as "Radio 4's flagship news and current affairs programme, including religious reflections from *Thought for the Day*".

The BBC reached a new low this year by excluding solely *Thought for the Day* from a governance review on impartiality, and refusing to reconsider that exclusion, the very topic – elevated to a cause célèbre – that is publicly acknowledged to be a long-standing bone of contention over bias. Such is its desperation to retain the indefensible exclusion of non-believers from *Thought for the Day*, it will even abuse its own management processes, and not for the first time, on this topic.



Caste-based discrimination

In April, the UK government declared that it would bring forward regulations to include caste as an aspect of race in [UK Equality laws](#). The passing of legislation to outlaw caste-based discrimination sets a powerful and historic example for the rest of the world that discrimination should not be tolerated, whatever the cultural or religious reasons used to excuse it.

The current Government originally opposed the change, but the surprising U-turn came in April as a result of much campaigning by the NSS and a number of its honorary associate peers, as well as Dalit Solidarity Network UK, and the Christian Institute. The concession followed two embarrassing Government defeats in the Lords, with the prospect of an almost unprecedented third one, for which most credit must go to honorary associate Lord Avebury. The Society was so closely involved it was the first to report the climb down.

Both the United Nations Human Rights Council and a report commissioned by the Government Equalities Office, compiled in 2010 by the National Institute for Economic and Social Research (NIESR), had previously recommended statutory protection against caste discrimination – as did an earlier joint submission by the NSS and IHEU to the UN. The NSS had delivered to the relevant Minister a legal opinion it had commissioned declaring that our treaty obligations dictated that the UN recommendation had to be implemented.

Despite this, the Government resolutely refused to outlaw caste discrimination through legislation, instead favouring an ‘education programme’ to deal with the issue. We argued that this proposal constituted a very poor substitute for a legal provision, and that a failure to legislate would have burdened the oppressed with continually challenging caste discrimination wherever and whenever it occurred. We argued that adding caste as an aspect of race in the UK would establish a clear means to protect people from discrimination on the basis of their caste because we would have the clarity of law required.

Parliamentary voting on the issue ping-ponged from the House of Commons to the House of Lords, with the Lords supporting the amendment to include caste-based discrimination as a recognised form of discrimination, and the Commons rejecting it. However, in a surprise turn-about move on the 23 April, the Government reluctantly conceded and tabled a last-minute amendment ensuring that discrimination against caste would enjoy the same statutory protection as other protected characteristics.

The Government has initiated a convoluted consultation on implementation which could significantly delay the legislation, with some even interpreting the lengthy consultation as an unwillingness of the Government to submit to the will of Parliament. Lord Avebury and others are fighting to shorten the consultation period.



Demonstrators calling for caste discrimination to be outlawed

European and international campaigning

Roman Catholic child abuse and the United Nations

The Vatican is obligated to observe the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, having ratified it. The Society has sought over several years for the Vatican to be held to account for its manifest failure to do so, in respect of rape and other abuse against minors by those acting under the auspices of the Church.

Senior Church officials have also facilitated this by shielding known perpetrators from justice and moving them on, only to reoffend.

A major milestone was reached in July, when the UN committee administering the Convention asked the Vatican, "in the light of the recognition by the Holy See of sexual violence against children committed by members of the clergy, brothers and nuns in numerous countries around the world, and given the scale of the abuses", to provide "detailed information on all cases of child sexual abuse committed by members of the clergy, brothers and nuns or brought to the attention of the Holy See". In summary they asked:

- Whether those accused were removed or not from contact with children
- Whether its reporting to secular authorities was mandatory
- Whether children were supported when making accusations and whether they were silenced
- What the outcome against canon law trials was, and whether there was co-operation with authorities in the countries concerned
- What assistance was given to victims
- What preventative measures are in place

They also asked about the, largely Irish, Magdalene laundries – notorious for their forced Labour of women and some girls – the last of which closed as late as 1996.

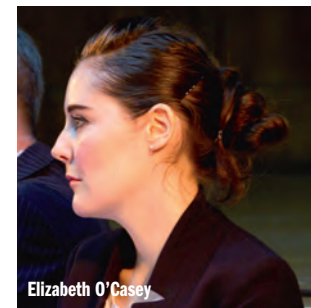
This followed briefings from victims' groups and the NSS – who were invited to meet the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva in June.

We wish to place on record our gratitude to honorary associate Geoffrey Robertson QC for his great assistance by providing evidence on and authoritative detailed confirmation of the breaches of the Convention.

This is the first time that the Vatican has been called to account by the UN on this issue. The Committee will ask it about this and other issues at a public meeting in Geneva in January 2014.

European Parliament

We have continued our work within the EU sphere through our membership of the Advisory Board to the European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics (EPPSP). Over the past year, policy & research officer, Elizabeth O'Casey, has attended EPPSP meetings, participated in discussions of topics such as stem cell research and religious lobbying, employment discrimination against non-Christians in Europe, and women's sexual and reproductive rights. In one meeting dedicated to discussing freedom of religion in EU external policy, Elizabeth, on behalf of the NSS and following her work at the United Nations Human Rights Council, called on the EU to better promote free speech via its representation at the UN. This prompted a written question to the European Commission by Sophie in 't Veld MEP. We also participated in an EU consultation on Free Expression.



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European Court of Human Rights

We intervened at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) to urge rejection of all four applications to the Court by (Christian) employees claiming that their freedom of religion had been violated. The Court rejected three of the applications, fortunately those which would have been most damaging were the court to have accepted them.

The three rejected applications concerned:

- a registrar refusing to conduct civil partnerships for same-sex couples
- a Relate counsellor unwilling to provide sex counselling for same-sex couples, and
- a nurse who insisted on wearing a crucifix on a necklace which was considered a health and safety hazard

The Court did however uphold the application of the BA employee who wished to wear a crucifix on front desk duties. The majority of the judges considered that BA had failed to correctly balance her right to manifest her religion with its right to project a corporate image. The ruling, whilst protecting the right

to manifest religion at work, made clear that these rights must be balanced against rights of others. BA had already agreed for her to wear her crucifix before the proceedings started.

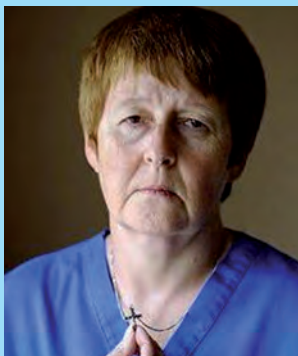
The ECtHR's decisions became final in May after an appeal by the three applicants whose cases had been rejected to have their cases heard at the Grand Chamber was itself rejected.

Lawyers on all sides agree that were these applications to have been successful, particularly the three that were later rejected, it would have fundamentally changed equality law throughout Europe. We believe this would have been in a profoundly damaging way, but achieving that change was presumably why the applications were made and backed by evangelical organisations, retaining the very best lawyers – at eye-watering cost.

The NSS's intervention was the *only* one to argue that the ECtHR should reject all four cases. It was kindly prepared by a team led by renowned human rights lawyer Lord Lester of Herne Hill QC. Some lawyers believe our intervention could well have been key in the largely successful outcome.

The applicants were British Airways employee Nadia Eweida and nurse Shirley Chaplin (concerning the wearing of crosses at work), and Islington registrar Lillian Ladele and Relate councillor Gary McFarlane (concerning objections on religious grounds to dealing with same sex couples). All applicants claimed that their cases being dismissed by the English courts constituted

a failure by the UK to protect their freedom of religion. Our submission rejected this. We argued that any further accommodation of religious conscience in UK equality law would have created a damaging hierarchy of rights, with religion at the top, and that the discrimination that Ladele and McFarlane sought the right to inflict was unacceptably damaging.



Left to right: Shirley Chaplin, Nadia Eweida, Lillian Ladele, Gary McFarlane

Secularist of the Year

This year, we donated our *Secularist of the Year Irwin Prize* to Plan UK, a global charity campaigning to ensure equal access to education for girls everywhere. This was in honour of Malala Yousafzai.

Malala's story sparked outrage around the world after the Taliban said it shot Malala for "promoting secularism". We wanted to celebrate the deeply inspiring and courageous work of Malala; work that has continued to promote education for all girls, in the face of Islamic totalitarianism and despite violence and threats from the Taliban.

Debbie Langdon-Davies, whose father, John, founded Plan in 1937, was presented with a prize of £7,000 by NSS honorary associate Michael Cashman MEP at our annual prize giving luncheon in London.

We also paid tribute to the London Atheism, Secularism & Humanism Society at Queen Mary University of London for its efforts to promote secularism on campus and in particular its defiant and robust response to attempts to close down free expression there, and to Nigerian Human Rights campaigner Leo Igwe who received a special achievement award. At much risk to himself and his family, Leo has campaigned tirelessly against the naming of children as "witches" and "warlocks" by manipulative and fanatical evangelical churches in Africa. Children branded in this way are often abandoned by their parents or become the subject of mistreatment and violence. Leo has been an incredibly brave and tenacious defender for human rights in very difficult circumstances, and we were keen to pay tribute to him.

We are grateful to Dr Michael Irwin for once more donating £5,000 towards the prize and Caroline Pridgeon for donating the remaining £2,000. Terry Sanderson organises Secularist of the Year.

The next *Secularist of the Year* luncheon is on Saturday 29 March 2014. Tickets are already on sale.



Michael Cashman MEP



Debbie Langdon-Davies



Terry Sanderson



Terry Sanderson, Michael Cashman MEP and Keith Porteous Wood



Stephen Evans with nominees British Muslims for Secular Democracy



Malala Yousafzai



Charlie Klendjian



Leo Igwe



Education

The major focus in Scotland has also been education. We have actively supported two petitions by the affiliated Edinburgh Secular Society, one to require City of Edinburgh Council to remove compulsory religious observance from its schools and one to the Scottish Government to abolish appointed religious representatives from local authority education committees; they currently hold the balance of power in a significant proportion of them.

We submitted a detailed report to Education Scotland on the unchecked incursion of dubious evangelical groups into non-denominational schools. This was exemplified with the exposure of the teaching of creationism in a Glasgow school where the chaplain of eight years' service belonged to a US evangelical church and distributed books denouncing the theory of evolution and warning pupils that, without God, they risked being murdered in a harmful, disgusting world.

Ceremonies

We continued to challenge the two annual Kirking of the Court ceremonies in Scotland, one Catholic and one Protestant, on the grounds that they potentially undermine the impartiality, integrity and independence of the Scottish judiciary. At the ceremonies, judges are invited to request "guidance from the Holy Spirit" for all who seek justice.

We argued that the judicial system's neutrality should be seen to extend to religious belief, and that judicial procedure and decisions should not be the subject of appeal to supernatural agency. So far, our arguments have not met with a satisfactory official response, but we are pleased that the matter has been logged in public, a necessary prerequisite to a resolution.

Scottish RC adoption society

Since 2009, adoption agencies throughout Britain, even religious ones, have been statutorily prohibited from discriminating on the grounds of sexual orientation. Roman Catholic adoption agencies in England had sought to continue to discriminate by repeated challenges up to the very highest level, but all failed. Following this, most such agencies in England have continued to function, resolving to comply with the law and in most cases loosening their ties with the Church. This also applies to St. Andrew's agency operating in east Scotland.

The other Scottish agency, however, St. Margaret's Children and Family Care Society, continues to refuse to comply with the law. The NSS's lawyers drew this to the attention of the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator. It ruled that St. Margaret's had broken equality law on grounds of sexual orientation and possibly on religion and belief. Crucially, it believes St. Margaret's had also breached charity law because the Regulator believed it was not acting in children's

best interests as "persons in same sex couples who might be suitable adoptive parents and serve the best interests of children are simply not considered by the charity".

The (Scottish) Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Michael Russell MSP, raised eyebrows by publicly expressing his disappointment at the independent Regulator's carefully-reasoned ruling.

In February, executive director, Keith Porteous Wood, and our Scottish representative, Alistair McBay, met the Minister formally at the Scottish Parliament to express their disappointment at him not supporting the Regulator, given the Britain-wide law in question was beyond doubt, and as far as our lawyers can see, the adoption agency has broken it. Mr Russell refused to be drawn on what the law said, or accept evidence that, in some cases, same-sex couples could be suitable adoptive parents. The Scottish Government maintains a close relationship with the Church, however.

St. Margaret's asked the Regulator to review its decision, and then appealed to the Scottish Charity Appeals Panel, which after some procedural objections by St. Margaret's, considered the matter for three days in September, and its conclusion is awaited.

Despite being the last RC adoption agency in Britain openly [defying equality law](#), St. Margaret's appears determined to continue appealing through the courts as far as possible, regardless of the cost. We believe that however far it appeals, it will be unsuccessful. If this happens, it has resolved to close, blaming us; but we are simply calling for it to be required to comply with the same law as every other agency.

Activism

There has been an unprecedented surge in secular activism in Scotland in 2013, perhaps in part due to the potential clean slate that could follow from independence, to be decided in a referendum in September 2014. The activism has resulted in the exposure of considerable embedded religious privilege. The secularist cause was also greatly helped by the very public demise of Cardinal O'Brien and further revelations of double standards and of appalling child sex abuse at a prestigious Catholic boarding school in Scotland, which mysteriously closed in 1993. Further impetus was gained from the 2011 Census figures which showed for the first time that those professing 'no religion', outnumbered those professing adherence to the Church of Scotland. The increase in non-belief approximated that in England and Wales.

Other campaigning

Challenge to council's free parking for worshippers' policy

In June we challenged Woking Borough Council over its policy of offering free parking to worshippers, while charging others. We consider it neither legitimate nor lawful for local government to subsidise the activities of any particular religion or belief group, and we launched legal action following complaints from local residents.



Our pre-action letter to Woking argued that its policy of allowing free parking for worshippers — which costs local tax-payers over £50,000 per year — constituted direct discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief and was unlawful under the Equality Act.

In response Woking Borough Council issued a 'clarification' on its controversial policy — revising its policy to make clear that members of other community groups who promote social inclusion and undertake voluntary work may also park free of charge in the Council's car parks.

In light of the change we have suspended any legal action until we can assess how the new policy works in practice before consulting again with our lawyers as to what further action is most appropriate.

Labelling of meat from religious slaughter methods

In February, we once again called on the Government to consider mandatory labelling of meat from animals slaughtered without pre-stunning.

In response to the horse meat scandal, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Owen Paterson MP, called for European Commission recommendations on labelling the origin of all processed meat to be "accelerated and published as soon as possible".

As part of that process we urged Ministers to also consider the concerns of people who, for ethical reasons, or reasons of religion and belief, wish to



avoid meat from animals killed without pre-stunning, as happens under the Shechita (Jewish) and some Halal methods of animal slaughter. The only exemption to animal welfare regulations requiring pre-stunning is this religious one.

The Government agreed that it was "right, in principle" to ensure people know what they are buying and how their food has been prepared. Method of slaughter labelling is currently being considered by the EU Commission in a welfare context and this, said DEFRA, could include consideration of a modified health mark scheme to help identify meat from the carcasses of animals slaughtered without stunning.

Male circumcision and the rights of the child

This year has seen some progress internationally in raising awareness about the non-therapeutic circumcision of young boys, an irreversible procedure not without risk and occasionally even fatal.

At the end of September, the children's ombudsmen from five Nordic countries, along with the Chair of the Danish Children's Council and the Children's spokesperson for Greenland, passed a resolution to "Let boys decide for themselves whether they want to be circumcised". The ombudsmen argued that circumcision without a medical indication on a person unable to provide informed consent conflicts with basic principles of medical ethics, and that the procedure conflicts with the principles enshrined by articles 12 and 24 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Then, in October, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) passed a resolution, based on a report by German Parliamentarian Marlene Rupprecht (with whom the NSS had been working), that expressed concern about practices, including the circumcision of young boys, which violate the physical integrity of children. It called on states to clearly define the medical and sanitary conditions to be satisfied in order for practices such as the circumcision of young boys to be justified.

Ahead of these encouraging developments, the NSS, the International Humanist and Ethical Union and the Secular Medical Forum (SMF) jointly logged concerns with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) about non-therapeutic circumcision of male minors. Following the developments in September and October, they jointly wrote asking the Chair of the UNCRC to raise these matters with other countries.

We are grateful for the assistance of SMF's Chair Dr Antony Lempert on medical aspects and barrister James Chegwidan on legal aspects.

Parliamentary Bill to restrict 'religious courts' supported by peers

Seventy peers have expressed overwhelming support for the Arbitration and Mediation Services (Equality) Bill to limit the power of self-styled 'religious courts'. The Bill specifically prohibits them from acting in a discriminatory way – often to the detriment of women and children.

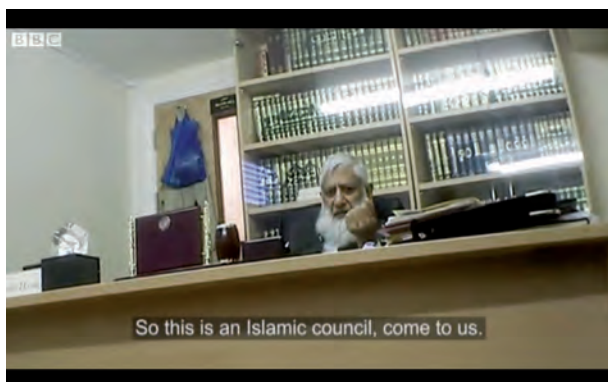
The Bill was introduced by Baroness Cox and supported strongly by the NSS with the help of council member Anne Marie Waters and executive director Keith Porteous Wood.

The Bill was given a second reading in the House of Lords on 19 October 2012, almost unopposed and with some very powerful speeches given by the many enthusiastic supporters.

As we expected, however, the Government sought to evade this sensitive issue, albeit it did acknowledge that it was looking at another related sensitive area: Muslim marriages that are not registered and therefore not valid in civil law.

The Bill fell at the end of the Parliamentary session, but has been reintroduced with some minor amendments. Support is growing and it is hoped to make more progress in the current session.

We are assisting Baroness Cox with a project on "honour"-based violence against women.



BBC's *Panorama* went undercover to investigate what is happening in Britain's Sharia Councils

Lobbying Bill

The NSS has been involved in a campaign against the Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill. We believe it would undermine democracy by restricting the freedom of expression of charities and other campaigning NGOs. We were part of an alliance of different charities and campaigning organisations, featured in a full page advert in three national newspapers.

The NSS, together with the Christian Institute, have been advising on Parliamentary strategy, an irony deliberately highlighted in the advertisement.

The campaign successfully forced the Government to pause the lobbying bill in the Lords to give ministers time to rethink plans to regulate the way campaign groups and charities campaign, especially during general elections.

Opposition in the House of Commons was led by NSS Honorary Associate Graham Allen MP, in his capacity as chair of the Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee.



The full page advert which appeared in the *Guardian*, *Telegraph* and *The Times*

Seventy peers have expressed overwhelming support for the Arbitration and Mediation Services (Equality) Bill to limit the power of self-styled 'religious courts'.

Communications

Maximising our media coverage is an important part of our work and we have maintained our high media presence over the past twelve months.

The highlight of our media coverage during the year came when the European Court rejected three of the four complaints brought by UK Christians against the government. NSS representatives were widely quoted in the media and appeared on a number of national and international news bulletins.

Our report into [evangelism in schools](#) generated a significant amount of media coverage and throughout the year we have regularly commented on the ongoing debate, and often at times of controversy, over the place of religion in schools.

When the UN called the Vatican to account over child abuse we were widely quoted in the national and international press.



Anne Marie Waters on Sky News

We were also invited to comment on a vast array of other topics throughout of the year, for example: the Girl Guides' and Scouts' new promises, our legal action over

discriminatory parking charges, religious chaplains in hospitals, women's face coverings and the release of census figures showing the ongoing decline of religious belief in the UK.

Our website remains the primary platform for raising awareness about our work. The site received almost 1.3 million visits in the last twelve months (a 44% increase on the year) and over 2.3 million page views.

We have also continued to build our social media presence with over 12,500 followers on Twitter and over 9,000 Facebook 'likes'.

We continue to maintain our popular daily online media-round up of news and opinion relevant to secularism. *Newsline*, our weekly email newsletter remains a vital way of communicating with members and the wider public.

We have also maintained our printed communications: the *Bulletin* and Annual Report continue to be distributed well beyond our membership base.

We also distributed a record number of promotional items including badges, bags and leaflets to student groups as part of freshers' week.



Keith Porteous Wood on ITV News

Our campaigns team continues to develop campaign briefings, available on our website. These reports contain a summary of the key issues and facts related to our campaigns and are created to inform and empower supporters to get involved with campaigning.

We continue to invest in our communications and have taken on additional staff to assist with this important area of our work.

President Terry Sanderson and executive director Keith Porteous Wood have done much of the broadcasting work, which has included a number of national and regional television appearances as well as a considerable amount of local, national and international radio interviews; campaigns manager Stephen Evans has taken an increasing share of the media work.



Bath Atheists, Humanists and Secularists Group distribute NSS campaigning material during Freshers' Week

Our website remains the primary platform for raising awareness about our work. The site received almost 1.3 million visits in the last twelve months (a 44% increase on the year) and over 2.3 million page views.

Other council activities not mentioned elsewhere

Terry Sanderson (president) analyses media coverage of secularism and produces the daily media round-up. He also edits *Newsline* and acts as principal spokesperson for the NSS. He has raised several thousand pounds for NSS funds from various fund raising events over the year.

Dan Bye gave talks on *the battle for secularism and challenging religious privilege* for the Manchester Humanist Group. He has also covered talks on *the struggle for freethought: lessons from history for atheists and secularists* at Bradford University Atheist and Humanist Group, *Secularism and the National Secular Society* for Sheffield Skeptics in the Pub, *the struggle against religious privilege* at Ludlow and the Marches Humanist Group. He also spoke at Leicester Grammar School about the National Secular Society.

Ray Newton is the council minutes' secretary. He has worked on the Society's plans to mark our 150th anniversary in 2016.

Afonso Reis e Sousa has led the work on revision of the articles.

Peter Vlachos represented the NSS at the first anniversary of the London Black Atheists.

Anne Marie Waters appeared on Channel 5 and Sky News on the burqa debate and has contributed a number of blogs to the website on the veil, women's rights and many other issues.

Staff sub-committee: Ray Newton, Gerard Phillips and Clare Wadd.

Investment sub-committee: Gerard Phillips, Afonso Reis e Sousa, Clare Wadd (and Keith Porteous Wood).

Your Council serving from 2012 AGM

President

Terry Sanderson

Vice president

Gerard Phillips
and (until 25 March 2013) Elizabeth O'Casey

Honorary treasurer

Clare Wadd

Other council members

Norman Bonney
Dan Bye
Ray Newton
Afonso Reis e Sousa
Peter Revell
Robert Stovold
Adrian Tippetts
Peter Vlachos
Anne Marie Waters

Elizabeth O'Casey resigned on acceptance of the policy and research officer post in the NSS office.

Afonso Reis e Sousa is currently Chair of Council. Gerard Phillips was Chair of Council until the 2012 AGM.

Executive director: Keith Porteous Wood FCCA

Campaigns manager: Stephen Evans



Terry Sanderson



Gerard Phillips



Clare Wadd



Norman Bonney



Dan Bye



Ray Newton



Afonso Reis e Sousa



Peter Revell



Robert Stovold



Adrian Tippetts



Peter Vlachos



Anne Marie Waters

Honorary associates

Graham Allen MP	Asma Jahangir*
Prof. Peter Atkins	Prof. Steve Jones
Lord Avebury	Baroness Kinnock
Baroness Prof. Blackstone*	Prof. Lawrence Krauss*
Prof. Colin Blakemore	Kerry McCarthy MP*
Edward Bond	Stewart Lee
Nick Brown MP	Graham Linehan
Prof. Ted Cattle CBE	Baroness Massey of Darwen
Michael Cashman MEP	Jonathan Meades
Nick Cohen	Sir Jonathan Miller
Prof. Richard Dawkins	Baroness Murphy
Lord Desai	Maryam Namazie
Angela Eagle MP	Taslima Nasrin
Baroness Falkner of Margravine	Lord O'Neill of Clackmannan
James Fitzpatrick MP	Lord Peston
Baroness Flather	Sir Terry Pratchett OBE
Michael Frayn	Philip Pullman
Ricky Gervais	Geoffrey Robertson QC*
Lord Goodhart QC	Martin Rowson
Prof. A. C. Grayling	Gita Sahgal*
Nia Griffith MP	Joan Smith
Dr. Evan Harris	Dr. David Starkey
Patrick Harvie MSP	Lord Taverne QC
Prof. Ted Honderich	Baroness Tonge
Mary Honeyball MEP	Polly Toynbee
Kelvin Hopkins MP	Baroness Turner of Camden
Dr. Julian Huppert MP*	Sophie in 't Veld MEP
Virginia Ironside	Lord Warner of Brockley
Dr Michael Irwin	



Baroness Prof. Blackstone



Dr. Julian Huppert MP



Asma Jahangir, Former UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief



Prof. Lawrence Krauss



Kerry McCarthy MP



Geoffrey Robertson QC



Gita Sahgal, human rights activist

*Honorary associates we have been pleased to welcome over the last year (all pictured, right)

Thank You

As a non-profit campaigning organisation, the NSS is not eligible for charitable status – and we neither seek nor receive funding from publicly-funded bodies. We are therefore reliant on members' subscriptions, donations and legacies to fund our campaigning work. We are immensely grateful for this support. The more generous it is, the more campaigning we can do.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to everyone who has donated money in the last year or remembered us in their wills. If you would like to take out a direct debit or standing order (or increase an existing standing order), please contact the office. If you would like to leave a legacy to the NSS to help secure secularism for future generations, the executive director will be pleased to assist.

We also thank the many people who generously donate their time, expertise and advice to the NSS. Our volunteers assist us in campaigning, with office work and at our events.

We are particularly grateful to the lawyers who assisted us *pro bono* with our European Court of Human Rights intervention. They are Lord Lester of Herne Hill QC, Dr Ronan McCrea and Max Schaefer. We also thank James Chegwiddden, John de Waal QC, Christopher Smith, Richard Stein, Catriona Stirling and David Wolfe QC for their legal assistance over the year. Thanks also to Charlie Klendjian for his work with the Lawyers Secular Society, and Dr Antony Lempert for his with the Secular Medical Forum. Both organisations have assisted the NSS during the year.

We are grateful to the residents of Woking who provided information and assisted us with our challenge to Woking Borough Council. Thanks in particular go to Aidan Griffin for assisting us with the related media work.

We are enormously grateful to Bradley Davis of WhiteLight for his invaluable help with graphic design.

Throughout the year Barry Thorpe has given his time to assist with research and his work is very much appreciated.

A heartfelt thanks to Claudine Baxter, who regularly assists us with membership administration in the office. Thanks also goes to all of the volunteers who helped out at our events. We are particularly grateful to Trevor Aston and Sven Klinge for photographing our events.

We also thank the many members and supporters that assisted with our research and campaigning work. Special thanks go to Dennis Penaluna, Dominic Wirdnam and their team for the invaluable FOI research on hospital chaplains and to Saul Freeman and the many other parents that assisted us with research into evangelism in schools.

Thanks also to all those who run stalls at local events and get involved with campaigning on a local level as well as alerting us to issues.

Groups affiliated to the NSS

Bedfordshire Humanists; Belfast Humanist Group; Birmingham Atheist, Secular & Humanist Society; Birmingham Humanists; Bradford Atheist & Humanist Society; Brighton Secular Humanists; Bristol Atheist Agnostic Secular Society; Bristol Secular Society; Cambridge University Atheist and Agnostic Society; Chiltern Humanists; Cornwall Humanists; Cotswold Humanists; Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists; Devon Humanists; East Kent Humanists; Edinburgh Secular Society; Essex Humanists; Farnham Humanists; FLASH; Greater Manchester Humanists; Hampstead Humanist Society; Humanist and Secularist Liberal Democrats; Humanist Society of West Yorkshire; Isle of Man Freethinkers; Kings College AHSS; Lancashire Secular Humanists; Leeds Atheist Society; Leicester Secular Society; LSE SU Atheist Secular Humanist Society; Ludlow and Marches Humanists; Norfolk Secular and Humanist Group; North East Humanists; Nottingham Secular Society; NU-Think; Oxford Atheists, Secularists & Humanists; Oxford Humanists; Plymouth Humanists; Queen Mary Atheism Secularism and Humanism Society; Reading Atheist, Humanist and Secularist Society; Sheffield Humanist Society; South East London Humanist Group; South Hampshire Humanists; South Somerset Humanists; St. Andrews University Atheist Society; Suffolk Humanists and Secularists; Sutton Humanist Group; UCL Atheist, Secularist, and Humanist Society; University of Lincoln Secular Society; University of Nottingham Secular Society; West Glamorgan Humanist Group; West London Humanists and Secularists.

Not a member?

The most tangible way of supporting our work is by becoming a member and contributing funds to enable us to work; the more we have, the more we can do. If you believe, as we do, that a secular Britain is our best way to achieve true equality for all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs, then please join us and become part of what is possibly the most important debate of the 21st century. Together we can create a fairer and more equal society.

You can join us online at www.secularism.org.uk/join.html or by contacting the office at admin@secularism.org.uk or by calling **020 7404 3126**.

Annual membership is £29, £17 for unwaged and £9 for students.

Joint membership, for two people at the same address, is £45 and overseas membership is £51.

From our members

“ I joined the NSS because after working in schools for over a decade I’m constantly baffled by the requirement for an act of collective worship to be held in schools, and by the teaching of RE with its heavy Christian bias and constant visits by people with a religious agenda. This is so unnecessary – in the 21st century we should move on.”

Alex, Somerset

“ I have a profound interest in democracy, freedom of expression, inclusivity and equality – all of which are undermined by religious organisations.”

Pat, Worcestershire

“ I joined NSS because I believe in religious freedom and freedom from religion. I want Britain to be a forward-thinking, fair and rational place to live for everyone and for future generations.”

Richard, Southampton

“ I am concerned by what I see as an increased mobilisation of highly politicised religiously motivated pressure groups who are arguing for an even greater role for religion in relation to public policy and society in general. I think it is essential that the NSS has the support and resources to be able to continue to provide a coherent and robust voice arguing for an end to religious privilege.”

Edward, Southampton

“ When I first joined I was motivated really by my atheism. Since that time however I have come to see the NSS as an organisation with a much broader and balanced agenda that I can subscribe to with enthusiasm. The removal of privileges from religion in all aspects of our lives has become very important to me. I have been enormously impressed by the way the organisation has carried out its aims – with courtesy, integrity and fortitude. I am delighted to be a member.”

John, Norfolk

FOR N

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