

NSS challenges Bear Grylls over Scouts inclusivity claims

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The National Secular Society has written to Chief Scout Bear Grylls to challenge his [recent claims](#) that scouting is for everyone regardless of their religion, ethnicity or belief.

Following the launch of a new uniform designed especially for Muslim girls, Grylls expressed pride that the Scouts offer "an environment for people of all backgrounds to come together and enjoy themselves."

Grylls' claims that the Scouts are "continuing to move with the times", but today most young people are not religious, but cannot join without making a 'Promise' that includes an oath to god.

Stephen Evans, NSS Campaigns Manager said: "Mr Grylls' claim that scouting is for all is simply untrue. The religious oath in the Scout Promise acts as a barrier to the non-religious, who either have to make a hypocritical and dishonest statement or risk being refused full membership of the Scouts."

In the letter the NSS called on the organisation to open itself up to non-believers and make the religious oath optional.

However, responding to the letter, Wayne Bulpitt, the Chief Commissioner of the Scouts made it clear that the organisation has no intention of changing its policy.

Despite not being a religious organisation, the Scout Association has been granted an exemption from equality legislation so it can continue to accept only members with religious beliefs or who are prepared to make a promise to a god.

The Scouts also exclude atheists from leadership positions. Their '[Equal Opportunities](#)' Policy states that 'the avowed absence of religious belief is a bar to appointment to a leadership position'. Paedophiles are the only other group deemed unsuitable for such positions.

Stephen Evans commented: "Such outdated, unfair and discriminatory policies completely contradict claims that the Scout Movement is there for all to enjoy.

"The Scouts are much admired and the organisation does brilliant work. That is why it is such a shame that its refusal to make the religious element of the oath optional deprives many young people of an honest access to scouting activities and deprives the Scouts of people who would be good leaders working in the organisation as volunteers.

"Independent [research](#) has revealed that two thirds of young people don't regard themselves as belonging to any religion. If the Scouts really do aspire to ensure the organisation is inclusive and welcoming to all, it's about time they introduced a secular option of the promise which would open up scouting to all young people, regardless of their religious beliefs, or indeed lack of them.

"However, if the Scouts do want to be an exclusively faith based organisation, they should be up front about this and not masquerade as an open and inclusive organisation which they are not. As long as they exclude non believers, their 'scouting for all' motto will be both misleading and dishonest."

[Read a copy of the letter sent to Bear Grylls](#)

[Read the response from the Chief Commissioner of the Scouts](#)

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