

# Crematoria should be religiously neutral and welcoming to all

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The National Secular Society (NSS) has urged the Government to ensure that all state-owned crematoria are religiously neutral, allowing religious symbols to be added when requested.

In response to a government consultation on crematoria provision, the NSS said there should not be a presumption that religious symbols are wanted in services.

The Society said that "fixed religious iconography should be removed from crematoria wherever it is practical and reasonable to do so and all civic crematoria should be religiously neutral spaces by default, providing a range religious symbols/iconography to be made available to users upon prior request."

In its consultation response the NSS added that facilities such be "welcoming and sensitive" to all families and that religious iconography should be made available for all who want it in their services – but not featured as standard.

Research carried out by jointly by Bristol Secular Society and Nottingham Secular Society revealed that of the 251 crematoria in England, 29% have fixed religious iconography – typically in the form of a Christian cross.

The Government launched the consultation over concerns that crematoria facilities were not suitable to families of minority faiths.

The NSS response said it supported moves to accommodate cultural or religious traditions where possible provided it can be done at proportionate and reasonable expense and without in any way disadvantaging other users.

Though the National Secular Society welcomed the Government's review into crematoria provision to make sure that facilities are suitable for all, it challenged the Department for Communities for referring to England as a "Christian country" in press statements concerning the review.

The Society expressed concern that this language could be used justify the dominance of Christianity over secular spaces such as crematoria and it urged the Department "to refrain from framing our national identity around a particular religion."

NSS campaigns director Stephen Evans said: "Crematoria provision should give families the opportunity to honour and respect the wishes of their loved one at a most difficult time. A religiously neutral environment should be the default position with crematoria operators making very clear to families and loved ones that religious iconography is available and can be used for services."

In 2015 there was [controversy](#) after a crematorium in Lancashire removed a cross from the altar. 40% of the site's services were non-religious and the cross was stored so that it could be installed when it was asked for.

A local councillor said that it was "usual industry practice" for buildings to be "non-denominational" so that they have the "flexibility to make all families welcome, whatever their beliefs."

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