

# Student umbrella group for non-believers launched

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**The National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies has been launched. It plans to mobilise students on university campuses and arrange campaigns and events across the country to protest against religious privilege and promote the understanding of science.**

Among those present at the Conway Hall launch were NSS honorary associates Richard Dawkins, A.C. Grayling and Polly Toynbee. Chloe Clifford-Frith, 22, who has just graduated from Oxford University and will be dealing with the federation's public affairs, said: "We live in a world where religious governments execute adulterers and homosexuals, deny women and minority groups' basic freedoms, and circulate fraudulent claims about contraception and scientific research.

We are privileged, in such a world, to live in a country where we can even have this debate and, as such, we have a duty to bring it into our universities and beyond." Polly Toynbee said the students' federation would "keep the rational and ethical humanist tradition alive both on and off campus". She said: "We need to oppose zealotry and fanaticism of all sorts by promoting the positive and liberating case for believing that life on earth is precious, because the here and now is all there is, and our destiny is in our hands."

Professor Richard Dawkins said public statements of non-belief were treated as "threatening" and an "affront to the religious". Religious belief did not have to earn respect like other views did, he said. "Beliefs that are unsupported, bigoted or demand special privileges should always be challenged. No opinion should be protected from criticism simply by virtue of being religiously held," he said.

Richard Dawkins and Anthony Grayling with members of the AHS.

NSS staff Stephen Evans and Tessa Kendall with AHS president, Norman Ralph (centre).

NSS Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood with members of the University of Southampton Atheist Society.

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