

## AGM 2021 elections: candidate statements

### President

Keith Porteous Wood

This has been another year of hard work leading to many successes, despite the distractions and challenges of COVID. The staff are now making greater use of our new offices which provide space for more campaigning staff who are being recruited.

Much of my time has been devoted to governance matters and I serve on staff and investment subcommittees. Our first online AGM was successful, but I am keen to return to in-person ones as soon as is prudent.

International work with which I was involved included extensive liaison with European partners and with the UN. This included the submission of reports furthering our commitment to support Human Rights and also to help fight clerical sexual abuse of minors.

I have also been working on major legacies and was pleased to complete probate on an estate where our substantial residuary bequest had been conditional on our being executors. In May we celebrated the 25th anniversary of my joining the NSS staff, as the sole employee. I have served four years as President and, with so much work still to do, offer myself for re-election.

My thanks to Stephen, staff and fellow council members for their invaluable support. Serving on the NSS Council for the past five years and as Vice President for the past three years has been an honour and opportunity to continue to advise on promoting the Society's aims and activities.

### Vice-presidents

Josephine Macintosh

Human rights are an important focus for me, making the NSS a natural home. I have represented the NSS at the UN Human Rights Council, speaking on various topics ranging from caste discrimination to freedom of religion. I have also worked closely with Keith Porteous Wood on submissions regarding clerical abuse to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, for which the NSS has become increasingly recognised, and have been involved in the Secular Legal Forum.

The NSS's work in challenging religious privilege is crucial, including as part of its ability to chart a steady path amid societal and political polarisation. I am committed to continuing to support the NSS's campaigning, educating and advocating on behalf of secularism as Vice-President and Council member and hope you will grant me that opportunity.

Richard Scorer

I have been proud to serve as your Vice President over the past year and I have been an active member of council.

As a lawyer I have worked to hold religious hierarchies to account for their appalling negligence and criminal covers ups of the abuse of children. In the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), and through the media, I have advocated for my clients who suffered abuse in Catholic, Anglican, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jewish and Muslim settings. I'm pleased to say that the IICSA report - although imperfect - acknowledged, in effect, that religious fundamentalism creates the ideal conditions for child abuse and cover up. Alongside Keith Porteous Wood, I continue to work to expose abuse scandals in the churches and to use this issue to highlight other issues of importance to the secularist cause - like the unacceptable constitutional and legal privileges of the Church of England, and its corrupt nexus of power with other parts of the establishment that resulted in the protection of clerical sex offenders.

I continue to undertake legal work, write and campaign on other issues of concern to secularists. In the Manchester Arena bombing inquiry I have been working to highlight the factors that give rise to religious radicalisation, and to ensure that as a society we challenge these without fear or favour. Religious lobbies know that many their views are unpopular and discredited. But they continue to use unjustified legal and social privileges to advance their regressive agenda, and to demand more privileges. So the work of the NSS has never been more necessary. The expansion of faith schools; homophobic campaigning by fundamentalist Christian groups; the continued dangers of fundamentalist Islam; the outrageous attempts to stifle free speech; attacks on women's right to choose- all these issues and more demonstrate the importance of our campaigns. I ask for your vote so that I may continue to contribute to our work in the coming year.

#### Treasurer

Mike Harley

Although a relatively new member of the Society, I would be delighted to have the opportunity to contribute to the further progress of secularism, making best use of such skills as I have. Therefore, I am pleased to put my name forward for the role of Honorary Treasurer.

By way of professional background, I spent roughly 40 years as a chartered management accountant in industry and local government, latterly running my own consultancy business specialising in education funding in maintained schools. Having retired, I metaphorically ran away and joined the theatre, attended an adult drama class, and now operate (spasmodically) as a professional actor. For a number of years, I have been the Hon. Treasurer of a small Bath based arts charity running competitive festivals in music, dance, drama and creative writing. I was raised as a Presbyterian, but without really being overly engaged with religiosity, which I guess makes me fairly typical of the human species. Later in life, having married a non-practising Roman Catholic, realisation came that our similarities as human beings were more important than the tribal labels we are forced to adopt at birth. This was followed by a period of study and reflection, leading to the conviction that the only intellectually honest position that I could personally adopt is atheism and secular humanism.

## Council members

Judy Audaer

I wish to apply for re-selection onto the NSS Council. I remain firmly committed to the aspirations and goals of the NSS and am very impressed with the ongoing efforts and achievements of our talented and hard-working staff team whom I have attempted to support through this most difficult recent period.

I have contributed to the organisation in recent years through assisting in the recruitment of staff and via the scholarship sub-committee that has made awards that have contributed to important relevant research. This includes the work that led to the recent creation of a national database regarding faith schools and degree of parental choice; also some currently ongoing research regarding the experience of Ahmadiyya Muslims in the UK, which promises to be extremely interesting.

I have also worked locally in Yorkshire to spread knowledge of the NSS and encourage people to sign up to our newsfeeds and to become members. It has been a challenge to stay connected when meeting only by Zoom, and if I am re-elected I really look forward to soon be meeting in person with NSS colleagues and reminding myself what London looks like after all this time!

Sadikur Rahman

My name is Sadikur Rahman and I have been a Council member for nearly 7 years.

In that time I have contributed with ideas and policy suggestions towards the overall aims of the NSS but also in particular in areas where the issues relate to Islam, Muslims and their interplay with Secularism.

Over the years I have campaigned and blogged on Hijab/headscarves in Schools, the wider proposed ban on niqab, the Sharia law reviews, gender segregation, Trojan horse scandals in Birmingham Schools and the plight of Bangladeshi bloggers. This year I made representations in local consultations on the RSHE curriculum in schools. I also sit on the committee which oversees the funding of academic works relating to secularism.

I believe secularism is the answer to many of the conflicts within Muslim communities in the UK and around the world as it is the only way in which each and every Muslim can live according to their own particular brand of Islam whether liberal or conservative, with the caveat of course that individual liberties & human rights are respected. The view by some Muslims that only their interpretation is valid can only be challenged in a secular Society that encourages and respects freedom of speech.

I believe I can provide experience and insight into these debates and issues and ask for your vote.

Eoin Carter

I'm from Edinburgh originally, now living in Cambridge where I'm completing the final stages of a PhD on the history of British freethought in the nineteenth century. My research focuses on the earlier generations of campaigners whose efforts gave birth to the modern Secularist movement: the delicate balances that had to be struck between agitation and accommodation, between radical ambitions and pragmatic realities. I was lucky enough to have a chance to discuss my work on the NSS's own podcast earlier this year (#49, May 2021).

In my view, one of the NSS's great historical strengths has been its ability to unite its foundational strength of committed campaigners with specialist skills brought by various traditions, whether in journalism, the law, education, or elsewhere. For my part, if elected to Council I will look in particular to promote and strengthen the NSS's academic connections, to better understand the role religious privilege played, and continues to play, in shaping our society.