

challenging religious privilege

national
secular
society

Annual Report

2022

OUR MISSION

The National Secular Society works for the separation of religion and state and equal respect for everyone's human rights so no one is either advantaged or disadvantaged on account of their beliefs.

THE SECULAR CHARTER

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

- There is no established state religion.
- Everyone is equal before the law, regardless of religion, belief or non-belief.
- The judicial process is not hindered or replaced by religious codes or processes.
- Freedom of expression is not restricted by religious considerations.
- Religion plays no role in state-funded education, whether through religious affiliation of schools, curriculum setting, organised worship, religious instruction, pupil selection or employment practices.
- The state does not express religious beliefs or preferences and does not intervene in the setting of religious doctrine.
- The state does not engage in, fund or promote religious activities or practices.
- There is freedom of belief, non-belief and to renounce or change religion.
- Public and publicly-funded service provision does not discriminate on grounds of religion, belief or non-belief.
- Individuals and groups are neither accorded privilege nor disadvantaged because of their religion, belief or non-belief.

Whatever one's view about the monarch, it is nonsensical for a head of state to swear to uphold a Catholic-free monarchy and protect the unjustifiable privileges of the Church of England. Or for the head of state to be *ex officio* the Church's Supreme Governor to whom the prime minister has to answer weekly.

It is also unsustainable, given the increasing majority of the population identifying as non-religious, religiously unconcerned or non-Christian – and with the Union coming under increasing strain – for a coronation to be conducted by a church of only one country of the UK.

Despite all of this, and the UK being the only country where anything like this absurdity survives, the coronation will go ahead.

It is unrealistic to expect the coronation to be much different from that in 1953 – except perhaps with the addition of some bystanders to give the illusion of religious diversity. While there is precedent for an incoming monarch modifying the oaths, it seems unlikely Charles will. However, a secular accession ceremony in parliament where the incoming head of state vows to act equally in everyone's interests, rather than just those of faith, would be a worthwhile gesture.

It is clear that Charles is no less religious than his mother and will resist any alienation of religion from his role, despite the many arguments against a head of state also being a religious leader. Maybe we will have to wait for a constitutional crisis, as may happen one day, when a successor refuses even to pretend to be an Anglican.

While we were proud of our role in the abolition of the blasphemy law in 2008, fear of violence or even causing offence has created a *de facto* blasphemy law, particularly for topics seen as blasphemous by reactionary Muslims. The attack on Salman Rushdie was a case in point, as was the failure – despite our appeals to the government – to support the teacher in Batley who showed cartoons of Muhammad to his class as part of a discussion on freedom of expression.

The recent sectarian conflict in Leicester is another example of minority religious extremism that is becoming ever more apparent. Yet another is the rapidly growing sabre-rattling

threats to the government from ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups over long-overdue attempts to regulate unregistered schools that deny pupils the very basic tools to be functioning citizens. In the US and even in Europe, Christian nationalism and more extreme Christianity is on the rise, threatening reversals of women's and LGBT people's human rights that would have seemed inconceivable just a few short years ago. We all need to be vigilant and vigorously oppose these generally religiously-motivated erosions.

We also need to guard against any weakening, however disguised, of the mechanisms that enforce human rights. The UK equality laws are the most advanced in the world and the UK played a leading role in the establishment of the European Convention on Human Rights in 1949. Were we to withdraw from it, as is increasingly touted, we would be joining Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Vatican City.

The many tributes paid to the achievements of Terry Sanderson, my predecessor as president, particularly his repositioning of the NSS as a human rights organisation, have been touching.

The preoccupations of Brexit, Covid, Ukraine and the cost of living have made it tougher to get our message across. Nevertheless, I remain optimistic of our ability to maintain a strong secularist voice,

both in the UK and at the United Nations as an antidote to the many challenges. We now have the strongest and most talented team ever and with forthcoming elections a council of management that is the most experienced I can remember. And we could not have achieved that without support from our members, for which we remain grateful. I also thank our chief executive and the staff, and my fellow council members, for all their efforts.



“ IT'S A SIN ”



Campaign to disestablish the officially homophobic church

In the wake of archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby's affirmation at the Lambeth Conference in August that gay sex and same-sex marriage are sins, we launched our "It's a Sin" campaign, raising awareness of the established church's regressive stance and calling for disestablishment.

Our advertising campaign in magazines and online highlighted that while the church's doctrine is its own affair, UK citizens are entitled to expect that its views have no bearing on the workings of the state. We urged our members and supporters to write to their MPs asking for them to work towards separating church and state. We thank the hundreds of you that did so. If you haven't already, you can use our template letter at secularism.org.uk/ItsASin.

We also wrote to then-Prince Charles and Prince William to ask if they agree with the Church's position on same-sex marriage. The British monarch is legally required to "join in



Copyright House of Lords 2022 / Photography by Annabel Moeller

Sovereigns are oath-bound to preserve the doctrine of the Church

It is time for the Church and the state to be separated



Stephen Evans argued the case for a secular head of state in *The Independent*.

communion" with the Church of England and promote Anglicanism in Britain. We said a sovereign that seeks to act as a focus for national identity, unity and pride cannot, at the same time, be the supreme governor of an officially anti-LGBT+ institution.

Following the death of Queen Elizabeth, our chief executive Stephen Evans continued the conversation with an opinion piece in *The Independent* arguing that our head of state should not have constitutional ties with religion. Both Stephen and Keith Porteous Wood have also used the letters pages of national newspapers to press the case for reform.

Sir, Nobody should be surprised by the Church of England's decision to ban the daughter of the late Desmond Tutu from leading her godfather's funeral because she is married to a woman. The surprising thing is that this institution remains the established church in England. The church's doctrine is its own affair, but the rest of us should be entitled to expect that its views do not have a privileged position in the public and political life of the country. In a nation that claims to uphold the equal treatment of all its citizens, the existence of an established church is a deep anomaly.
STEPHEN EVANS
Chief executive,
National Secular Society

Our letter in The Times

CHURCH AND STATE: THE LATEST FIGURES

96% of a recent citizen's assembly agreed democracy should be underpinned by the principle that "there are clear lines between the church, state and judiciary".
[Source: UCL Constitution Unit, 2022]

62% Brits disagree bishops should still have a place in parliament.
[Source: Techne 2022]

71% Brits think it isn't important for the prime minister to be Christian.
[Source: Deltapoll, 2022]

Challenging the bishops' bench

The Church of England's privileges extend to the House of Lords, where two Church of England archbishops and 24 bishops (Lords Spiritual) are given seats and are able to vote on legislation.

In October we told the independent Commission on Political Power, which was established to examine potential legislative and structural reform of the UK political system, that bishops should no longer have automatic seats in parliament.

Even the Church seems to realise the bishops' bench is unsustainable. This year a CofE briefing emerged which suggested the Church is open to reducing the number of bishops in a reformed House of Lords (but perhaps not so open to scrapping them entirely).



Copyright House of Lords 2021 / Photography by Roger Harris

The UK is unique among western democracies in giving representatives of religious groups automatic seats in its legislature.

Another council steps away from prayers

We're regularly contacted by councillors objecting to prayers before council meetings. We're pleased to report that in December, Congleton Town Council voted to adopt a new civic protocol that will allow for council meetings to be conducted in an entirely secular manner. The motion for the new protocol was proposed by councillor Suzy Firkin, who contacted us in March for advice.

Public services: Resisting religious interference

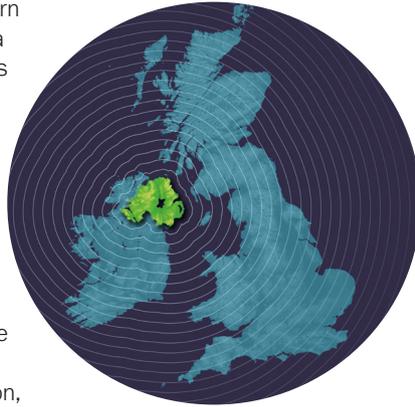
- We've been exposing government plans to outsource more community services to religious groups, while eroding protections against unwanted proselytising. This includes a £1 million fund launched last year for community projects which only religious groups could receive.
- In January we urged the Scottish government to ensure it supports only organisations that are genuinely inclusive of all, regardless of religion or belief, in tackling poverty. Last year a food bank was accused of breaching equality law after publishing a job vacancy for a stock coordinator stating candidates must have "Christian values" and "evidence a live connection with the church".
- We advised a joint working group on police guidance following calls to enshrine the right of religious clerics to access crime scenes following the murder of David Amess MP last October. We warned that police must not undermine priorities to protect evidence and safeguard the public. We welcomed the subsequent guidance which said decision makers "must balance medical and investigative priorities".

More inclusive schools on the horizon as religious landscape shifts

New figures from Northern Ireland's census reveal a rapidly changing religious landscape. Catholics have now overtaken Protestants as NI's largest religion or belief group. And the second largest group are those without a stated religion.

The figures underscore the need for drastic changes to NI's education, which features alarming levels of religious discrimination, segregation and control even by UK standards. But landmark legislation passed this year should help change this by placing a duty on the Department of Education to further support integrated schools, which educate children from all backgrounds together in an inclusive approach, as well ending religious exemptions to anti-discrimination law in the recruitment of teachers.

We are one of many groups who have supported these reforms. In May we held an online conference with politicians, academics and lawyers to reflect on recent successes and discuss future challenges to a more secular education system in NI.



NI collective worship and RE breach human rights

In July the High Court of NI found collective worship and religious education (RE) breach a requirement in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) for states to "respect the right of parents' religious and philosophical convictions in respect of education and teaching". The court said the authorities should act to ensure the arrangements for RE and collective worship are ECHR-compliant.

But the UK government has since said it has no plans to review collective worship laws in England. This is despite a Private Member's bill from Baroness Burt to replace mandatory collective worship with inclusive assemblies in non-faith schools progressing to the House of Commons in December. In August, Poulner Infant School in Hampshire applied for an exemption to collective worship as two thirds of its parents do not identify as Christian, but it was denied. Welsh ministers have been more receptive to our lobbying and have indicated that collective worship may be something they could look at when current curriculum reforms are complete.

Council / Secular society chief says councillors are 'absolutely right' over religious rep concern

Stephen Evans was quoted in the Scottish press backing councillors who oppose appointing religious representatives.

RE is also in need of reform in England, where 34% of academies do not include RE on the school timetable despite it being a legal requirement. We've written to the education secretary urging for RE to be reformed into a subject schools want to teach, rather than one enforced by inspectors.

In Scotland, RE provision is used to justify the law requiring local authorities to appoint three religious representatives to their education committees. Following concerns raised by increasing numbers of councillors, we lobbied the education secretary to end the provision.

Working to end faith-based school admissions

In June the government admitted faith-based admissions cause inequality. Yet it doesn't even know how widespread discriminatory admissions policies are.

Last year the Department for Education told us it "does not hold information on which schools select on the basis of religion as an element of their admissions criteria", even though it publishes information on which schools practise academic selection.

Faith schools: Government doesn't know how many state schools select children on the basis of religion

EXCLUSIVE



Our exposure of government ignorance on faith-based admissions was featured in iNews.

We believe that thousands of state-funded schools use religious criteria in their admissions policies.

We're continuing to campaign to end faith-based discrimination in our education:

- We backed a move by Suffolk County Council to end CofE voluntary controlled schools prioritising church-going families in their oversubscription criteria from September next year.
- Last year we reported a Jewish faith school in London to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) after finding it requested details of pupils' ethnic backgrounds in its application form – and only white ethnicities were possible options. The OSA instructed the school to change its admissions procedure as a result.

Lubavitch school told to change entry form

The Jewish Chronicle covered our exposure of a Jewish school's application form with all-white ethnicity boxes.

Challenging faith school harms

Religious selection is only one of the problems caused when state-funded schools or academy chains have a religious ethos:

- We supported a children's author who was banned by the Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark from giving talks about his books, which feature young gay characters, at schools under its control in March. The diocese was criticised by Ofsted, and teachers at one of the schools went on strike. In May, another faith school apparently cancelled an author talk because the book in question was about a fictional witch and there were fears this would "promote witchcraft".



Gay children's author Simon James Green was banned from giving school talks by the Catholic Church

'Reconsider religious school funding' call after gay author's visit is cancelled

Our support of Simon James Green was covered widely in the media, including The Independent.



Secular Society blasts recommendation to shut Wigan state school

We were quoted in local news challenging the decision to close a Wigan community school to keep a Catholic one open.

- We backed families in Wigan who campaigned to stop their local community school from closing to keep a Catholic one open, warning the move would devastate local secular school provision.
- We've highlighted how some state-funded Jewish schools have implemented sexist policies – often with impunity.

Plans to tackle unregistered schools stall

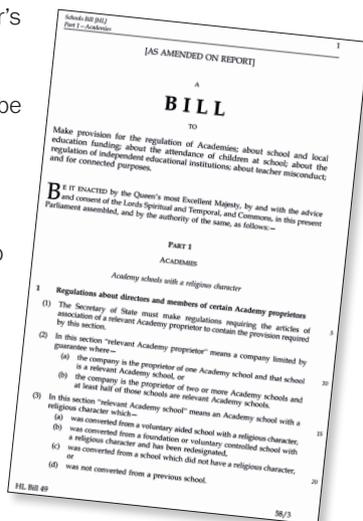
We've urged the education secretary not to abandon plans to stop children being denied a secular education in unregistered schools.

We've been supporting provisions in the government's flagship Schools Bill that would give Ofsted more powers to crack down on unregistered schools, and establish compulsory registers for children not in school to ensure they receive adequate education. Some religious groups operate unregistered schools in order to prioritise religious inculcation while avoiding scrutiny under the independent school standards. Some members of the Charedi Jewish community, where unregistered schools are a particular problem, have opposed the bill.

But following the appointment of Liz Truss as prime minister, the bill was placed under review. The government told us it was being considered "in the context of the Prime Minister's overall legislative agenda". There are rumours from religious activists that it will be scrapped.

We've therefore sought reassurance from the government that it will not renege on its commitment to bring unregistered educational settings into the regulatory system.

The Schools Bill, which would have helped tackle unregistered schools, has been shelved.



Independent faith schools

We've continued to highlight the problems in many independent faith schools. Figures released in December revealed that in 2021 a quarter of independent faith schools inspected by Ofsted failed to meet required school standards. That means these schools were more than twice as likely to fail Ofsted inspections as independent schools without a recorded religion. Failures often include refusing to teach topics that are in conflict with religious beliefs.

Theological colleges

We raised concerns with higher education regulator the Office for Students (OfS) that some specialist theological colleges registered with them have policies that discriminate against LGBT+ students and restrict academic freedom and freedom of speech.

OfS-registered institutions can access public funds, including student loans. Where theological colleges have become OfS-registered providers of higher education in return for access to public funds, the public has the right to expect that they be held to the same standards as any other registered provider. The OfS have refused to confirm whether they have launched formal investigations against the colleges concerned.



Charles Bradlaugh's grave restored

Last year we launched a fundraiser to restore the grave of our founder Charles Bradlaugh MP at Brookwood Cemetery in Surrey. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, we reached our target and unveiled the restored grave, complete with a bust of Bradlaugh himself, at a ceremony last October. Attendees included the mayor of Woking and several of Bradlaugh's descendants. We thank NSS council member Bob Forder for co-ordinating the project.

Bradlaugh founded the NSS in 1866 and faced a prolonged struggle to enter parliament as an MP in the 1880s, as he was barred from taking his seat because of his atheist beliefs. He finally took his place in parliament in 1886 and was instrumental in giving all MPs, and those giving evidence in court, the right to affirm rather than swear a religious oath.

The restored grave and information panel, detailing Bradlaugh's achievements to visitors to Brookwood Cemetery, will help ensure his remarkable legacy is not forgotten.



"A man of the people, and a man for the people."

BROOKWOOD CEMETERY SOCIETY CHAIR KIM LOWE ON BRADLAUGH

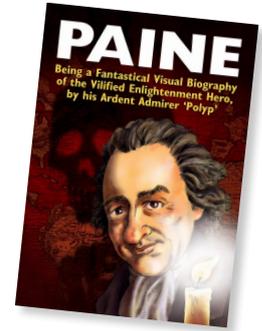


Three NSS presidents attended the ceremony: Terry Sanderson, Keith Porteous Wood and Denis Cobell.

Thomas Paine: A novel tribute

We backed a crowdfunder for the creation of a graphic novel about Thomas Paine – a key figure in secularist history.

Author Paul 'Polyp' Fitzgerald says he was inspired to write *Paine: A Fantastical Visual Biography* as "a way of paying homage to the world's least known revolutionary freethinking hero, and hopefully rescuing him from oblivion".



In memory: Terry Sanderson, 1946–2022

We are sad to report our former president Terry Sanderson died from cancer in June, aged 75.

During his time as president from 2006 to 2017, Terry oversaw a number of remarkable achievements. Terry was proudest of promoting a clear secularist vision in our organisation's constitution that protects the rights of all, and our campaign leading to the abolition of blasphemy laws – not to mention being a leading figure behind the huge demonstration against Pope Benedict's state visit to London in 2010.

Since the 1970s, Terry was a well-known figure in the movement for gay rights. He set up a mail order book business specialising in gay literature and wrote gay self-help books. For a quarter of a century he wrote the monthly Mediawatch columns in *Gay Times*, and campaigned against the inhumane portrayal of gay people in the media.

A little over a month before he died, he announced his imminent demise on Facebook, ending with: "Goodbye and try to be kind to each other".



Resisting Islamic ‘blasphemy laws’

Several events this year have highlighted the need to push back against attempts to silence speech about religion, particularly Islam:

- We highlighted that safety concerns were the reasons behind the UK-wide cancellations of ‘The Lady of Heaven’, a film about Islamic history from a Shia Muslim perspective. Large numbers of Muslim men protested outside cinemas showing the film, claiming it was ‘blasphemous’.

- We showed solidarity with author Salman Rushdie, who was stabbed in August by a man who accused him of ‘attacking Islam’, by speaking at a ‘Stand with Salman’ event in London.

- We raised serious free speech concerns about a press regulator’s proposed standards code, which prevented publishers from saying that female genital mutilation is a religious practice.



Our campaign officer Alejandro Sanchez at ‘Stand with Salman’.

Protecting free speech within hate crime laws

Hate crime laws can help tackle crimes motivated by hostility or prejudice. But they must be formulated carefully to ensure robust criticism or satire of religion isn’t silenced:

- In December the Law Commission addressed our concerns that its proposed hate crime reforms could inadvertently criminalise criticising certain religious practices that are also associated with recognised ethnic groups. It concluded current protections applying to discussion and criticism of religious practices should be extended to cover cultural practices.

- In March we warned Northern Ireland’s Department of Justice that its proposed reforms to hate crime laws could undermine free speech, and called for the reforms to include abolishing NI’s blasphemy laws.

Opposing ‘blasphemy laws’ around the world

In September we urged the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure its strategies to tackle intolerance based on religion or belief include promoting, rather than undermining, free speech. Powerful religious institutions have long attempted to use such initiatives to smuggle in de facto ‘blasphemy laws’ silencing speech they don’t like.

Both explicit and ‘back door’ blasphemy laws continue to underpin horrific human rights abuses around the world. Perhaps the most high profile case this year is Mubarak Bala (pictured), president of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, who in April was sentenced to 24 years in prison in connection with a series of Facebook posts which some deemed ‘blasphemous’ against Islam. He was arrested in 2020 and held without charge for 462 days, while denied access to a legal team for over five months. We joined international efforts to campaign for Bala’s release.



Courtesy of Humanists International



Stephen Evans and Megan Manson from the NSS attended a protest against Mubarak Bala’s imprisonment outside the Nigerian High Commission.

Progress on freer, fairer wedding laws

We've long campaigned to reform outdated, Christian-centric wedding laws in the UK. We saw very encouraging progress this year:

- The Law Commission published its proposals for reforming wedding laws in England and Wales, which are broadly in line with our recommendations. This includes near-universal legal rules for all weddings, allowing weddings to take place almost anywhere, relaxing prohibitions on incidental religious content at civil ceremonies, and new offences criminalising those who mislead people into unregistered religious 'marriages' with no legal protections.

- Northern Ireland plans to adopt proposals we backed to raise the minimum marriage age to 18 and allow couples to have their marriage legally solemnised by a celebrant who is humanist or subscribes to another nonreligious philosophy.



We worked with the Law Commission to shape its proposals for modernised wedding laws.

Flawed 'bill of rights' plan on hold

We've welcomed the government's decision in September to shelve its plan to replace the Human Rights Act with a 'bill of rights'. We repeatedly warned the government the plan risked a rollback on rights protections, particularly for the nonreligious.

International work on child rights

- We supported a report by an international council of experts calling on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to work towards full, equal protection of all minors from religious and cultural genital cutting. We hosted an online discussion in June on the topic with two of the report's authors. One of the authors was Dr Antony Lempert, chair of our Secular Medical Forum, who co-authored another report in July criticising the British Medical Association's permissive stance on religious and cultural male circumcision.



Antony Lempert and Kira Antinuk discuss their report on genital cutting and child rights at our online event.

- Throughout the year we raised religious encroachments on children's rights across the world with the UNCRC. This included alerting it to religious threats to child rights in the UK, the role of the Catholic Church in Polish schools, and clerical abuse of minors in Canada, Chile, France, Ireland and New Zealand. The UNCRC generally acts on our concerns. The president leads this work.

Success: Early abortion telemedicine here to stay

As a result of the pandemic, in 2020 the government rolled out a temporary provision for women to receive all medication by post for abortions before 10 weeks' gestation following a telephone consultation.

The initiative proved safe, effective and was overwhelmingly preferred by women, rather than having to visit a clinic for early medical abortions. So we joined other pro-choice organisations in campaigning for the provision to be made permanent.

Despite the government announcing it would scrap the policy in England following lobbying from anti-abortion groups, we were successful: in March, MPs voted in favour of keeping the provision, which will also be made permanent in Scotland and Wales.

While this is big step forward for women's reproductive rights, concerns still remain – particularly following the revocation of abortion rights in the US in June, and the implications this may have for women's rights worldwide.

In November, we sounded the alarm over a newly-registered branch of a US anti-abortion charity, Stanton Healthcare, in Edinburgh. The Belfast branch of the charity had been found falsely telling women abortions cause breast cancer and infertility.

Charity status given to controversial anti-abortion group Stanton Healthcare

THE  TIMES

Our concerns about Stanton Healthcare were quoted in The Times.

Feminist and secularist Pragna Patel delivers 2022 Bradlaugh Lecture

Our Bradlaugh Lecture this year was delivered by veteran campaigner Pragna Patel, a founding member of the secularist women's rights group Southall Black Sisters. Pragna spoke about how state 'multi faithist' policies have enabled the erosion of secularism and women's rights. She also talked about her work defending Salman Rushdie during the 'Satanic Verses' affair.



Protecting women and girls from religious misogyny

- This year we responded to consultations on strategies to tackle violence against women in Scotland and Northern Ireland. We highlighted that conservative religious teachings about women may contribute to abuse, and warned on the dangers of using faith groups to deliver services for women experiencing violence.
- We reported Utrujj Foundation, an Islamic organisation which registered as a charity in December, to the Charity Commission after finding an article on its website advising on when and how to beat women.
- In May we welcomed the inclusion of religious courts in updated guidance from the Crown Prosecution Service for prosecutors working on domestic abuse cases.
- In September we backed plans to formally pardon those historically convicted of 'witchcraft' in Scotland but said more is needed to tackle the religious roots of misogyny and 'witchcraft'-related abuse that continue today.

Reforming the law on assisted dying

Religious opposition is perhaps the largest barrier to compassionate legislation on assisted dying that maximises the autonomy, welfare, dignity and safety of patients. Last October the bishop's bench united to oppose a bill to allow the choice of assisted dying for terminally ill people.

But there has been progress:

- Last September the British Medical Association dropped its opposition to assisted dying.
- Most MPs who spoke at a parliamentary debate in July supported reforming the law to allow the choice of assisted dying. We briefed all MPs prior to the debate.
- We responded to two consultations in Scotland this year giving our support for reforming the law to allow the choice of assisted dying under certain circumstances.

Protecting secular mental health care

- In July we urged the Ministry of Defence to ensure its welfare provision is fully inclusive of all service personnel, irrespective of religion or belief. Much of MoD pastoral care is still centred on Christian chaplains.
- We've responded to consultations in England, Scotland and the United Nations on mental health this year, warning that religious imposition in healthcare and public services can be detrimental to mental health and wellbeing.
- A GP who's received several complaints from patients for proselytism, particularly those suffering from mental health issues, has been told by NHS England he must attend a 'professional boundaries course', after we raised concerns.



Our chief executive Stephen Evans spoke on ITV about Dr Richard Scott, a GP whose proselytising to patients has come under scrutiny.

Challenging religious barriers to vaccines

- In December we urged the DfE to ensure all pupils have equal access to in-school vaccinations, after discovering a Hindu academy chain blocked delivery of flu vaccines in its schools, including those with no faith ethos, on religious grounds.
- In February we referred a Christian charity to Scotland's charity regulator OSCR after discovering it posted anti-vaccine conspiracy theories, as well as viciously homophobic memes, on Facebook. OSCR told us it was unable to intervene because the Facebook posts "are in accordance with their religious beliefs". This supports the case for charity law reform – religion should not enable charities to promote harmful messages.



OSCR's investigation into a charity we reported for anti-vaccine messages made front page news.

Combatting religious extremism

- After years of NSS campaigning, a charity run by notorious ‘hate preacher’ Zakir Naik, who is banned from Britain, was finally shut down in May. The charity, Islamic Research Foundation International, funded an Islamic TV channel which incited violence and murder.
- In October the Charity Commission opened an investigation into an Islamic charity after we reported it for publishing pro-Taliban and antisemitic lectures on its website.

Islamic charity website urges Muslims to fund jihad



Our exposure of extremist content promoted by an Islamic charity was widely reported, including in The Times.

- We held two events this year which examined the problem of religious extremism in the UK: one exploring secularist issues within the UK’s Bengali diaspora, and one discussing how to overcome tensions between Islam and secular democracy.



Our networking event at Toynbee Hall in London to discuss issues affecting the Bengali diaspora.



Taj Hargey, Mohammed Amin, Stephen Evans and Yasmin Rehman at the event in Birmingham

Challenging non-stun slaughter

The religious exemption from slaughter laws designed to protect animal welfare is one of the most contentious examples of religious privilege. We’ve exposed recent government policies which may exacerbate the problem:

- We warned Defra in August that proposed new guidance on public sector catering could create a duty for organisations to actively supply non-stun meat.
- We criticised a government-backed amendment in a bill meant to protect animals which compels advisors to respect “religious rites” when making recommendations on animal welfare issues.
- Last year we discovered non-stun halal and kosher meat is being sold in parliament and alerted the media.
- There has been more positive news regarding labelling for meat from animals slaughtered without stunning. Ninety-seven per cent of respondents to a government consultation on labelling last year said the government should introduce mandatory labelling for meat to indicate the method of slaughter. There were over 1,400 responses to this question. We were one of the respondents – and we encouraged our supporters to respond to the consultation.

NON-STUN SLAUGHTER: THE LATEST FIGURES

72%

Brits back labelling for food produced from non-stun slaughter. Just 4% oppose labelling.

(Source: Censuswide 2021)

OVER 50%

of cattle slaughtered without stunning for kosher meat may end up on the general market unlabelled as it is rejected for not meeting religious requirements.

(Source: Defra, 2022)

The total meat supplied from non-stun religious slaughter is four times greater than the proportion of Muslims and Jews in the UK. That represents between

34^{and} 99 million

animals unnecessarily slaughtered without stunning each year.

(Source: Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation, 2021)



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Kim Lowe and everyone at Brookwood Cemetery Society for their work on the Bradlaugh grave restoration and wreath-laying ceremony.

All our members and supporters who responded to our branding survey.

Judy Audaer, Catriona Low, Ed Moore and Aleksandra Myslek, who will be retiring from Council at the AGM. We thank them for their valuable contributions to the NSS.

If you are interested in volunteering, please see secularism.org.uk/work-with-us for more information.

Affiliated groups

We would like to thank all our affiliated groups for their support. We would especially like to thank those who have hosted our speakers and promoted the NSS.

Any group that supports our aims can join the NSS as a group member. If you have any questions about group membership or would like to request a speaker or materials, please email membership@secularism.org.uk



Chair of Dorset Humanists David Warden and NSS head of campaigns Megan Manson. Megan gave a talk on secularism at Dorset Humanists in April

Members and supporters

We would like to thank all our members. During these uncertain economic times, we especially appreciate our members' generosity. We would also like to thank those who support us by sharing our content, writing to their MP and keeping us informed of relevant issues.

We would like to thank those who have remembered us in their wills. We are honoured that so many of our members wish to make secularism a part of their legacy. Their generosity ensures that we can continue to campaign for the separation of religion and state and face whatever challenges the future may bring.

If you have any questions about membership, donations or how to leave us a legacy, please contact membership@secularism.org.uk.

WHY SUPPORT THE NSS?

“To help campaign for a fair, equal, secular society and remove religious privileges that are holding back societal progress.”

MANDANA, LONDON

“To help promote the interests of secularism in the UK and protect against the creeping interests of the religious right in modern society.”

LUKE, SURREY

“Detailed, reasoned opposition to religious privilege and ability to swim against the flow. I especially admired the Society’s approach to the Batley school problems. Hardly anybody else considered the impact on the teacher concerned.”

IAN, MANCHESTER

“I do not think the church should influence parliament, or that schools should be separated based on personal faith.”

GEMMA, CUMBRIA

“I was born in an Islamic country but from a young age I’ve considered myself an atheist. People should have religious freedom, but in no circumstances should they be given the privilege of influencing policies or laws.”

SHAHNAZ, DURHAM

“Although I believe that all should have the right to follow whatever religion they wish I also believe that the state should be entirely free of religious bias of any sort, and that there should be no establishment of religion in the UK. Religion should be a private matter.”

BEN, SOMERSET

“A state religion, and non-secular society, is an infraction on human rights. I experienced and witness first-hand the affects it has, being forced to go to a Church of England school when I had little faith in religion.”

NATE, DEVON

“I strongly support the idea of no privilege and no disadvantage for people of any religion or none. In particular, I am strongly opposed to religious state schools which I think are socially divisive as well as being utterly ridiculous.”

JAMES, HERTFORDSHIRE

“I want to live in a secular society where no one any longer assumes that morality must have a religious dimension.”

PETER, LONDON

“I am a supporter and advocate of separating religion from public life. Coming from the middle east and living in many countries there as a child has given me a very good insight regarding the stresses that secular minorities are put under in these circumstances, including within family environment.”

AHMED, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

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