

# Ep 14: End compulsory worship | Education update

Video available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Q\\_CJMDor5I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Q_CJMDor5I)

0:00:02.780,0:00:09.180

[Emma Park] Hello and welcome to episode 14 of the National Secular Society podcast. I'm Emma Park,

0:00:09.180,0:00:13.680

and this week I'll be talking to Alastair Lichten, Head of Education at the NSS.

0:00:13.680,0:00:17.860

One of the NSS's goals is to ensure that all children have access to

0:00:17.860,0:00:22.580

an inclusive education, free from religious bias. With this in mind,

0:00:22.590,0:00:26.550

Alastair and I will be discussing the Society's current campaign against the

0:00:26.550,0:00:31.130

law on collective worship in schools, as well as its new resource for teachers

0:00:31.130,0:00:36.360

'Exploring Secularism'. Alastair will also be giving an update on his activities in

0:00:36.360,0:00:46.920

the education sector. As a teenager I went to a rather old-fashioned Anglican

0:00:46.920,0:00:52.590

school. Every morning in assembly we would sing hymns, say prayers, and listen

0:00:52.590,0:00:58.020

to sermons. Week after week we sang about the bliss to which only the children of

0:00:58.020,0:01:02.660

Zion would have access, or exhorted each other to smite the troops of Midian.

0:01:02.660,0:01:07.770

After one of these invigorating sessions I remember a senior teacher, long since

0:01:07.770,0:01:11.660

retired, coming onto the stage and repeating with gusto the part about

0:01:11.660,0:01:16.980

non-christians being damned for eternity. Even back then, in the heart of rural

0:01:16.980,0:01:21.030

England, there were a number of students in the audience who were Jewish, Muslim or

0:01:21.030,0:01:25.500

from a non-religious culture like China, quite apart from inveterate unbelievers

0:01:25.500,0:01:30.960

like myself. Nonetheless our daily Christian worship, although in the theory

0:01:30.960,0:01:35.460

it might have been optional, was in practice compulsory. And even though it

0:01:35.460,0:01:39.600

gave heathens like me something to rebel against, it was hardly conducive to a

0:01:39.600,0:01:45.150

tolerant atmosphere. But that was two decades ago. Since then, we in Britain

0:01:45.150,0:01:49.530  
have become on average less religious as  
a nation and more diverse in our

0:01:49.530,0:01:55.409  
religious affiliations or lack of them.  
Given this variety of beliefs, in the

0:01:55.409,0:02:00.160  
country today surely no one still  
expects school children to have to

0:02:00.160,0:02:05.520  
engage collectively in Christian worship,  
or any other kind of worship, on a daily basis.

0:02:05.520,0:02:09.200  
It turns out that there are two answers to this  
question:

0:02:09.200,0:02:13.420  
the legal position and  
the actual practice in schools.

0:02:13.420,0:02:18.280  
Neither is particularly satisfactory from a  
secularist point of view, and that's why

0:02:18.280,0:02:23.080  
abolishing collective worship is still  
on the National Secular Society's campaign list.

0:02:23.080,0:02:28.480  
I am now joined by Alastair Lichten to find out  
more.  
Alistair, hello.

0:02:28.480,0:02:32.140  
[Alastair Lichten] Hi Emma.  
[EP] First can you explain what the law  
requires

0:02:32.140,0:02:37.000  
in terms of collective worship in schools?  
[AL] Well, the law in England and Wales  
mandates

0:02:37.010,0:02:42.319

that all schoolchildren take part in a  
daily act of broadly Christian

0:02:42.320,0:02:49.180  
collective worship. Like so much else,  
this dates back to the seminal 1944 Education  
Act,

0:02:49.180,0:02:54.600  
although the current law is found in the  
1998 School Standards and Frameworks Act.

0:02:54.600,0:02:58.159  
Northern Ireland has  
its own requirements, and in Scotland

0:02:58.160,0:03:04.500  
there is Religious Observance, which in  
places is being replaced with Time for  
Reflection.

0:03:04.500,0:03:07.220  
The term 'collective worship' is a bit of a

0:03:07.220,0:03:11.659  
problem, as it doesn't really sum up  
what it's all about. If you had

0:03:11.660,0:03:16.640  
a collective within a school, who wanted  
to come together for voluntary worship,

0:03:16.640,0:03:21.280  
maybe at lunchtime or after-school Club,  
that would be a very different issue.

0:03:21.280,0:03:27.880  
The issue here is that it's mandated worship,  
mandated by the state, to be directed

0:03:27.880,0:03:32.480  
and often coerced by school authorities, which  
is why our campaign

0:03:32.480,0:03:37.320  
is to end compulsory worship in schools.  
[EP] How does the position in England and  
Wales

0:03:37.320,0:03:41.720  
compare with the law in other countries?  
[AL] Well, very differently.

0:03:41.720,0:03:45.700  
The UK, as far as we know, is  
the only democratic country which

0:03:45.700,0:03:51.440  
legally imposes a daily act of worship in state  
schools. This would be completely alien

0:03:51.440,0:03:55.540  
in almost any other modern liberal democracy.  
[EP] We have such a variety

0:03:55.549,0:04:02.389  
of schools in this country: state schools,  
independent schools, faith schools. How is

0:04:02.389,0:04:07.000  
the legal requirement for collective worship  
enforced  
in these different schools in practice?

0:04:07.000,0:04:11.320  
How much room is there for schools to  
interpret the law in their own way?

0:04:11.320,0:04:14.389  
[AL] In practice most schools either ignore the  
requirements

0:04:14.389,0:04:19.430  
or simply reinterpret it in such a way  
that they hold perfectly inclusive,

0:04:19.430,0:04:25.400  
topical, ethical assemblies, which they  
then just call 'collective worship' and

0:04:25.400,0:04:30.139  
they might have a moment of silence at the  
end,  
or invite people to pray or reflect if

0:04:30.139,0:04:35.419

they want, but they basically carry out  
the assembly with no

0:04:35.419,0:04:40.490  
element of directed worship.  
The requirement is, in fact, so unpopular,

0:04:40.490,0:04:45.290  
Ofsted have long since abandoned any sort  
of enforcement or inspection of it, and

0:04:45.290,0:04:50.990  
the D of E tacitly support this position.  
Although the situation is very different

0:04:50.990,0:04:55.790  
in faith schools. For example, well  
over 90% of Church of England primary

0:04:55.790,0:04:59.990  
schools, according to a recent survey,  
have daily Christian collective worship.

0:04:59.990,0:05:05.600  
Also, in non-faith or community ethos  
schools, where you have the particularly

0:05:05.600,0:05:09.860  
religious head teacher, or group within  
the school, who's keen to

0:05:09.860,0:05:14.340  
impose this, and keen to take a  
very literal interpretation of the requirement,

0:05:14.340,0:05:18.710  
and, equally, some schools  
manage to the right to withdraw reasonably

0:05:18.710,0:05:23.780  
well, but this is overwhelmingly seen as  
unsatisfactory. Those parents really

0:05:23.780,0:05:27.919  
don't want their children marked out  
by being withdrawn, and schools can

0:05:27.919,0:05:31.520

make this difficult as well.  
[EP] it sounds like there is a lot of room for

0:05:31.520,0:05:36.650  
manoeuvre, and the situation very much  
depends on the school. So what are the

0:05:36.650,0:05:41.460  
National Secular Society's biggest objections  
to the collective worship requirement?

0:05:41.460,0:05:45.160  
[AL] It's quite simple really. We  
don't believe the state should be mandating

0:05:45.169,0:05:50.419  
directed worship. It's a violation of  
pupils' freedom of belief, and without any

0:05:50.419,0:05:55.520  
educational basis or justification.  
This goes so clearly and obviously

0:05:55.520,0:05:59.570  
against principles of equality that is  
actually requires its own special

0:05:59.570,0:06:04.400  
exemption from the Equality Act. Worship  
should only ever be voluntary, and it

0:06:04.400,0:06:10.400  
should never be imposed, coerced or  
mandated. If you're part of a

0:06:10.400,0:06:15.440  
religious community, or fan of worship  
personally, that's fine, but you may not

0:06:15.440,0:06:19.490  
appreciate the message of exclusivity  
this sends, and you may not just appreciate

0:06:19.490,0:06:24.229  
just how alien this practice is to many  
families, and the way in which many

0:06:24.229,0:06:29.030

parents want to raise their children. As  
long as we have this legal requirement it

0:06:29.030,0:06:32.539  
provides a platform for those that do  
want to impose their religion and

0:06:32.540,0:06:38.540  
worship in schools, whether that's school  
authorities or external evangelical groups.

0:06:38.540,0:06:43.060  
[EP] So is the NSS campaigning for a change in  
the law?

0:06:43.060,0:06:48.000  
[AL] Changing the various laws across the UK  
is a must,

0:06:48.000,0:06:52.480  
but the government can do better to  
manage the situation with improved

0:06:52.480,0:06:57.320  
guidance, it has been a long time since the  
guidance was updated. Last month we wrote  
to

0:06:57.320,0:07:01.610  
the new Education Secretary, Gavin  
Williamson, urging him to consider

0:07:01.610,0:07:05.620  
an update to the guidance, and we hope  
that will happen in the next parliament.

0:07:05.620,0:07:10.220  
The guidance needs to make clear what  
schools need to do to provide a

0:07:10.220,0:07:15.110  
meaningful alternative to worship.  
That needs to be a genuine

0:07:15.110,0:07:19.520  
meaningful alternative, that doesn't  
stigmatize or cause any detriment to

0:07:19.520,0:07:24.380

withdrawn pupils. The guidance needs to clarify exactly what fulfilling the

0:07:24.380,0:07:28.970

collective worship requirement means This could

0:07:28.970,0:07:33.650

regularise the situation, where schools merely hold an assembly in

0:07:33.650,0:07:37.910

which there is an opportunity for voluntary worship, but without them

0:07:37.910,0:07:43.190

directing it or imposing it. Also the guidance should make clear what

0:07:43.190,0:07:48.140

consultation, if any, school authorities need to take, particularly those with

0:07:48.140,0:07:52.880

[unclear] protected community school ethos, to ensure that their

0:07:52.880,0:07:59.510

policy is suitable for their community.

[EP] Is there a particular reason why the NSS

0:07:59.510,0:08:05.330

should be concerned with this issue right now?

[AL] The autumn term tends to see a

0:08:05.330,0:08:10.010

big uptick in our case work related to imposed worship and schools. The simple

0:08:10.010,0:08:13.220

reason is that many parents are only just now discovering that this is a

0:08:13.220,0:08:18.440

requirement. You also tend to get a lot of stuff around Christmas. Unfortunately

0:08:18.440,0:08:23.360

some schools try to make Christmas assemblies particularly religious, or

0:08:23.360,0:08:27.800

other schools even go so far as trying to exclude pupils from Christmas

0:08:27.800,0:08:34.040

related activities if they're withdrawn from collective worship. The big issue at the moment

0:08:34.040,0:08:38.419

in England is the case of the Harris family. [EP] The Harris family?

0:08:38.419,0:08:42.469

[AL] Yeah. You may have seen on our website this

has since been taken up and

0:08:42.469,0:08:47.720

supported by the Humanist Association. So that's put the issue in the news. A

0:08:47.720,0:08:53.120

little background on that: we supported the Harris family last year. They attend

0:08:53.120,0:08:58.579

a Community Ethos Academy, not a faith school but part of a

0:08:58.579,0:09:03.049

Christian Multi-Academy trust, which they feel is acting a bit like a faith

0:09:03.049,0:09:07.549

school, and that the way in which the Christian worship is managed makes

0:09:07.549,0:09:12.949

withdrawal very difficult, [there's a] lack of any meaningful alternative. So that's a human

0:09:12.949,0:09:16.970

rights case that's going through at the

moment. We'll follow it closely, and

0:09:16.970,0:09:20.689  
we expect that this is going to  
push the DfE into making some sort of

0:09:20.689,0:09:24.829  
new guidance, which could be good or bad  
for us, but we'll keep up the pressure

0:09:24.829,0:09:31.160  
and need to wait and see. Elsewhere in  
the UK, in Wales it's moving up the

0:09:31.160,0:09:35.509  
agenda. As the big curriculum reform  
issues start to move on this could be

0:09:35.509,0:09:40.189  
one of the next issues to look at.  
There are also campaigns in Scotland,

0:09:40.189,0:09:43.549  
where there has already been some reform,  
and in Northern Ireland.

0:09:43.549,0:09:48.720  
So really across the UK.  
[EP] Are you getting any other specific  
examples

0:09:48.720,0:09:54.460  
of parents or their children talking to you  
about  
difficulties they've encountered?

0:09:54.460,0:09:59.680  
[AL] Yeah. Just look at the stats  
on our page on compulsory worship and

0:09:59.689,0:10:04.610  
information there is one of the most visited.  
There's a wide range of practice

0:10:04.610,0:10:10.460  
in terms of how exclusive or how  
aggressively the worship element is pushed.

0:10:10.460,0:10:14.380  
We've got various testimonials on  
the website, and there is a big part of

0:10:14.389,0:10:16.850  
our casework that's people  
approaching us for help.

0:10:16.850,0:10:20.329  
Although there are few parents who then go  
on to withdraw their children because

0:10:20.329,0:10:26.239  
of the difficulties that can come with  
that. We've had community schools with

0:10:26.239,0:10:29.869  
prayers four times a day,  
pupils told off for not taking part,

0:10:29.869,0:10:33.649  
parents accused of intolerance or just  
told they're not welcome at the

0:10:33.649,0:10:36.739  
school, because they don't want their  
children being directed to pray to a

0:10:36.739,0:10:41.029  
religion that they don't follow. And all  
of this is not getting into any of the

0:10:41.029,0:10:47.569  
more extreme or outlying examples.  
We have external evangelical groups or

0:10:47.569,0:10:53.809  
local religious leaders coming in  
to lead worship. Now, for example, we've had

0:10:53.809,0:10:57.589  
pupils really upset by one assembly where

0:10:57.589,0:11:02.779  
paper cups were apparently set on fire,  
one wet and one dry, and this was to

0:11:02.779,0:11:07.239

symbolize and to teach that Christian baptism is necessary to avoid hell.

0:11:07.240,0:11:11.880

A completely inappropriate lesson to be teaching in a school.

0:11:11.880,0:11:16.520

[EP] What about British society as a whole? Is there widespread support for keeping

0:11:16.520,0:11:22.970

the collective worship requirement on the statute book?

[AL] Absolutely not! Just

0:11:22.970,0:11:28.250

this week we're recording. the

0:11:28.250,0:11:32.300

Church of England released a new poll, which they're spinning to claim supports

0:11:32.300,0:11:36.350

collective worship. But obviously they understand the collective worship

0:11:36.350,0:11:40.070

requirement is unpopular so they didn't appear to ask about it in the poll, and

0:11:40.070,0:11:43.820

then just use the press release to suggest that the collective worship

0:11:43.820,0:11:48.620

was possible. Last year our own polling, in conjunction with Censuwide,

0:11:48.620,0:11:54.230

found that just 26% of the public felt that school assemblies need to

0:11:54.230,0:12:00.470

feature worship. Other polling is sporadic on this. It was in

0:12:00.470,0:12:04.940

the news a lot in 2011, when there was a ComRes survey for the BBC, and that

0:12:04.940,0:12:09.840

found that around 70% of parents were opposed to enforcing the requirement.

0:12:09.840,0:12:14.600

[EP] How do you see public perception of the collective worship

0:12:14.600,0:12:21.050

requirement developing in the future?

[AL] British society looks set just keep getting

0:12:21.050,0:12:28.100

more religiously diverse and less religious. The idea of needing

0:12:28.100,0:12:32.030

the state to mandate particular, and impose particular, religious activities

0:12:32.030,0:12:38.840

just seems more and more old-fashioned - a legal requirement from the 1940s seems

0:12:38.840,0:12:42.950

completely incongruous today. Do we really think there's anything

0:12:42.950,0:12:47.440

suggest that this requirement is gonna become more popular or more suitable for

0:12:47.440,0:12:54.170

for schools? Of course many schools will just continue to muddle on, muddle

0:12:54.170,0:12:57.680

through, as they are at the moment. But the pressure for reform is just gonna

0:12:57.680,0:13:02.150

keep going up and up.

[EP] You've told us about the reasons for opposing

0:13:02.150,0:13:05.930

collective worship.

What is the NSS actively doing at the

0:13:05.930,0:13:10.010

moment to campaign against it?

[AL] We're in regular contact with the DfE and

0:13:10.010,0:13:15.050

devolved administrations on this issue,  
continuing to build up the evidence bank

0:13:15.050,0:13:20.240

and to raise public awareness, so we're  
ready to respond to consultations and

0:13:20.240,0:13:23.780

keep the pressure up.

And the main thing we do is a lot of casework,

0:13:23.780,0:13:28.060

support to parents, pupils and even schools  
affected by the requirement.

0:13:28.070,0:13:31.910

[EP] And if we, as concerned  
members of the public, agree with you,

0:13:31.910,0:13:36.890

what can we do to support the NSS's  
campaign?

[AL] We'll link to the campaign page

0:13:36.890,0:13:41.810

in the show notes, so it'd be really helpful  
if you could visit there and use our

0:13:41.810,0:13:48.530

template letter to write to your MP or  
MSP or AM. You can sign the national

0:13:48.530,0:13:54.200

petition which will be forwarded to  
devolved administrations as well. You

0:13:54.200,0:13:58.340

can really give the campaign a boost by  
sharing us on social media and letting us

0:13:58.340,0:14:02.210

know about your experiences. So if you're  
a parent, pupil or teacher affected by

0:14:02.210,0:14:06.380

the requirement, we'd love to hear from you.

[EP] So just as a final question. Alastair,

0:14:06.380,0:14:10.940

should schools still have any form of  
collective assemblies on a daily basis,

0:14:10.940,0:14:16.670

and, if so, what should they involve?

[AL] School assemblies are very popular among

0:14:16.670,0:14:20.450

the parents and the general public, I  
have to say they're not always teachers

0:14:20.450,0:14:25.580

favorite thing. But certainly regular, I  
them don't know about daily, but regular

0:14:25.580,0:14:29.930

assemblies are an important, valuable  
opportunity to bring the school

0:14:29.930,0:14:33.860

community together. Now if we stopped  
organizing them around exclusive

0:14:33.860,0:14:38.030

religion, surely the school community element  
could be

0:14:38.030,0:14:43.070

strengthened. It's a very disingenuous  
argument that's put forward in defence

0:14:43.070,0:14:47.390

of the collective worship requirement,  
the claim that without it school

0:14:47.390,0:14:53.300

assemblies would just disappear. Yes,  
school assemblies are being squeezed out,



0:14:53.300,0:14:58.190

for lots of reasons.

I know every single campaign against the

0:14:58.190,0:15:01.670

collective worship requirement, or the similar requirements across the UK, every

0:15:01.670,0:15:07.360

single campaign says: replace this requirement or the requirement for

0:15:07.360,0:15:14.450

regular inclusive topical ethical school community assemblies and it should be

0:15:14.450,0:15:19.520

up to schools on how to best manage this. [EP] Yeah, I agree. And speaking as a

0:15:19.520,0:15:22.970

former teacher myself it's definitely very helpful to have a collective

0:15:22.970,0:15:27.530

assembly just to give the school a sense of a group ethos but certainly there's

0:15:27.530,0:15:31.730

no reason why religion should be involved in that. Alistair, in your role

0:15:31.730,0:15:35.750

as a Head of Education of the NSS, could you tell us about your activities at the

0:15:35.750,0:15:39.670

moment? Are there any campaigns or other achievements that

0:15:39.670,0:15:44.920

you would like to highlight?

[AL] Education is always the biggest area of work so I'm

0:15:44.920,0:15:51.670

always busy, well supported by the rest

of the campaigns team, by our secular

0:15:51.670,0:15:58.000

education forum, and our fantastic allies and members. At the moment the No More

0:15:58.000,0:16:02.020

Faith Schools campaign, which I coordinate, has been a big focus, and I think

0:16:02.020,0:16:07.150

we'll probably do a dedicated episode on that at some point. Last month we

0:16:07.150,0:16:11.310

published analysis of new figures showing that the majority of teachers in England

0:16:11.310,0:16:16.360

supported an end to new faith schools. This month there's been an update on our

0:16:16.360,0:16:20.710

campaign against a new proposal for a voluntary aided faith school in

0:16:20.710,0:16:25.350

Peterborough. I've been talking about the whole history of these new

0:16:25.350,0:16:28.570

voluntary aided faith school proposals, which we've been leading the campaign

0:16:28.570,0:16:32.770

against. And I've been out and about talking about the

0:16:32.770,0:16:36.820

campaign, so I did my No More Faith Schools talk at Leicester Secular

0:16:36.820,0:16:42.940

Society and at a Hackney branch of the Labour Party meeting. I'm doing it again

0:16:42.940,0:16:48.130

next month at North London Humanists, and

I'll be representing the campaign at the

0:16:48.130,0:16:52.300

Liberal Democrats conference in Bournemouth. All these places, there's

0:16:52.300,0:16:56.260

there's been a great response and have had great questions, so if you want me to

0:16:56.260,0:17:04.400

come and talk to your ,group, trade union meeting, local atheist/secular/humanist/interfaith/political group

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I'm more than happy to come along, just get in touch.

0:17:07.820,0:17:12.840

[EP] Last Saturday you were in Manchester for the NSS's annual Bradlaugh Lecture.

0:17:12.900,0:17:16.860

Could you tell us a bit more about the history of this lecture?

0:17:16.960,0:17:21.480

[AL] I had a great time on Saturday. I thought this was a really great

0:17:21.490,0:17:26.230

event this year. The Bradlaugh Lecture is held annually at the Manchester Art

0:17:26.230,0:17:32.380

Gallery. It's in September, normally the first weekend, which coincides with the

0:17:32.380,0:17:39.190

NSS's anniversary. So it was launched on our 151st anniversary. Manchester Art

0:17:39.190,0:17:44.740

Gallery features a magnificent portrait of our founder Charles Bradlaugh.

0:17:44.740,0:17:48.070

It's the portrait of him standing at the bar of the House of Commons. He was

0:17:48.070,0:17:52.390

forbidden from taking up his seat because he was an atheist. It's a powerful

0:17:52.390,0:17:56.920

image of him continuing, locked out of the House of Commons, but still

0:17:56.920,0:18:02.100

there speaking for his constituents and speaking for what he believed was right.

0:18:02.100,0:18:06.370

[EP] And who gave the lecture this year and what was he or she speaking about?

0:18:06.370,0:18:11.260

[AL] This year's speaker was Andrew Moffat, who I interviewed in episode 12

0:18:11.260,0:18:15.250

of the podcast, and also as I discussed in a previous episode, I believe

0:18:15.250,0:18:21.370

episode 11, there's been a massive campaign over the last year by

0:18:21.370,0:18:27.340

reactionary religious groups against inclusive RSE. RSE is Relationships and

0:18:27.340,0:18:35.530

Sex Education in schools. Andrew is an award-winning deputy head teacher who has

0:18:35.530,0:18:40.180

created a really fantastic inclusive education program called

0:18:40.180,0:18:48.700

No Outsiders, which has been the subject of a vicious anti LGBT campaign by

0:18:48.700,0:18:54.490  
certain religious groups. Although it's called No Outsiders, as he

0:18:54.490,0:18:58.800  
talks about in his speech, it's not just about LGBT issues, it's about

0:18:58.800,0:19:04.960  
inclusivity, people of all faiths and none, different social backgrounds, people of

0:19:04.960,0:19:10.270  
different abilities, different interests etcetera. It's

0:19:10.270,0:19:13.510  
really lovely, exactly the sort of inclusive education that schools

0:19:13.510,0:19:18.700  
should be doing. But unfortunately it's been the subject of protests and

0:19:18.700,0:19:25.060  
conspiracy theories claiming it's some sort of anti-religious LGBT

0:19:25.060,0:19:30.760  
indoctrination program. So, Andrew, in a really positive and inspiring

0:19:30.760,0:19:35.770  
way, was able to tell the audience, a sellout crowd, what it was

0:19:35.770,0:19:41.020  
all about and really make the case for it there. [EP] In the coming week

0:19:41.020,0:19:45.580  
NSS members will receive their autumn bulletins. Can you give us a preview?

0:19:45.580,0:19:50.800  
[AL] Yeah. Members get three issues of our

bulletin magazine a year, and the autumn one, I

0:19:50.800,0:19:56.380  
think, is landing in the next week or so, when this podcast is released. The lead

0:19:56.380,0:20:01.480  
story is about our Exploring Secularism project, which provides free

0:20:01.480,0:20:03.789  
education resources for schools to help

0:20:03.789,0:20:08.679  
teachers and pupils explore secularism, in what we hope is a balanced, informed,

0:20:08.679,0:20:13.600  
and very relevant way. As always, in our bulletin there's updates on all our

0:20:13.600,0:20:19.149  
campaigning activities. Also we're announcing free, quite exciting events

0:20:19.149,0:20:24.190  
coming up at Conway Hall, our base in Central London. On 30th November

0:20:24.190,0:20:28.379  
the National Secular Society's historian, and one of our Council members,

0:20:28.379,0:20:34.389  
Bob Forder, will be talking about Richard Carlile and his pivotal role in 19th

0:20:34.389,0:20:39.340  
century secularism and liberalism. In February the chair of our Secular

0:20:39.340,0:20:44.619  
Education Forum, Dr. Keith Sharpe, will be giving a talk on the 1944 Education Act

0:20:44.619,0:20:49.389  
and its legacy, which, obviously, we've already

discussed today. And in May, and I'm very

0:20:49.389,0:20:53.950

much looking forward to this, there'll be a CPD day for teachers it's called

0:20:53.950,0:20:59.169

Exploring Secularism for Educators. It's a free event, and will be very useful

0:20:59.169,0:21:03.700

for RE teachers, SACRE members, and any other educators

0:21:03.700,0:21:08.529

with an interest in secularism or in religion and society. So all those

0:21:08.529,0:21:11.800

details will be in the show notes and announced in the bulletin.

0:21:11.800,0:21:16.680

[EP] And those will be in Conway Hall in Red Lion Square, just near the British Museum.

0:21:16.680,0:21:20.580

You mentioned this Exploring Secularism resource for schools.

0:21:20.590,0:21:23.859

I understand it's something you've been working on for quite a long time. Can you

0:21:23.859,0:21:28.539

tell us a bit more about it ?

[AL] Yeah. The Exploring Secularism project is one of

0:21:28.539,0:21:32.710

those that I'm most excited about. This has been something that we've been

0:21:32.710,0:21:38.729

approached for, over the years. A lot of RE teachers,

0:21:38.729,0:21:43.960

politics teachers, other teachers with interest, citizenship teachers, asking

0:21:43.960,0:21:48.190

us because they have questions about secularism: Are there resources on it? A

0:21:48.190,0:21:53.499

lot of religious studies A-levels cover aspects of secularism and it comes

0:21:53.499,0:21:57.549

up in all sorts of places, but really there's a real dearth of actual

0:21:57.549,0:22:03.700

good resources on what is secularism and exploring secularist questions. It tends to get

0:22:03.700,0:22:11.440

lumped in as anti-religious, or as non-religious. So we've launched

0:22:11.440,0:22:16.970

a big range of new, all free resources. They're all

0:22:16.970,0:22:21.919

focused around open questions and explore the issues.

0:22:21.919,0:22:26.210

We're advocating that pupils ask these questions, we're not advocating

0:22:26.210,0:22:32.120

that they come to certain conclusions. That allows teachers and pupils

0:22:32.120,0:22:37.190

to explore what is secularism, what are the main secular issues today.

0:22:37.190,0:22:42.320

There's worksheets, presentations, all sorts of things. And if you're a

0:22:42.320,0:22:47.000

teacher, get in touch. We can send you copies of resources. If you're a parent,

0:22:47.000,0:22:51.620  
get in touch. Please send this to your school, let them know it's there.

0:22:51.620,0:22:55.280  
[EP] In which lessons would you envisage that this resource might be useful?

0:22:55.280,0:22:57.820  
[AL] We designed the resources to be very

0:22:57.830,0:23:02.960  
flexible. So, for example, one of the resources allows people to explore

0:23:02.960,0:23:06.710  
different models of secularism around the world, and that you could

0:23:06.710,0:23:10.340  
use at an RE lesson if you're exploring 'What is Secularism?',

0:23:10.340,0:23:14.360  
maybe looking at different examples. But equally, if you're doing a comparative

0:23:14.360,0:23:18.350  
politics lesson, you could use that resource. If you're studying

0:23:18.350,0:23:22.549  
French culture you could study the topic of

0:23:22.549,0:23:25.820  
Laïcité. If you're doing history, there's history focussed resources.

0:23:25.820,0:23:30.040  
If you're doing geography or politics, looking at different political systems,

0:23:30.049,0:23:35.680  
we have resources on how art and literature

0:23:35.690,0:23:41.299  
have challenged or reinforced religious privilege or tolerance or

0:23:41.299,0:23:45.230  
discrimination. So you could talk about blasphemy in an English

0:23:45.230,0:23:48.770  
lesson or an art lesson. These are relevant issues. You could talk about

0:23:48.770,0:23:53.090  
NIT lessons. We were considering issues around censorship on the Internet. So

0:23:53.090,0:23:57.440  
although the majority of interest, and I think the majority of use of this is

0:23:57.440,0:24:03.710  
focused on religion and belief lessons and citizenship lessons, it's a

0:24:03.710,0:24:09.260  
wide-ranging very flexible set of resources. [EP] Alastair Lichten, thank you very much.

0:24:09.260,0:24:15.060  
[AL] Thanks so much.

0:24:15.140,0:24:21.000  
[EP] That was episode 14 of the National Secular Society podcast, hosted by Emma Park.

0:24:21.000,0:24:24.900  
If you'd like to help us challenge religious privilege and support freedom

0:24:24.910,0:24:29.350  
of and from religion in Britain today you can become a member or supporter of

0:24:29.350,0:24:33.880  
the Society from just one pound a month. Full details are on our website at

0:24:33.880,0:24:39.700

[secularism.org.uk/podcast](http://secularism.org.uk/podcast)

If you liked this podcast you

0:24:39.700,0:24:43.690

can find further episodes on the website  
along with more detailed information

0:24:43.690,0:24:50.560

about the topics discussed. I hope you can  
join us next time, and thanks for listening.

0:24:50.560,0:24:51.060