

ANNUAL REPORT

# 2021



challenging religious privilege

national  
**secular**  
society

## National Secular Society's Secular Charter

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

- a) There is no established state religion.
- b) There is one law for all and its application is not hindered or replaced by religious codes or processes.
- c) Individuals are neither disadvantaged nor discriminated against because of their religion or belief, or lack thereof.
- d) Freedom of expression is not restricted by religious considerations.
- e) Neither the state, nor any emanation of the state, expresses religious beliefs or preferences.
- f) Religion plays no role in state-funded education, whether through religious affiliation, organised worship, religious instruction, pupil selection or employment discrimination.
- g) The state does not engage in, fund or promote religious activities or practices.
- h) Public and publicly-funded service provision does not discriminate on grounds of religion or belief.
- i) There is no privileged position in society or advantage in law for any individual or group by virtue of their religion or belief, or lack thereof.
- j) The state does not intervene in the setting of religious doctrine or the running of religious organisations.

**This new version of the Secular Charter has been drawn up by Council after consultation with members to submit to the 2011 AGM for approval.**

**BRITAIN'S ONLY ORGANISATION  
WORKING EXCLUSIVELY  
TOWARDS A SECULAR SOCIETY**



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

After a series of successful, high profile campaigns, the NSS has established itself firmly in the public consciousness.

It is an indicator of our success that we are attacked more than ever before, even if the best our opponents can do is to precede “secularist” with a seemingly mandatory pejorative adjective such as “militant” or “fundamentalist”.

Our critics are primarily those who resent the challenge to what they see as their “traditional” privileges. Those whose vested interests we challenge misrepresent secularism, sometimes wilfully, as being anti-religious. We hope that those who have hitherto not understood what secularism really represents will find reassurance in our Secular Charter.

After a year of discussion, consultation and meetings, we have produced a version of the Charter that will enable the NSS to move into the 21st century with a sharper focus. The Secular Charter will help the NSS to present itself more strongly as a serious and credible player in the political arena. The version to be presented for approval at the AGM can be seen on the inside cover.

We need to ensure we are a strong and serious organisation that will be up to one of the most intractable and vital struggles of the coming decades: secularism's battle with religious fundamentalism.

We must increasingly focus our efforts on pushing back the religious privileges that are already in place and resist the rising demands for more.

The arguments and debates about the veracity or otherwise of religious claims are interesting, and will no doubt continue, but they cannot be the primary focus of the NSS's work.

Despite plummeting church attendance, religion is not going away. We see daily its influence growing in practically all of our key institutions, both national and international. Both the Anglican and Catholic churches have swung rightwards, which might explain the vast exodus from their ranks. As the reasonable, humane and liberal people leave, and the churches diminish in size, they have been taken over increasingly by fundamentalists.

But even the congregants who are left seem less reactionary than the religious organisations that purport to represent and speak for them.

The majority of Muslims in this country are happy to participate in society and embrace the values that inform life in Western society. But the rise of militant, belligerent Islam, often lavishly funded from the Middle East, is a growing danger to us all, and particularly to women and to moderate Muslims.

We must promote secularism as the force that can contain some of the more destructive religious impulses that can undermine Human Rights worldwide. In the UK, Human Rights are under relentless attack from evangelical Christians. They are well-funded and even receive support from the United States. We were proud to be the standard-bearer for secularism in an important European Court case: see page 5. If the decision goes the wrong way, it could spell the end for Human Rights as we know them. That the NSS is the only secular intervener in this case underlines the pressing need for the secular message to be communicated more clearly.

Our job is made harder in the present climate with yet another Government that seems intent on entrenching religion and its privileges even further into our public life. This is a long game and one that we must all commit to.

The NSS will continue to be in the forefront of the struggle for a secular society – which would be fair to all, religious and non-religious alike – and our Secular Charter will be an excellent tool in the battles ahead.

The NSS is the *only* national organisation in the UK focussed solely on secularism. It is therefore an essential destination for all those who want a society that is free, just and not restricted by any theological dogma. We hope that not only will you retain your membership, but that you will encourage others to join our cause.

# EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION...

## EDUCATION BILL

The Education Bill, which relates only to England, was laid before the Westminster Parliament in January 2011. It paves the way for more academies and free schools. As expected, these are proving particularly attractive to religious groups.

In Scotland, we have been campaigning to end religious segregation in state funded schooling by developing a policy statement that was circulated to the political parties before the May 2011 elections to the Scottish Parliament. Representations on this issue have been made to committees and members of the Scottish Parliament.

Under the Government's academies programme in England, groups of parents, teachers and charities are being encouraged to set up their own "free schools", and existing schools are being encouraged to convert to academy status, as a result of which they become self-governing and no longer under local authority control.



Nick Gibb

Under the new system, the Church of England has made clear its aspiration to be the largest sponsor and provider of secondary education in this country. We have strongly opposed this in media statements. Even the Archbishop of Canterbury admits it is a "rather startling and breathtaking proposal".

We have been active in Parliament throughout the year promoting changes to the Bill. Our dialogue with the Department for Education has been constructive and we have held a series of meetings with Ministers and officials to discuss our position in detail.

We identified a number of areas of concern in the proposed legislation, and worked closely with Honorary Associate peers who tabled amendments to the Bill in the House of Lords.

Mass conversion to academy status brings with it an alarming potential increase in the religiosity of schools. A particular concern to us is the likelihood of increased levels of discrimination against the non-religious, when faith schools currently under local education authority control are granted greater freedoms. Our fears were confirmed when Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education (in England) recommended that Catholic schools should transfer to academy status to put them "out of reach of meddling secularists". He said the academy model gave Catholic schools a chance to extend "hard-won freedoms" over admissions, staff appointments, the teaching of religion and the way they are governed.

The Bill made no attempt to scale back permitted levels of employment discrimination in faith schools, despite long-standing concerns over the compatibility of existing legislation with EU law. Regrettably, the Bill missed the opportunity to reform the outdated laws that enforce religious worship in school. These two topics formed the focus of our campaigning on education throughout the year.

## EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION IN 'FAITH SCHOOLS'

We lobbied extensively over the law on the employment of teachers, particularly that the law permitting discrimination against teachers "not of the faith" is in breach of the EU Employment Directive. The historical note (see panel) shows the law in breach of the Directive to have been inserted in 1998 at the behest of the bishops, albeit with the obedient acceptance of the then recently elected Blair government. As a direct result, the Equality and Human Rights Commission sought legal advice from counsel. It ran to 90 paragraphs and fully endorsed our stance, noting that the "problem discussed above is far greater than even the NSS has contemplated so far".

We brought this advice to the Minister, to influential members of the committee considering the Bill, to the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee, and the press, which reported our concerns. The Government remained intransigent and, like its predecessor, was anxious never to upset the Church of England. This led us to file a complaint about the alleged breaches to the European Commission.

We have since lodged additional complaints concerning the compatibility with the Directive of the School Standards & Framework Act and the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (both laws permit discrimination against teachers in faith schools) and admissions policies of Catholic Sixth Form colleges in England and Wales.

### EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION IN SCHOOLS: HISTORICAL NOTE

It would be surprising if these incompatible elements of the School Standards and Framework legislation were not the direct result of demands from the churches, and our research shows this to be the case. In proposing amendments in 1998 to insert the incompatible elements, the Lord Bishop of Ripon explained the background and how satisfied the churches were with them, as well they might be. We now know more about the religious sympathies of the then newly-elected Tony Blair, who we expect set the tone – the Government putting up no resistance whatsoever:

*"I led a delegation to the Home Secretary which included members of the Roman Catholic Church and the free Churches as well as of the Church of England. The Home Secretary expressed the view that our concerns about Church schools would be properly met by an amendment introduced into this Bill. Therefore, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment putting that point. I am delighted that the Government have accepted it. The form of the amendment was prepared in consultation with the Churches and we express ourselves completely satisfied."* (Lords Hansard, 4 Jun 1998: Column 576)

Lord Hill



During the Bill's passage through the House of Lords, we assisted Baroness Turner who tabled a large group of amendments seeking to correct the law permitting discrimination against non-religious teachers. Lord Avebury supported her, castigating the Government for allowing the law to fall so far short of our treaty commitments on

Human Rights and EU Directive compliance. This drew the ire of the Bishop of Hereford who seemed to be unable to think beyond the provisions of the schools' trust deeds. He is unwilling to accept that these treaty commitments trump church bigotry, just like Archbishop Sentamu of York. Dr Sentamu has even less excuse for supporting this breach of EU law, having been a lawyer.

As the Bill entered Report Stage, all Members of the Lords had further opportunity to consider amendments to the Bill.

Ahead of this stage, Lord Hill, the Minister responsible for piloting it through the House of Lords, invited Baroness Turner, Lord Avebury and NSS Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood to a productive meeting to press our amendments in detail and to discuss the legality of the Government's proposals. Keith presented the Minister with a dossier of legal opinions setting out how this discriminatory law is incompatible with the Directive. We took a senior lawyer to the meeting. The Minister had backed up from at least six staff.

## COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

The law in England and Wales provides that children at all publicly-funded schools "shall on each school day take part in an act of collective worship". In community schools, the worship must be wholly or mainly of a Christian character.

Britain is the only Western democracy of which we are aware that mandates worship by law in publicly-funded schools. We argue that compulsory worship is unworthy of an education system in a modern secular democracy and survives only because of religious pressure.

Before the publication of the Education Bill, we wrote to secretary of State Michael Gove arguing that the legislation relating to school worship, dating from the 1944 Education Act, infringes children's human rights and discriminates against non-religious pupils and non-Christians. Our letter was reported by the *Guardian*, who said our position was supported by head teachers, teaching unions and other pressure groups.

During the passage of the Education Bill we have been urging the Government to review the law, which is widely regarded as being outdated and is comprehensively flouted by schools.

In July, peers debated the amendments calling for an end to compulsory worship, most of which were tabled at our suggestion by NSS honorary associate Lord Avebury; five of our honorary associates spoke in support. This Grand Committee debate in the House of Lords was the most comprehensive debate on collective worship in England for decades. Lord Avebury told his fellow peers that England



and Wales were out on such a limb on this simply because the Lords is the only legislature in the world with *ex officio* clerics.

It has been clear during meetings with the Department for Education that collective worship is a particularly sensitive area for the Government. It seems to be one on which they are less willing than anything else to negotiate – no doubt fearing the inevitable backlash from the Church of England.

The NSS campaigns for an end to collective worship, but has pragmatically crafted amendments simply to remove the legal requirement and make worship optional for community schools, and to make withdrawal easier, particularly for older pupils where we have reminded the Government that the Joint (Parliamentary) Committee on Human Rights backs our stance and believes the law as it stands fails to respect the Human Rights of the pupils themselves.

Even this was resisted by the Government, in denial that the law requiring a daily act of worship is unpopular and widely flouted. When asked to justify this, we provided Education Minister Lord Hill with substantial evidence backing up our assertions. It included a recent BBC-commissioned ComRes poll showing that 64% of parents in England said that their children did not attend a daily act of collective worship and that 70% of parents were not in favour of enforcing the law. For all the emphasis on evidence-based policies, this area may be one where evidence is both unwelcome and ignored.

But as Lord Avebury concluded during the Lords' debate: "This is going to happen in the end (... ) whether they like it or not, it is going to come. Sooner or later we shall get rid of the act of compulsory worship in schools, and the sooner the better."

# MORE EDUCATION

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In January, the Government announced a major review of the National Curriculum in England.

The NSS submitted [evidence](#) arguing for the inclusion of RE in the curriculum review with a view to radically reforming the subject. We advised that any RE syllabus should be determined by academics to provide objective information about religion and non-religious philosophies that motivate people. A reformed National Curriculum subject would ideally include philosophy and critical thinking.

### English Baccalaureate

The exclusion of RE from the English Baccalaureate provoked a massive lobbying campaign for it to be included from religious groups. In March, the NSS submitted [evidence](#) to the Education Committee supporting the decision not to include RE as one of the core subjects.

We are pleased to report that in July, the Secretary of State announced that he had decided to leave the subjects included as they are.

## “FAITH” SCHOOLS

In May, the NSS met with senior officials from the Department of Education’s (DfE) admissions policy team to discuss concerns over religious schools.

The meeting was arranged to coincide with the publication of the new Admissions Code, which the coalition Government promised would be “simplified”. The NSS was given assurances that the new code would not be weakened, for example, by allowing religious schools to use covert selection to cherry-pick children from more affluent families.

In April, the Church of England’s new head of education, the Bishop of Oxford, Rt Rev John Pritchard, admitted in an interview with the *Times Education Supplement* that Church schools get their league-topping results by using privileged admissions criteria to select the best pupils.

A senior official of the Department’s extremism unit assured us that groups advocating values “inconsistent with British democratic principles” would not be successful when applying to run free schools.

He also assured that those teaching creationism as a scientific theory would automatically have applications refused. Rejecting one academy application, Secretary of State Michael Gove wrote that “the teaching of creationist views as a potentially valid alternative theory is not acceptable in a 21st century state funded school.” We have congratulated him publicly for taking this more robust approach, something he said he appreciated when he and Keith met.

Following the publication of the draft Admissions Code in May, we submitted a response to the DfE’s consultation on the changes to the admissions framework.

After criticising the inherent unfairness of the faith school system in England, our submission focussed on evidence that the discriminatory admissions policies of some faith schools lead to socio-economic segregation. We also highlighted the threat to community cohesion posed by restrictive admissions policies, particularly of single-faith schools. Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh schools have been among the first free schools approved by the Government.

The NSS is pleased however, that the new draft code permits anyone to raise an objection about admission arrangements in any school that they consider unfair or unlawful. This should improve the accountability of faith schools to the communities they serve.

## PROTECTING COMMUNITY SCHOOL PROVISION

This year, the NSS backed a local campaign to save the only non-religious school in the west of the Isle of Wight.

Isle of Wight Council is planning to shut Weston Primary school, the only community school in a twelve mile radius, because of a surplus of school places, leaving two local faith schools open.

In July, the NSS sent a detailed submission to the Council backed up with legal reasons against eliminating diversity of provision in the area and denying parents any realistic option of sending their children to a non-faith school.

Weston Primary school has now applied to the Department for Education for academy status, which would take it out of control of the local authority and allow it to remain open.

**“Catholic schools can avoid ‘unsympathetic meddling’ by secularists if they take up the Government’s offer of academy status, the Education Secretary [Michael Gove] has said.”**

— *Catholic Herald* 16 February 2011.



# OUR LEGAL CHALLENGES AND SHARIA “LAW”

## COUNCIL PRAYERS LEGAL CHALLENGE: HIGH COURT HEARING ON 2 DECEMBER

This judicial review against Bideford Town Council will be heard in the High Court on 2 December 2011. Bideford has continued to conduct prayers as part of Council meetings, despite representations from our lawyers. They advised that this practice *inter alia* breaches the European Convention on Human Rights and is not a legitimate Council function. The case follows a complaint by a Bideford Councillor, Clive Bone, who objects to the prayers and has even been vilified in the press for refusing to take part in them, or at least remain in the chamber while they are said.

Bideford Council has been protected from financial exposure by a firm of solicitors who have been involved in other cases involving Christians exercising their “conscience”. The well-heeled Christian Institute is supporting Bideford, and they have brought out the big legal guns.

The majority of councils in England and Wales still conduct prayers. If our Judicial Review is successful, they will have to cease the practice on pain of contempt of court proceedings. Whichever party loses is likely to appeal.

**This will be an expensive process and we urge members and supporters to contribute to our £20,000 appeal. Donations can be made by cheque or via our website. We thank those who have already contributed.**

Read our Bideford FAQ at <http://bit.ly/BidefordFAQ>

## NSS CARRIES TORCH FOR A SECULAR WORKPLACE AT EUROPEAN COURT

Four religious employees whose claims of discrimination against their employers have been dismissed by an Employment Appeals Tribunal have applied to the European Court of Human Rights that Convention rights to freedom of religion are not being sufficiently protected in UK law.

Two, *Eweida* and *Chaplin*, relate to the display and wearing of Christian crosses and the other two concern a conflict between religion and homosexuality. Lillian Ladele, a public



The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg

employee, had refused to conduct civil partnerships and Gary McFarlane had refused in principle to conduct psychosexual counselling for same-sex couples. Both of their employers had strong equal opportunities policies.

The NSS has been given permission to *intervene* as an *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) in these cases. As far as we are aware, we are the only intervener taking a purely secular line (although others applied): it is that all of these dismissals were correct in law. Well-funded American religious campaigners have been given leave to intervene, as have the Equality and Human Rights Commission and Liberty.

We approached probably Britain’s most experienced human rights lawyer, Lord Lester of Herne Hill QC, who agreed that if the applicants were successful, it could seriously undermine equality law, not only in the UK but in Europe and possibly further afield. Because of its importance, Lord Lester kindly agreed to act *pro bono*, as did member Dr Ronan McCrea and barrister Max Schaefer. We thank them all.

## SHARIA “LAW”

This has been a major focus during the year. We co-sponsored the Arbitration and Mediation Services (Equality) Bill, tabled by Baroness Cox. Both she and the NSS are concerned about the rapid expansion of Muslim Arbitration Tribunals which give all the appearance of being official judicial bodies. They use the provisions of the Arbitration Act (designed to deal with commercial disputes) to legally enforce decisions made under sharia principles. This Bill aims to clarify the application of discrimination law to arbitration; to strengthen the law to support progress on equality in other methods of dispute resolution; and to help ensure that family law and criminal matters are dealt with by the proper authorities.

Our activities in sponsoring the Bill have resulted in several well attended high profile meetings in the House of Lords where Keith Porteous Wood has spoken from the platform alongside Baroness Cox. Audiences have included the press corps and peers. They reacted positively, although the Government, like its predecessor, has so far been in denial. At least one Ministerial meeting is planned to put our case across. We were also pleased to co-sponsor with One Law for All a packed debate in the House of Commons, kindly sponsored by Jim Fitzpatrick MP, on the use of the Arbitration Act to enforce sharia. Speaking for One Law for All were Honorary Associate (and Secularist of the Year winner) Maryam Namazie and Anne Marie Waters, and for the NSS, Keith Porteous Wood. All parliamentarians were invited to the debate in a joint mailshot which included an excellent One Law for All booklet explaining the issues.

We also took part in a one-day conference by One Law for All at Conway Hall on apostasy and sharia.

As shown in our Europe section, we also flew the flag expressing concern about sharia in Britain at the Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels.

## THE POPE AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Pope's visit last year enjoyed maximum media hype, but reference to our demonstration was largely avoided, particularly by the BBC. Yet a Church-commissioned poll, a year later, found that the most enduring memory was the controversy about the cost, the main thrust of our campaign – and one reinforced by the extraordinarily successful demonstration.

The drubbing the Church got on other questions explains why the poll has been buried. Three times as many respondents had an unfavourable view of the Church compared with those who had a favourable view, and an even higher proportion thought it to be out of touch with today's society.

On the other hand, respondents were asked: "The Pope communicated the following messages over his visit. How strongly do you agree or disagree with them?" One was "The UK should guard against aggressive forms of secularism". Given the weighted wording, 62% agreed and 15% didn't.

The least favourable responses related to child abuse. Only a quarter were satisfied with the Pope's apology for the child abuse scandal, and only a fifth thought the right steps are being taken to avoid it being repeated.

We too remain convinced that the Vatican strategy remains damage limitation, rather than justice for victims or punishment for perpetrators, and those who knowingly shielded them. The beatification of the previous Pope, John Paul II, provided us with an opportunity to make the only critical comment to be broadcast and appear around the world: "This sprint to sainthood is to deflect examinations into JP II's unedifying record on clerical child abuse – and, with it, Benedict's own role."

### We intervene at UN again

The Roman Catholic Church/Vatican State are known in diplomatic circles as the Holy See. Keith Porteous Wood condemned the Holy See for the third year running at the United Nations Human Rights Council (courtesy of the International Humanist and Ethical Union – IHEU).

He was able to [announce to the plenary session](#) of the Council that his previous allegations of the Holy See's wholesale breaches of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) had now been confirmed by Geoffrey Robertson QC, who is also a Distinguished Jurist Member, United Nations Internal Justice Council, 2008–2012. He considers that the Holy See has breached six Articles of the Convention.

He cited Robertson's evaluation of the cause of the continuing scandal: "procedural deficiencies of Canon Law, the selfish desire to protect the Church from scandal by harbouring and trafficking paedophile priests, and the negligent supervision of bishops by the CDF office of the Holy See, headed for the previous two decades by Cardinal Ratzinger".

He repeated Robertson's belief that "The Holy See's grave and extensive breaches of the CRC, and its contempt for its reporting obligations over the past thirteen years, should ... justify its expulsion."

In the accompanying written statement, we detailed the Articles we allege had been breached, noting Robertson's conclusion that "It is plain from ... the new Canon Law norms laid down in July 2010 ... that the Vatican will not, under this Pope, yield in its claim that the church is entitled to shelter suspected criminals in its midst from police investigation, public trial and any punishment that they deserve."

Keith called upon the Human Rights Council and the Committee on the Rights of the Child to hold the Holy See to account for:

- its breach of its obligations under the CRC;
- its disregard for its duty of care to the abused children;
- its systematic cover-up of thousands of cases of abuse; and
- its failure to adequately control those put in positions of trust with children.

He believes from the reaction of their representative that they are starting to feel the heat.

While in Geneva, Keith was invited to the UN High Commission to discuss our concerns. He also met senior staff in children's NGOs who were most helpful and with whom we are now cooperating.

### Major report tabled with Council of Europe over child abuse in Ireland

We alerted the Council of Europe, which was conducting a cyclical review of Ireland, to Ireland's disgraceful record in this area for many decades. It was made possible by the complete lack of separation between church and state. Our [report](#) ran to 50 pages and included hard-hitting conclusions and recommendations.

Even Ireland's latest reports to the United Nations and the Council of Europe are evasive to the point of being misleading. We hope that the change of heart signalled by their Prime Minister's (Taoiseach Enda Kenny's) defiant speech marks the start of a new era.

The ensuing fracas with the Vatican highlighted serious conflicts of law and sovereignty arising from Roman Catholic canon law (and its farcical judicial process) which have serious implications well beyond Ireland's borders. We have raised this at the United Nations, again courtesy of IHEU.

*Dear NSS*

*Thank you for devoting time and effort to this very important matter. The people of Ireland need our help to protect their children.*

*I have cried over this report.*

*Thank you, this really is why I am a member.*

*Yours faithfully,*

**Letter from NSS member following our report to the Council of Europe about child abuse in Ireland**



## SCOTLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

In Scotland we have been campaigning to end religious segregation in state-funded schooling by developing a policy statement that was circulated to the political parties before the May 2011 elections to the Scottish Parliament. We have drawn attention to the sectarian dangers from separate Roman Catholic schools and the profligacy of duplicated education facilities.

Representations have been made to committees and members of the Scottish Parliament on this issue and on threats to freedom of expression involved in proposed legislation concerning religious sectarianism at football matches.

Approaches have also been made to members of both the Scottish and UK Parliaments and governments concerning the oath required of a new monarch under the Act of Union of 1706/7 “to preserve and maintain the ‘true Protestant religion’ and Presbyterian church government in Scotland”.

NSS Council member Norman Bonney also arranged a meeting in Belfast for our Northern Irish members and supporters.

## BAN ON ROYALS MARRYING CATHOLICS CHALLENGED

In April, we wrote to David Cameron and Nick Clegg about the discriminatory law that prevents the heir to the throne from marrying a Catholic. The law does not ban marrying people of other faiths.

The Government has now begun the process to change the law, although Catholics would still be barred from the throne itself. The legal changes require reform of several UK laws including the Act of Settlement 1700. David Cameron is expected to consult the 16 Commonwealth heads of state and government about this at the Commonwealth summit in Australia at the end of October 2011. Senior representatives of the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly have already backed a change.

In 2009, we assisted Honorary Associate Dr Evan Harris when he introduced the Royal Marriages and Succession to the Crown (Prevention of Discrimination) Bill.

## BIG SOCIETY AND THE LOCALISM BILL

At the end of March, Vice President Elizabeth O’Casey and Keith Porteous Wood met Department of Communities and Local Government Minister Andrew Stunell to discuss the Localism Bill, social cohesion and local services being handed over to religious groups in England and Wales.

The NSS once more raised concerns about local services being run by religious groups and the ability of those groups to discriminate against those using the services and also against employees – even though the services are publicly funded. Religious community leaders are increasingly controlling access to publicly-funded services. Both



Andrew Stunell

the non-religious and people of the ‘wrong’ religion could be at a disadvantage in using and being employed by these public services. Successive administrations have ignored our protests about the unfairness of this and refused to remove the religious exemptions from employment law permitting it.



Elizabeth O’Casey

## HOUSE OF LORDS REFORM

In May, the coalition government published comprehensive proposals for a smaller, reformed House of Lords. The draft Bill and White Paper set out proposals for a reformed House with 80 per cent of members elected, and the remaining 20 per cent appointed independently.

Under the proposals, the number of Church of England bishops would be cut from 26 to 12, who would retain full voting rights. However, as the new upper chamber would have only 300 members this actually represents an increase in the proportion of bishops. It is also likely that some of the remaining bishops would be full time representatives rather than normally attending on a rota basis.

Mr Clegg’s proposals also include an option for a 100 per cent elected chamber, which would have no bishops.

Well before the proposals were published we submitted our own [report](#) to the Cabinet Office.

Our main recommendation was for the removal of the Bench of Bishops from the House of Lords and that the new second chamber should have no specific religious representation.

We specifically warned against extending representation to other denominations or faiths. This would almost certainly lead to increasing demands for representation from the many religions and their various sects practising in Britain. Such proposals would be unworkable. It would also make the House even more unrepresentative of the population on issues like LGBT rights, contraception, abortion and assisted dying.

Lord Avebury prompted the Leader of the House of Lords to concede: “The House of Lords is the only legislature that includes *ex officio* representation of clerics.”

For the proportion of bishops to rise in the slimmed-down chamber would be an affront to democracy and a regression, not modernisation.

The draft Bill is now being considered by a Joint Committee, composed of 13 peers and 13 MPs, before legislation is introduced next year.

We will continue to challenge any plans that fall short of the complete removal of unelected bishops from the Lords, with no place for any religious representation.

## NSS AT EU PRESIDENTS' MEETING

The NSS was delighted to be invited again last October to the prestigious annual European Commission working lunch for “non-confessional” (i.e. non-religious) organisations. The hosts were the Presidents of the European Commission, the EU Parliament and the EU Council (of Member States’ Ministers).

The theme of the lunch was the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, and the lead person from each organisation was invited to make a contribution.

NSS Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood was the first guest to be invited to speak by President Barroso. He focussed on social exclusion caused by religious division, pointing out how deep the divisions still are in Northern Ireland, and that they are perpetuated by sectarian schools. He observed that, worryingly, the young were less tolerant than older generations both in Northern Ireland and in Muslim communities.

Keith also drew attention to the high degrees of segregation caused by minority faith schools, and that these are increasingly publicly funded: “They increase social segregation, and in particular they tend to isolate people from minority ethnicities and cultures,” he said.

Keith concluded by commending academic research demonstrating that schools which reflect the full diversity of the community are essential for community cohesion. Stephen Evans, Campaigns Manager, presented President Barroso with a dossier of this detailed research. The President asked Stephen and Keith detailed questions about publicly-funded religious schools in the UK.

The NSS was one of the very few national organisations represented. Read Keith’s speech at <http://bit.ly/hsUeT>.



The NSS's Stephen Evans with President Barroso



Keith Porteous Wood with the three EU presidents

## OTHER ACTIVITIES IN EUROPE

### European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics

Over the last year the European Parliamentary Platform for Secularism in Politics (EPPSP) has twice focussed on the European Parliament's dialogue with religious groups under the auspices of Article 17 of the Treaty of Lisbon. This is the provision requiring dialogue with religious (and in theory at least, "non-confessional") organisations. There is no transparency in the dealings between the various entities of the European Union and the Catholic Church in particular. Worryingly, the Church is pushing for "dialogue to intensify and deepen" yet further. We suspect they are demanding sight of proposed policy and legislation ahead of even the elected MEPs. We have taken an active part in expressing concern about this, and in the second meeting where President Buzek (a Polish Lutheran) attended, Keith was one of a number of questioners to press him on religion/state separation.

The members of the Platform were dismayed by the President's unwillingness to embrace separation; he said he preferred "autonomy". This unfortunate approach could not have been more tangibly demonstrated than when he announced that he had appointed Romanian Bishop Tokes (also an MEP) as the deputy to oversee Article 17 dialogue for both religious and non-confessional organisation. Honorary Associate Sophie in 't Veld, who is chair of the EPPSP, pointed to a strong secular candidate for dialogue with non-confessional organisations. Needless to say, this has not been picked up.

Elizabeth O'Casey alternates with Keith Porteous Wood at these meetings.

### Dialogue with EU policy body

Religare hosted two meetings at Brussels in which we took an active part. This is an EU-funded organisation "to examine new normative frameworks in the field of religion and secularism with a view to making policy recommendations for improvement".

At the European Parliament we were on the platform at a seminar on "Religion and the workplace". We spoke strongly in favour of a secular workplace, of one employment law for all and for no privileges on religious grounds.

At the Centre for European Policy Studies (a presentation mainly for academics and lawyers) we led the opposition to a presentation that appeared quite sanguine about accepting the spread of sharia in Britain, noting that:

- a. democratically determined human rights compliant law should always override religious "law"
- b. there is not, as had been suggested, a "cosy" "European" or "Western" Sharia, distinct from the kind operated in non-Western countries. The only reason the extremes are not implemented in Europe is that they would not be tolerated.

- c. it is unreasonable and unfair to impose Sharia on "self-identified Muslims" as many value the secular justice system and indeed many have come to the West to escape religious patriarchy.

### Fundamental Rights Agency

Jointly on behalf of the International Humanist and Ethical Union, we submitted suggestions about the Agency's future work programme canvassing much greater attention to the conflict between religion and human rights.

### International Association of Freethought (IAF)

The NSS has become a founder member of a rekindled International Association of Freethought.

Keith Porteous Wood spoke at the launch in Oslo, which was attended by delegates from 18 countries. He will be one of the international spokespersons of the new organisation, whose initial objectives are:

- separation of religious institutions and states in all countries, on all continents
- an international commission of inquiry on public financing of religious institutions
- exposure and denunciation of the crimes committed by priests

The IAF origins are from congresses in 1880 (Brussels) and 1904 (Rome).

When in Oslo, Keith also attended the International Humanist & Ethical Union congress.

### Foreign Office reception

The President and Executive Director were invited to an annual reception given for ambassadors and diplomats at London's Lancaster House by the Foreign Secretary. After a brief conversation about the NSS, William Hague thanked us for our good work.



William Hague

## SECULARIST OF THE YEAR

The 2010 Irwin Prize for Secularist of the Year was awarded to Dutch MEP and secular campaigner Sophie in 't Veld who is chair of the European Parliamentary Platform for Secularism in Politics. It was once more sold out and greatly enjoyed.

There were two Volunteers of the Year this time, Claudine Baxter for her work in the office over more than five years, and Dominic Wirdnam for his work on the hospital chaplains' campaign and for leading Bristol Secular Society.

A special award went to Marco Tranchino for his work on the Protest the Pope march last year.

The prizes were awarded by Honorary Associate Professor Anthony Grayling.

Once more, we thank Dr Michael Irwin for so generously sponsoring the £5,000 prize, which Ms in 't Veld kindly declined. It will go towards next year's prize.

In her acceptance speech, Ms in 't Veld said that after half a century, the European Union increasingly finds itself debating ethical issues such as abortion, stem cell research and gay rights. "It is exactly in this type of fierce debate that the secular point of view needs a clear voice. The problem is that secular citizens are hardly organised, while conservative religious groups are quite successful in focusing media attention on their ideas." You can hear a podcast of the whole ceremony at the Pod Delusion website and also extra interviews with Sophie and AC Grayling here <http://bit.ly/f5l2UC> and see the photo gallery here <http://bit.ly/eeRQA1>

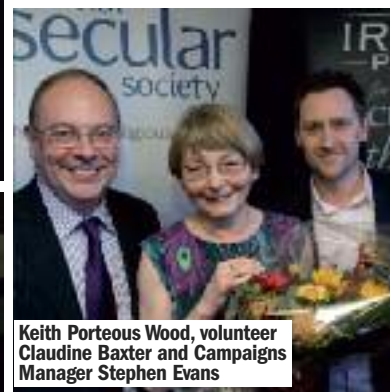
The event was organised by Terry Sanderson. Booking is already open for Secularist of the Year 2012, on Saturday 17 March.



Sophie in 't Veld



Dr Evan Harris and Joan Smith



Keith Porteous Wood, volunteer  
Claudine Baxter and Campaigns  
Manager Stephen Evans



AC Grayling



Dr Michael Irwin

## SECULAR CONFERENCE

Our sell-out conference in September was organised by vice president Gerard Phillips. Delegates joined in animated discussions with speakers about healthcare, education, law and government as well as the best way to promote secularism. We were delighted to welcome Honorary Associates Nick Cohen, Dr Evan Harris and Baroness (Muriel) Turner of Camden. Completing the impressive line up of speakers were Baroness (Mary) Warnock, Dr Antony Lempert and Dr Ed Presswood of the Secular Medical Forum, Anne Marie Waters of One Law For All, Sue Cox of Survivors' Voice Europe and Paul Blanchard. NSS President Terry Sanderson opened and closed the conference and Executive Director Keith Porteous Wood spoke on education. You can listen to the speakers on the Pod Delusion podcast here: <http://bit.ly/gYsChm>



Anne Marie Waters



Gerard Phillips and Nick Cohen



Baroness Turner



Dr Antony Lempert



NSS volunteers at the conference



## MARCH FOR A SECULAR EUROPE

The march grows in size every year. This time it ended opposite Downing Street with a rally where speakers talked about law, freedom of expression, women's rights and LGBT rights as well as sexual abuse by priests.

Speakers included Keith and Terry, Sue Cox (Survivors Voice Europe), Maryam Namazie (One Law For All) and Peter Tatchell as well as representatives from the European Humanist Federation, National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Students, the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association and the BHA. We were also delighted to have speakers from France and an Italian MP. The event was co-ordinated by Marco Tranchino.



Marco Tranchino and Sue Cox



Keith Porteous Wood



AHS President Jenny Bartle

## DEFENCE SPENDING ON MILITARY CHAPLAINS CHALLENGED

In October we wrote to the Defence Minister to challenge spending by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) funding on military chaplains. This followed the response to our Freedom of Information request revealing that 280 Christian chaplains are employed across all three services at a cost to the taxpayer of £22 million and that a quarter of army chaplains cannot currently be fully deployed to the frontline because of medical issues.

A significant part of a military chaplain's role is to provide pastoral support – but to all service personnel, not just the religious. The Christian monopoly in this area needs to be challenged.

We argued that if the MoD determines there is a place for pastoral support in the military in addition to counselling and psychotherapy services already offered, those positions should be open to anyone with the skills to provide necessary support, regardless of their religion or belief.

We suggested to the Minister that any religious representation in the armed forces should be funded by religious bodies rather than out of the defence budget, already under immense strain.

## RELIGIOUS SLAUGHTER OF ANIMALS

The NSS campaigns for an end to religious exemptions from animal welfare legislation that enables animals to be slaughtered without prior stunning. Only on religious grounds are such exemptions given.

As long as these exemptions are given, meat from this form of slaughter should be labelled to indicate this. Consumers should have the right to information which enables them to make an informed choice.

Efforts at the European Parliament to require the appropriate labelling of meat produced by ritual slaughter methods were frustrated this year by a well-organised lobbying campaign organised by Shechita UK, a group set up to defend and promote Jewish slaughter methods.

EU proposals to introduce compulsory labelling in shops for meat produced by ritual slaughter were finally dropped in July following a political deal between MEPs, who supported the proposals, and the Council of Ministers, who did not.

The NSS had raised concerns in the UK and Europe that a significant proportion of this meat is bought by consumers who don't realise they are buying meat from animals not stunned before slaughter.

The Government is due to consult on the implementation of a new EU regulation on the protection of animals at the time of killing. This will be an opportunity for us to challenge once more the exemptions from animal welfare legislation given to religious groups.

We have also raised awareness of, and our concerns about, the growing trend of serving only halal meat,

particularly in canteens and refectories, often covertly. We have the same objection in principle to kosher and halal slaughter methods.

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

We had a constructive meeting with the Advertising Standards Authority, questioning their stance on freedom of expression in advertising. We objected to their adjudicating against some advertisements featuring priests and nuns in suggestive poses, and reminded the Authority that one of its adjudications had recently been overruled by a court on freedom of expression grounds. We complained that they had reacted disproportionately to a very small number of complaints by believers. We have followed this up with a formal complaint about the Code of Advertising Practice and its guidance on religion. Our complaint led them to consult with their lawyers.

We have also been co-operating with the Christian Institute to reduce the threat to freedom of expression posed by the Public Order Act. Section 5 of the Act outlaws "insulting" conduct. We are concerned about the chilling effect this has on free speech. We are campaigning for the word "insulting" to be removed from Section 5, as part of the forthcoming Freedom Bill.

## ARCHBISHOP CHALLENGED

In November last year, the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu, gave the annual International Rule of Law Lecture in the Inns of Court in London on the topic 'Justice in a Secularising and Pluralising Society'. During the questions that followed, Keith Porteous Wood tackled him about former Anglican Primate George Carey's intervention in the *McFarlane* Employment Appeal Tribunal (a Relate counsellor refusing to provide certain services to same sex couples). Dr Carey had called for a special panel of religious judges who have "sensitivity ... of religious issues" to judge cases "engaging religious rights". Dr Carey's intervention had been roundly criticised by the appeal judge, Lord Justice Laws.

Keith's intervention went down well with the distinguished audience, but Dr Sentamu seemed none too happy to answer it directly. He responded that judges should have "religious intelligence", and thought some common ground was achievable with mutual respect on both sides. On balance, however, he acknowledged there must be an absolutely level playing field, so in effect conspicuously failed to support Dr Carey.

A sequel to this encounter is that the *McFarlane* appeal was to become one of the four appeals involved in our intervention at the European Court of Human Rights.

## COMMUNICATIONS

We continue to maintain a high media profile to spread the message of secularism and to challenge religious claims, led by Keith Porteous Wood and Terry Sanderson. Stories we have initiated or comments we have made are frequently quoted in media round the world.

We have been quoted on a wide range of subjects, including education, clerical child abuse, hospital chaplains, equality laws, the religious slaughter of animals, the Scout and Brownie promise, the need to combat sectarianism in Scotland and council prayers. We continue to speak out against religious groups and people who want exemption from equality or employment laws, about the Churches' challenge to gay marriage and against religious attempts to limit women's right to choose abortion. We were widely quoted about the Christians who refused to let gay couples stay at their B&B.

The BBC handed over the Christmas Eve *Thought for the Day* to Pope Benedict. Minutes before it was broadcast, however, the NSS's Executive Director, Keith Porteous Wood, told the Radio 4 *Today* programme that the BBC's decision was an 'extraordinarily bad choice' and described the Pope's unchallenged appearance as "a slap in the face for abuse victims". He concluded that "no one knew more about child abuse in the Catholic Church than Benedict", given his responsibility for priestly discipline for the last thirty years.

Our European Court challenge was picked up in Human Rights and European institution circles and even more so by lawyers' journals. This even extended to Keith's views on the direction of equality law being written up by a leading legal reference source.

In education, we have covered a very wide range: religious and minority faith schools (including the threat to social cohesion), threats from the Education Bill in England to non-religious teachers' jobs, free transport to faith schools (now being very much curtailed), RE in the EBacc, imposed worship in schools and creationism being taught in schools.

The NSS's website continues to attract significant traffic as people log on daily to read the carefully-selected stories from around the world's media on our What the Papers Say feature. Over the last 12 months our site has received 602,000 visits and 1.2 million page views. Work has also been carried out on improvements to the site which will be rolled out in 2012.

Our weekly email newsletter *Newsline*, edited by Terry Sanderson, also continues to grow in popularity – often beating the mainstream press to stories that are much commented on. If you aren't receiving it, you can subscribe on the NSS website.

Our following on Facebook and Twitter (@natsecsoc) continues to grow.

## HEALTH

Our campaign to have hospital chaplaincy services funded by charity continues. Led by NSS member Alan Rogers, secularists in Wales have been collecting data on the cost of hospital chaplains. The campaign was supported by 60% of candidates in the recent Welsh Assembly election.

We have joined the Sex Education Forum as part of our campaign for sex education to be fact-based and comprehensive without mixing facts with faith or biasing teaching according to the ethos of the school.

We submitted a response to the Broadcast Code of Advertising Practice consultation on pregnancy advisory services advertising.

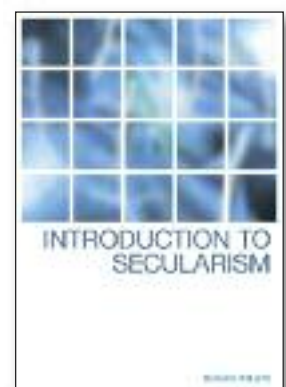
The NSS and Secular Medical Forum wrote jointly to the General Medical Council (GMC) about Dr Richard Scott, the GP facing disciplinary action over preaching at and even trying to convert his patients, which is in breach of GMC guidelines. We brought to the GMC's attention some of Dr Scott's comments to the media, defiantly asserting his right to 'bring Jesus into the surgery'.

Secular Medical Forum members attended the British Medical Association's annual conference and its chair, Dr Antony Lempert, took part in a European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics debate about conscientious objection in healthcare. His comments on non-therapeutic circumcision and Dr Scott's case were reported in the media. The SMF also responded to the Royal College of Psychiatry's review of the impact of abortion on women's health. Both Dr Lempert and Dr Ed Presswood spoke at the Secular Conference in September.

We place on record our gratitude for the work of the Forum, which is expanding its activities.

## NSS PUBLISHES INTRODUCTION TO SECULARISM

The NSS has published a guide to secularism written by Gerard Phillips. The *Introduction to Secularism* looks at what secularism is – and isn't – and why it is more relevant today than ever. You can buy a copy at the NSS shop [www.secularism.org.uk/books](http://www.secularism.org.uk/books)



## CASTE DISCRIMINATION

We are continuing to press the Government to trigger the enabling power in the Equality Act 2010 to outlaw caste discrimination. In the last annual report, we noted that the Government agreed to include a clause enabling caste discrimination to be outlawed, following work by Lord Avebury, assisted by Keith Porteous Wood. This power has yet to be triggered (made active) by a ministerial order.

A report commissioned by the previous (Labour) government to inform the Government in exercising this option shows that there is, as we maintained, ample evidence of caste discrimination in the UK.

## STUDENTS

The NSS now has much stronger links with student societies, mainly through our relationship with the Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies organisation (AHS).

In the spring, we challenged a survey of staff and students at Higher Education colleges by the Equality Challenge Unit for its lack of objectivity and bias against the non-religious. This was well-covered in the *Times Higher*.

Vice President Gerard Phillips gave a talk at the AHS annual convention, at which we ran a stall, giving us numerous opportunities to interact with students. Keith Porteous Wood and Terry Sanderson spoke at Oxford *Think Week* in February.

Affiliation to the NSS is now free for student groups and membership for students is only £9. We welcome applications and are happy to give advice. We are also happy to provide materials for use by students.

## HONORARY ASSOCIATES

Graham Allen MP	Professor Steve Jones
Professor Peter Atkins	Baroness Kinnock
Lord Avebury	Stewart Lee
Iain Banks	Graham Linehan
Lorraine Barrett AM	Baroness Massey of Darwen
Professor Colin Blakemore	Jonathan Meades
Edward Bond	Sir Jonathan Miller
Michael Cashman MEP	Baroness Murphy
Nick Cohen	Maryam Namazie
Professor Richard Dawkins	Taslina Nasrin
Lord Desai	Lord O'Neill of Clackmannan
Angela Eagle MP	Lord Peston
Baroness Flather	Sir Terry Pratchett
Ricky Gervais	Philip Pullman
Lord Goodhart QC	Martin Rowson
Professor A C Grayling	Joan Smith
Johann Hari	Dr. David Starkey
Dr. Evan Harris	Lord Taverne QC
Patrick Harvie MSP	Polly Toynbee
Christopher Hitchens	Baroness Turner of Camden
Professor Ted Honderich	Sophie in 't Veld MEP
Mary Honeyball MEP	Gore Vidal
Kelvin Hopkins MP	Professor Lord Wedderburn of Charlton QC
Virginia Ironside	

We are pleased to welcome our new Honorary Associates:



### Lord Avebury

A Liberal MP from 1962-70 and now a Liberal Democrat peer. He also founded and chaired the Parliamentary Human Rights Group for 21 years. For more than ten years, he has worked on many successful NSS campaigns – most notably the abolition of the

blasphemy laws, for which he jointly won our Secularist of the Year award in 2009 – and continues to work closely with Keith in parliament.



### Baroness Murphy

A doctor who worked for many years in the NHS, most recently as Professor of Psychiatry of Old Age at Guy's Hospital. In 2004 she was made a life peer and sits as a crossbencher. She has spoken out strongly against

Government plans for academies in House of Lords debates and is active in other aspects of education, gay rights and equalities.



## YOUR COUNCIL AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2011

### President

Terry Sanderson

### Vice Presidents

Elizabeth O'Casey

Gerard Phillips

### Honorary Treasurer

Stephen Dunkling

### Other Council Members

Norman Bonney

Dan Bye

Zoe Cox

Ray Newton

Martin Perry

Afonso Reis e Sousa

Robert Stovold

Peter Vlachos

At the 2010 AGM, vice President Carla Revere stood down and Surendra Lal retired. Thanks to Carla Revere for her hard work on Council and to Surendra Lal for his many years of service.

New Council members: Norman Bonney, Dennis Penaluna (who has resigned for personal reasons) and Robert Stovold.



Terry Sanderson



Elizabeth O'Casey



Gerard Phillips



Stephen Dunkling



Norman Bonney



Dan Bye



Zoe Cox



Ray Newton



Martin Perry



Afonso Reis e Sousa



Robert Stovold



Peter Vlachos

## OTHER COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

**Terry Sanderson (President)** spends considerable time creating media and campaigning opportunities and editing *Newsline*. He has given talks in Brighton, Ealing and Sheffield as well as several in London's Conway Hall. He has also raised thousands of pounds for NSS funds through a series of unique film entertainments.

**Gerard Phillips (Chair of Council)** In addition to being Chair of Council, organising the Secular Conference and writing the *Introduction to Secularism*, he has been heavily involved in the Secular Europe Campaign.

He gave a speech at the Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Students Annual Conference in March and has also given talks at Durham University, Lewisham Humanists and to Bristol Secular Society.

**Norman Bonney** published an article in the *Political Quarterly* urging a radical rethink of the more than 300 year old coronation oaths, an article about David Hume in the *Edinburgh Evening News* and a letter about the Act of Settlement in the *Scotsman*. He also met with NSS members and members of affiliated groups in Belfast in May. He was quoted on the Scottish football hate bill and the Scottish Parliament's *Time for Reflection*.

**Dan Bye** took part in a debate at Princethorpe College in Rugby and spoke at Sheffield Atheist Society.

**Elizabeth O'Casey** attended the European Parliamentary Platform for Secularism in Politics meeting in Brussels. She met with European Commission officials to discuss our concerns about faith-based discrimination.

She also chaired a session at the One Law for All conference on International Women's Day and attended the meeting at the Department of Communities and Local Government. She gave a talk to the Central London Humanist Group on Freedom of Expression.

**Robert Stovold** is contributing a chapter to a collection of papers debating the appropriateness of providing spiritual care in the NHS.

**Peter Vlachos** spoke to Lewisham Humanists, Brighton and Hove Humanists, Hampstead Humanist Society, at the "Do Women Need Secularism?" conference and a conference on Religion and Health at the University of Greenwich.

**Staff sub-committee:** Stephen Dunkling, Ray Newton and Gerard Phillips

**Investment sub-committee:** Stephen Dunkling, Gerard Phillips, Martin Perry and Keith Porteous Wood.

**Committee to review the Secular Charter:** Elizabeth O'Casey, Gerard Phillips, Afonso Reis e Sousa, and Terry Sanderson.

## THE NSS SUPPORTS THESE GROUPS

Abortion Rights; Amnesty International; Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain; Dignity in Dying; European Humanist Federation; European Women's Lobby; International Humanist and Ethical Union; Lawyers Secular Society; Liberty; National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies (AHS); One Law For All; Sex Education Forum; Secular Medical Forum.

## GROUPS AFFILIATED TO THE NSS AS AT 28 SEP 2011

Bedfordshire Humanists; Belfast Humanist Group; Birmingham Humanists; Brighton and Hove Humanist Society; Bristol University Atheist Agnostic Secular Society; Cambridge University Atheist and Agnostic Society; Chester Humanists; Chiltern Humanists; Cornwall Humanists; Cotswold Humanists; Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists; Devon Humanists; Durham University Humanist and Secularist Society; East Kent Humanists; Essex Humanists; Farnham Humanists; Greater Manchester Humanists; Hampstead Humanist Society; Humanist and Secular Liberal Democrats; Humanist Society of West Yorkshire; Isle of Wight Humanist and Secular Association; Kings College Atheist, Humanist and Secular Society; Lancashire Secular Humanists; Leicester Secular Society; Lewisham Humanist Group; Norfolk Secular and Humanist Group; North East Humanists; North London Humanist Group; Nottingham Secular Society; NU-Think; Oxford Atheists, Secularists & Humanists; Oxford Humanists; Queen Mary Atheism Secularism and Humanism Society; Reading Atheist, Humanist and Secularist Society; Sheffield Humanist Society; South Hampshire Humanists; South Somerset Humanists; Suffolk Humanists and Secularists; Sutton Humanist Group; UCL Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society; University of Nottingham Students' Union; Welsh Marches Humanist Group; West Glamorgan Humanist Group; West London Humanists and Secularists.

## THANKS

There are many people who donate their time, expertise and advice to the National Secular Society. Our volunteers assist us in campaigning, with office work and at our events.

This year we owe a particular debt of gratitude to the lawyers who are working for us *pro bono* on our European Court of Human Rights intervention. They are Lord Lester of Herne Hill QC, Dr Ronan McCrea and Max Schaefer. We are very grateful indeed to them all.

We cannot thank Honorary Associates Lord Avebury and Baroness Turner enough for their assistance in the House of Lords.

We also thank Catriona Stirling for her valuable legal perspectives.

A special thanks to Dr Evan Harris for his thoughtful comments on our legal challenges.

We would like to thank Bradley Davis of WhiteLight for his design work on the Annual Report, *Bulletins* and promotional material.

Throughout the year Barry Thorpe has given his time to assist with research and his work is greatly appreciated. We would also like to thank Mazin Zeki and John Dillon for their research over the year.

We are immensely grateful for the work of Claudine Baxter, who regularly assists us with membership administration in the office.

Thanks also go to Rebecca Sharkey for her work on campaigns and marketing.

We are very grateful to Trevor Aston and Sven Klinge for photographing our events.

Thanks to Neil Gardner at Ladbroke Productions for his invaluable assistance with the *Newsline* podcast and to James O'Malley and Liz Lutgendorf at the Pod Delusion for podcasting our events.

Thanks also to those who run stalls at local events and get involved with campaigning on a local level as well as alerting us to issues. Particular thanks go to Dominic Wirdnam for his contribution over the past year.

We are grateful to volunteers who helped us at the Secular Conference and the AGM. Special thanks go to Shaun Joynson for his part in making the conference such a success. Thanks also to all those who spoke at our events.

We are immensely grateful to Dr Michael Irwin for again sponsoring the £5,000 prize for Secularist of the Year.

The NSS would also like to thank everyone who has donated money in the last year or remembered us in their wills. You can make a donation by cheque or by the Donate button on the website.

A growing number of members now have standing orders. These allow us to plan ahead with our campaigns as well as funding our current work.

If you would like to start a standing order or increase your current one, the office will be pleased to send you a form. A standing order of £5 or more will include your membership.

# BRITAIN'S ONLY ORGANISATION WORKING EXCLUSIVELY TOWARDS A SECULAR SOCIETY

## Join us

**If you believe, as we do, that a secular Britain is our best way to achieve true equality for all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs, then please join us and become part of what is possibly the most important debate of the 21st century. Together we can create a fairer and more equal society.**

You can join us online at [www.secularism.org.uk/join.html](http://www.secularism.org.uk/join.html) or by contacting the office at [admin@secularism.org.uk](mailto:admin@secularism.org.uk) or by calling **020 7404 3126**

Annual membership is £29, £17 for unwaged and £9 for students

Joint membership, for two people at the same address, is £45 and overseas membership is £51.

**“The National Secular Society is Britain’s most urgently needed pressure group”.**

— Nick Cohen, journalist, author and political commentator.

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

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SENIOR OFFICE STAFF: TESSA KENDALL, STEWART WARE