

150 YEARS OF CHALLENGING RELIGIOUS PRIVILEGE

national
secular
society

Annual Report
2016

National Secular Society Annual Report 2016

The National Secular Society campaigns for the separation of religion and state and promotes secularism as the best means to create a society in which people of all religions or none can live together fairly and cohesively. The NSS sees secularism – the position that the state should be separate from religion – as an essential element in promoting equality between all citizens.

Our campaigning and policy objectives are guided by our Secular Charter.

The Secular Charter

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

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

This report covers the period from October 2015 to October 2016.

President's Message

The almost unprecedented political upheaval in Britain over the past year has raised several issues for the NSS, and not all of them are positive. These profound changes in the nature of our country mean that we will have to work harder than ever to defend the progress we have made over recent times. We now have a Government led by someone who is patently unsympathetic to the concept of secularism.

The Prime Minister – a conservative, practising Anglican – is paving the way for even more religious schools. Not only will hundreds more of these schools be established, they will no longer be required to open themselves up to members of other faiths, or of none.

The UK is a society with incredible religious diversity. When she was Home Secretary Theresa May warned that it may be impossible to build a “cohesive society”. It is saddening then that one of her earliest decisions should be to worsen segregation by allowing new faith schools to discriminate without limit in their admissions.

There are Islamic, Jewish and Christian independent schools which work against social cohesion and the rights of the children who attend them. One Charedi school, for instance, threatened a ban on mothers driving their children to school. Independent Islamic schools continue to undermine ‘British values’ and discriminate on the grounds of gender. We have welcomed action by Ofsted in the past year to investigate these schools.

As you'll read in this report, the NSS has been working hard to persuade the establishment that more of these schools would be undesirable. Unfortunately, we seem to be living in a political culture that does not see the dangers and accepts the oft-inflated claims peddled by religious bodies about their suitability to have an ever larger role in our education system.

Then came the vote to leave the European Union. This will have an impact on the whole country, of course, and take us into unknown territory. The NSS has established a presence in the European Parliament, partly through the Platform for Secularism which is headed by our honorary associate Sophie in 't Veld.

We have been generally pleased with EU laws and directives that have led to better equality and anti-discrimination legislation here. The EU Parliament has mainly resisted the pressure from religious groups to exempt them from such legislation. If these laws now have to be renegotiated in our own parliament, the pressure from religious interests for exemptions will resume.

It is going to be a major battle to retain what we have achieved. The Government seeks not only to dismantle the Human Rights Act but has also eyed the Equality Act with hostility.

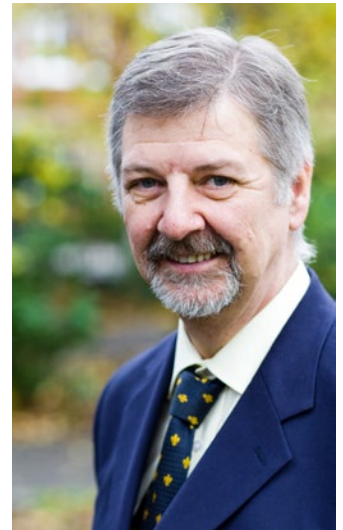
But all is not entirely lost on the international stage. The NSS has received a boost with the granting of our consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council. Previously we have had to rely on other organisations to gain access to the Human Rights Council. When we challenged the Vatican there on its disgraceful record on child abuse, we did it under the umbrella of the International Humanist and Ethical Union, which already had ECOSOC status. Now we have direct access, and we intend to make full use of it, particularly since the election of the UN's new General Secretary, Antonio Guterres, a devout Catholic who wanted to keep abortion completely illegal when he was Prime Minister of Portugal.

And, of course, it was this year that the NSS reached its 150th birthday. The conference we organised for that was a resounding success, and I would like to pay particular tribute to Stephen Evans, the other staff and volunteers who put so much energy into making it happen.

The new portrait bust of our founder, Charles Bradlaugh, which is being paid for through donations by our members and supporters, will soon take its rightful place in a prominent position in the Houses of Parliament.

As you will see from this report, we have been busy on many fronts, large and small. The influence of religion in our society is still disproportionate, despite the fact that poll after poll shows we are one of the most unreligious nations on earth. And that is why the NSS must remain alert and ready to meet new challenges.

That means more resources and for that we must turn to our members and friends. Could I first of all thank those who have already contributed to our 150th Anniversary appeal for their generosity. And could I say to those who have not yet done so that we would be delighted if they would contribute and help us in our work to make Britain a more just, fair and secular country, a country where everyone is valued and no-one is privileged or disadvantaged because of their religion or, indeed, their lack of it.



Terry Sanderson

Religion and Schools

Undue religious influence over young people's education has remained the key focus of our campaigning work this year.

Opposition to a new wave of religiously selective schools

The Government's announcement in September that faith-based free schools in England will be permitted to operate 100% religiously selective admissions arrangements, up from 50%, is a real setback for secular education and the fragile social cohesion that exists in the UK.

The NSS has been at the forefront of challenging these pernicious proposals that will result in a new generation of religiously selective faith schools. Forty new Roman Catholic schools have already been mooted.

While claiming to "promote inclusivity", the Government plans will actually increase discrimination in state education by allowing new and existing faith-based free schools to prioritise pupils of parents who share (or purport to share) the faith of the school.

The Government's decision to make new faith schools even more discriminatory is the result of effective lobbying from the Catholic Church which was refusing to open free schools unless the 50% cap on religious based admissions was removed.

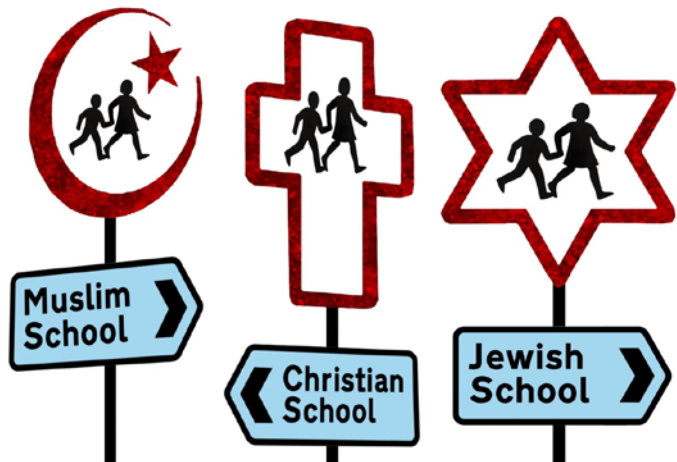
Whilst there is a clear need for new school places, we want to see them provided in inclusive schools, equally welcoming to all children, irrespective of their religion and belief background. The last thing our education system needs is an expansion of faith schools, but Prime Minister Theresa May's government appears to be even more committed to faith schools than previous governments have been. Before she became PM we were given an assurance that the 50% cap would not be increased.

We immediately launched a campaign asking our members to contact their MPs about the proposals. We've also been briefing MPs, and encouraging supporters to respond to the Government consultation.

Alarming, any changes that the PM wants to make to free schools admissions would not require legislation or parliamentary approval. The current 50% cap for free schools is stipulated in funding agreements drafted by the Secretary of State.

The Government's own consultation document acknowledges that minority faith schools are creating a ghettoised education system. Jewish, Sikh, Hindu and Muslim faith schools are monocultural zones that do nothing to foster greater social cohesion.

To address this, the Government has announced a number of tokenistic and completely ineffective measures to give the illusion that faith schools will "promote cohesion". These proposals are simply window dressing to disguise the unpalatable reality that the Government feels too



beholden to, or scared of upsetting, organised religion to take the only effective measure to remedy the separatism and segregation – the phasing out of publicly funded faith schools.

Multi Academy Trusts

As we predicted, the move towards academisation of schools in England is increasing opportunities for religious influence. Not content with its influence in faith schools, the Church is seeking to increase influence in mixed and non-faith-based Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) and community schools.

In April, our evidence to the Education Committee inquiry into MATs pointed out serious failings in the protections for secular education and oversight of faith schools.

Approximately 350 community schools have been absorbed into Church-led MATs. Despite Department for Education officials personally assuring us that community schools absorbed into MATs will have their individual ethos protected, we remain convinced that such protections are wholly inadequate.

In March we lodged our objections with the regional schools commissioner to a proposed new MAT in Newcastle which would see four community schools merged with a CofE primary and controlled by the Church of England, who would appoint 60% of the Trust's board.

In a paper at the Church's Synod (which also set out plans to open 125 new free schools) the Church said that a Christian "vision for education can still be expressed and promoted" in non-faith schools. In June we uncovered how the London Diocesan Board for Schools was appointing at least 25% of the members of a new community school MAT to which they provided commercial services.

Throughout the year we have been contacted by parents, teachers and governors concerned about efforts by religious groups to assert a much more aggressive religious ethos in faith schools. In particular the Church of England is keen to convert Voluntary Controlled schools, where they can only appoint 25% of the governors and need to follow the locally



“Religious discrimination in schools admissions is one of the reasons why faith schools are often a divisive influence in society.”

NSS honorary associate **Lord Taverne** speaking in the House of Lords this year

agreed RE syllabus, into academies where they can appoint a majority of governors and have greater control over the curriculum.

Such moves are made possible through the Government's 'memoranda of understanding' signed in the last year by the DfE caving in to Church of England and Catholic Education Service demands. It gives Church schools special protection from forced academisation and strengthens their ability to promote a more rigorous religious ethos. There is of course no reciprocal agreement protecting secular schools' ethos.

In addition to confronting these large scale threats to secular education the NSS staff are taking on an increasing amount of casework, supporting parents dealing with issues stemming from religion being imposed in their children's schools. In Scotland, this assistance is being provided by our vice-president Alistair McBay.

It's clear that our fight for a secular and inclusive education system will be a long and arduous one, but one we're determined to win.

Religious Education

We've continued to engage constructively with the ongoing debate over religion and belief teaching in schools.

In 2016 we contributed to and welcomed a report calling for fundamental reform of the subject, so that teaching reflects the real religious landscape of the UK – with content including a "broad range" of religious and non-religious views. We endorsed the conclusions of the *RE for Real* report, produced by the Religious Literacy Programme at Goldsmiths, University of London, which described the current approach to Religious Education as a "mid-20th century settlement for an early 21st century reality that fails to acknowledge the nature of religion and belief in the modern United Kingdom".

In February our campaigns director Stephen Evans took part in a two day consultation event at Windsor Castle, which brought together 32 experts and practitioners within the education sector, including the former education secretary Charles Clarke, to discuss the legal framework which underpins the current place of religion in education.

Stephen also provided a secularist perspective in an interfaith dialogue debate in Parliament in August organised by the Birmingham-based New Hope charity.

Whilst there is clearly a growing consensus to reform RE, the subject remains a contested area of the curriculum, with progress towards necessary reforms hindered by the continuing influence of vested interests.

The Government has continued to dismiss calls to change the new RE GCSE syllabus, downplaying a High Court ruling from November 2015 in favour of three families who challenged the Education Secretary's exclusion of non-religious worldviews from the syllabus, claiming that the court had made its decision on a "technicality".

Meanwhile, under the new leadership of Fiona Bruce MP (a member of the Christians in Parliament group) the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on religious education has regrettably changed its remit to specifically exclude the teaching of values of people with no faith. Its former Chair, Stephen Lloyd, said the group has been taken over by religious "fundamentalists" and warned that

the parliamentary group was "in danger of turning into a religious sect".

In a submission to the APPG's inquiry into the "importance and development of Religious Literacy" in July we reiterated our support for improved religion and belief education in schools but pointed out that non-religious worldviews, including secular and philosophical critiques must be part of, not separate from, genuine religious literacy.

We also expressed our view that the inordinate concern for religion and belief literacy from some quarters is being used as a Trojan horse to sustain religious privilege and elevate religion's status in public life.

Meanwhile, in Wales, where a new national curriculum is being developed, we met with senior officials in Cardiff responsible for the Humanities Area of Learning which is responsible for Religious Education. There appears to be support there for a much more objective and religiously neutral approach to the teaching of religion and belief in Welsh schools and we'll be working to ensure that all vestiges of confessional teaching are removed and that the subject isn't unduly influenced by faith groups with a vested interest.



Alistair Lichten outside the Senedd

Illegal Faith Schools

Years of campaigning to highlight the problem of unregistered (and therefore illegal) faith schools where children are systematically denied a secular education appears to be paying dividends. This year the schools inspectorate established a taskforce of inspectors to seek out unregistered schools that are operating outside the law.

Between January and May Ofsted uncovered more than 100 such illegal schools – 50 of which were faith based

“Schools paid for out of public money should be inclusive schools where all children are educated together, irrespective of their faith backgrounds.”

Stephen Evans, NSS Campaigns Director on BBC News

Religion and Schools (cont.)

and noted that the institutions were putting thousands of children “at risk of harm, including the risk of exposure to extremism and radicalisation”.

In September the outgoing Chief Inspector of Schools, Sir Michael Wilshaw, said that “political correctness” was causing local authorities to turn a blind eye to illegal faith schools, particularly in the case of unregistered Islamic schools. He said that the 150 to 160 illegal schools which are already known about are just the “tip of the iceberg”.

Despite assurances we have been given by the Government for years that it is taking “robust steps” against unregistered schools, we remain highly concerned that too many children are being left to languish in illegal ‘schools’ where their fundamental right to education is being ignored. We have therefore sought clarification from the Government about its strategy to ensure that all children and young people growing up in Britain receive a decent education that adequately prepares them for life in modern Britain.

We urged the DfE to ensure that both Ofsted and local authorities are given the necessary powers to investigate and close down ‘schools’ where they are found to be operating unlawfully and take forward prosecutions where necessary.

Until now the Government has adopted a ‘softly softly’ approach to unregistered schools, seeking to encourage them to go through the registration process. We believe this has failed to address the problem and has instead amounted to a policy of unprincipled toleration.

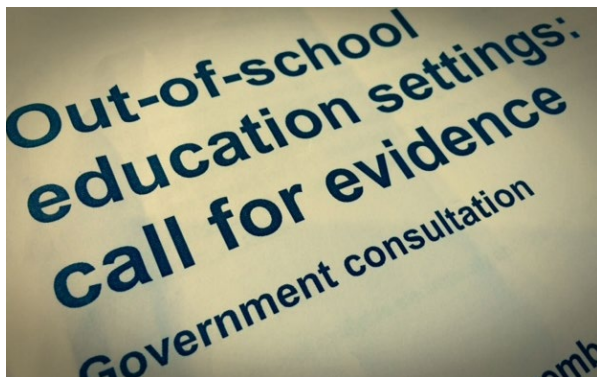
A submission we made in September to the United Nations’ periodic review of the UK’s record on human rights urged the UN to recommend that the UK develops a robust strategy for addressing this issue which includes the closing down of illegal schools.

Regulation of supplementary schools

We welcomed Government plans to safeguard children and young people who attend “out-of-school education settings” with a system of registration. Under the proposals Ofsted would have powers to regulate and inspect anywhere teaching ‘out of school’ education of more than six to eight hours a week.

We first raised concerns about child welfare in supplementary schools with the Government in 2011 when we raised concerns over evidence of child abuse at some British madrassas.

Our submission to the Government consultation this year warned that out-of-school educational settings, including



religious supplementary schools, are a poorly regulated area, pointing to clear evidence of the need for a new system of registration, regulation and inspection to ensure that children in such settings are safeguarded.

However, the plans have been fiercely opposed by some faith groups with prominent Christian Conservative MP David Burrowes even insisting he would refuse to let inspectors into his Christian “youth camp”.

Given that the proposals only extend to settings providing ‘intensive tuition’, we believe the kneejerk reactions of many religious groups who say the proposals amount to an ‘attack on religious freedom’ could in some cases be an attempt to evade scrutiny of potentially questionable if not unlawful activity.



Collective Worship

Our long-standing campaign to end the requirement on schools to provide Collective Worship intensified this year, with governments across the UK facing pressure to drop this outdated and unjustifiable imposition on children’s religious freedoms.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child urged the UK to repeal laws requiring the provision of ‘broadly Christian’ worship in UK schools and said pupils should be given the independent right of withdrawal from any religious worship held in schools.

The recommendations reflected concerns raised by the NSS in a briefing submitted to the body leading up to the publication of the Committee’s report.

Following the publication of the UN recommendations, thirty campaigners – including academics, MPs, peers, faith groups and educators – signed an open letter to the Secretary of State for Education, organised by the NSS, calling on the Government to abolish the law requiring worship in English schools.

Meanwhile, senior academics also warned of “significant concerns” about the imposition of collective worship in non-religious schools this year – arguing that it may violate the right to freedom of religion and belief.

The DfE reacted with its customary intransigence, with the new Secretary of State Justine Greening informing the NSS that the Government had “no plans to change the current requirement for the daily act of collective worship... or the current arrangements surrounding the right to withdraw”.

We also raised the topic of collective worship at a meeting with civil servants at the Welsh Government where we were assured that they would be taking the issue up with the Minister, to whom we have also written with our concerns.

Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland we gave our support to a student-led campaign to give teens the right to opt-out of collective worship. Scott Moore of the 'Let Schools Choose' campaign also won the backing of the Alliance Party and is optimistic about securing more political support.

In Scotland, the Government faces a legal challenge over its refusal to allow sixth form pupils to opt themselves out of Religious Observance (which they can in England, following an NSS initiative). A group of non-Catholic students in a Catholic faith school were reportedly punished with a week's worth of detentions after they refused to attend a religious service.

In July our campaigns director Stephen Evans highlighted many of the case studies we've worked on concerning collective worship at a NASUWT Equality Officers Training and Development Day in Birmingham. He was heartened that many teachers would welcome a change in the law, removing the requirement on schools to provide worship.

Momentum is clearly building against the imposition of religious worship on pupils, and in the words of our late honorary associate Lord Avebury, "Sooner or later we shall get rid of the act of compulsory worship in schools, and the sooner the better."

Religiously segregated school transport

We have welcomed a slew of announcements from local councils this year moving away from discriminatory school transport policies which give pupils of faith schools support to get to distant religious schools, without an equivalent for pupils of community schools.

This is one of many ways in which the education system discriminates against the non-religious majority in the UK, but fortunately more and more councils are calling time on this archaic and unfair arrangement.

We welcomed the launch of a consultation on this by Reading Borough Council, which came shortly after Lancashire Council announced plans to remove the subsidy.

In one case this year we wrote to the leader of Telford and Wrekin Council after a boy was told he couldn't use the school bus after moving home because it was only for pupils who went to church. Following our letter, it was announced that the Council would rethink its policy.

Flintshire Council's policy which made non-Catholics pay for a bus Catholics enjoyed subsidised use of was placed under review early this year – after we protested about it in 2013.

Sex & Relationships Education in schools

This year we have been urging the new Education Secretary to ensure that all young people receive adequate and compulsory sex and relationships education, in line with the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

We backed this up in a submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights' inquiry into children's rights, where we called for the creation of a statutory duty on all schools, including faith schools, to teach age-appropriate SRE.

We also welcomed a call from the former Solicitor General Vera Baird QC, the Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner, who said that compulsory sex education was crucial to tackling "endemic sexual exploitation".

“The significant changes we’re seeing in the country’s religion and belief landscape means the Church’s role in state education needs to be diminished not expanded. In a religiously diverse and secularised society it makes little sense to organise education along religious lines.”

Stephen Evans, quoted in the *Telegraph* on the Church of England’s plans to open 125 new faith schools using Government’s free schools programme

Equality and Human Rights

Challenging the government's inadequate sharia review

As Theresa May became PM she was already facing serious criticisms for the review into sharia 'law' that she had launched as Home Secretary. Although we welcome more official scrutiny for sharia, we immediately drew attention to fundamental problems with the review. When the review was launched in May, the Government's press release claimed that discrimination was "contrary to the teachings of Islam". It is unacceptable for the Government to pontificate on theology, and even more disturbing that it is peddling this fallacy as the basis of a review. The Home Office said it was seeking examples of "best practice" from sharia 'courts'. We have challenged the Government, and the review, for their focus on theology rather than women's rights.

The chair of the review is a theologian, and the sole named "advisors" are two imams, one of whom has a record of very troubling comments.

We therefore have no confidence that the review will be, as claimed, a "full, independent review", following the evidence wherever it leads.

Concerningly, the review's call for evidence was limited to "Individuals with experience of sharia law". We have also objected to the Home Office's use of the word "law" to describe sharia.

We joined many other human rights groups in signing an open letter, organised by honorary associates Pragna Patel and Gita Sahgal, warning the Government that its review was becoming seriously compromised.

We joined the boycott of the review, but explained to the Government why we had done so and submitted evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee's own inquiry into sharia.



The Committee's inquiry set out to "examine how Sharia councils operate in practice, their work resolving family and divorce disputes and their relationship with the British legal system" and sought evidence on the "basic tenets of Sharia law with reference to family, divorce, domestic violence and children and how those compare to the same in British law."

Our evidence to the Committee stressed the need to diminish the demand for sharia by utilising citizenship education in schools. It isn't enough to just ban the 'courts' – which is unlikely to be effective on its own in stamping these 'courts' out.

Also this year, we have supported the introduction of Baroness Cox's Arbitration and Mediation Services (Equality)

Bill, which would prevent sharia and other religious tribunals from doing "anything that constitutes discrimination, harassment or victimisation on grounds of sex" – and so have limited some of the worst effects of sharia 'law'. It failed as the Government refused to support it, arguing that an independent review was the correct approach. We disagree, particularly when the review is so fundamentally flawed.

Fighting caste discrimination

Our first formal intervention at the Human Rights Council since gaining special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council was in September 2016 when Josephine Macintosh, who was co-opted to the Council this year, spoke about the UK's failure to legislate against caste discrimination.

Since the Conservative Government took office it has resisted outlawing caste discrimination, initially by claiming that education about caste would be sufficient, then by procrastinating, and finally by claiming – we consider implausibly – that it was awaiting the development of "helpful" case law, something that we consider is unlikely to happen.



Josephine Macintosh addressing the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva

This resistance is despite repeated calls from the UN, most recently in August, and Parliament directing the Government to make caste discrimination unlawful. Parliament did so in 2013 as part of an initiative spearheaded by the late Lord Avebury and the NSS.

In July there was a Lords debate on the topic, and we assisted peers with this. A majority of the proponents of legislation in the debate are honorary associates plus Lord Lester of Herne Hill QC who has worked for us on discrimination cases at the European Court of Human Rights. Only one back bench peer, Lord Popat, opposed legislation. The Government evaded a direct request to state categorically whether or not they would legislate.

We had hoped for better with the departure of David Cameron, particularly as incoming PM Mrs May has talked of too many cases of "burning injustices" arising from people's race and background. Unfortunately however her administration has added insult to injury by announcing a

consultation on caste legislation; not how best to achieve it, but whether it was even necessary.

We therefore used our new UN status to alert the UNHRC in Geneva to the Government's intransigence. Josephine Macintosh described the consultation as risking inviting those of "so-called higher caste and those wishing to discriminate on grounds of caste to oppose the legislation". She then called "on all member states to encourage the UK to legislate to implement its international obligations".

We remain hopeful that the consultation responses and other pressure calling for legislation will be heeded.

Marriage equality in the military

In May, the Minister for the Armed Forces announced a pilot project to register Ministry of Defence owned sites for same-sex civil marriages and civil partnerships, following a Parliamentary question prompted by the NSS. We had noticed that, despite legislation and guidance being in place for three years, no steps had been taken to make them available. We presume that this was because the chaplains were all from religions or denominations who have not accepted same-sex marriage.



RAF taking part in the London Gay Pride parade

NSS defends human rights from religious lobbying

The NSS was again invited, along with diplomats and other human rights NGOs, to the launch of the UK Government's annual Human Rights report.

This gave us an opportunity to raise caste discrimination in conversation with the Minister, Baroness Anelay. Our executive director also asked the panel of speakers in a question-and-answer session



whether it was still appropriate to regard the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as 'universal', given the mounting attempts to supplant it with religious alternatives. He was heartened that none of the speakers denied this reality. The head of the Human Rights and Democracy Department went further to say they were considering how to tackle it.

Keith Porteous Wood also spoke at the House of Lords launch of the book *Religious Approaches to Human Rights*, where he highlighted organised religion's long record of abusing human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is currently being undermined, for example, by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) which claims to be "the collective voice of the Muslim world". It's "Cairo Declaration" practically ends each article with "subject to sharia". He appealed to the audience for human rights not to be, as some claim, the reserve of the religious, but the well around which all, be they religious or not, can meet on equal terms for the good of all humanity.

“ Shamelessly blocking the use of military chapels to gay serving personnel who want to marry also illustrates that the centuries-old persecution of homosexuals by the institutional churches is being actively perpetuated today by their leaders, despite support for same-sex marriage by the majority of those that identify as Christians.”

Keith Porteous Wood, Pink News

Free Speech

Government stalls on counter-extremism plans

Our collaboration with the Defend Free Speech Coalition, which also includes groups as varied as the Christian Institute and the Peter Tatchell Foundation, continues to be fruitful. In December 2015 we met top officials at the Home Office to express our concerns about the threats to freedom of expression contained in the Extremism Bill, particularly of the Extremism Disruption Orders (EDOs) it envisages, which would be draconian. We are very concerned about the disproportionately low level of proof required that would be required to obtain EDOs and the paucity of safeguards for those threatened with them to defend themselves.



The Defend Free Speech coalition

Worryingly, when questioned about the proposals in Parliament, the Security Minister was unable to define 'extremism' coherently – offering ten definitions in an hour.

We continue to await concrete proposals from the Government, and the consultation we were promised at our meeting.

Challenging blasphemy codes

Threats to free expression are still coming thick and fast in many forms, particularly from the state, from student unions, the regressive left and from sectarian violence.

We're acutely aware of the danger of returning to a *de facto* blasphemy law through the backdoor, after we achieved a major, historic victory in the abolition of the blasphemy law in 2008. Our president Terry Sanderson spoke of this danger at our conference in September, and the need to be constantly vigilant against infringements of free expression.

That's why we spoke out when the European Commission announced a crackdown on online 'hate speech', without adequately defining what it would include as 'hate speech'. In partnership with YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Microsoft, the Commission launched a new "code of conduct". Ex-Muslims, secular Muslims and critics of Islam are already finding their posts taken down and pages removed by social media companies. Our response to this was picked up by national and international media. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance later

sought unacceptably to bar UK media from reporting the Muslim background of terrorists.

Meanwhile in the UK, Keith Vaz MP, then chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee, volunteered that he would vote for the reintroduction of a UK blasphemy law if one was ever proposed. In October we defended British Olympic gymnast Louis Smith after he was very publicly castigated for allegedly 'mocking Islam' in a leaked private video. The disproportionate reaction against him was illustrative of a troubling return of blasphemy. These episodes underline the need for the NSS and like-minded groups to consistently speak out for freedom of expression.

A litmus test of commitment to freedom of speech is being prepared to defend those with whom you disagree. We wrote to the Northern Ireland Public Prosecution Service last year to protest their decision to pursue Pastor James McConnell for a "grossly offensive" anti-Islamic sermon. We were very pleased early this year when the judge found the preacher not guilty.

Promoting free speech on campus

Student unions have rarely been out of the headlines this year for the increasingly bizarre and sinister bans they are placing on speakers.

An extensive Populus poll found that 46% of students support legal limits on freedom of expression where religion is concerned. Winning the battle for free speech on campuses is therefore crucial and we have been playing our part in this.

In February we backed the #Right2Debate initiative, a student-led campaign supported by our friends and partners in the Quilliam Foundation. Rather than challenging extreme views with censorious 'no platform' policies, #Right2Debate encourages students to contest them and debate.

One repeated target of campus censorship is our honorary associate Maryam Namazie. In December last year students from Goldsmiths University's male Islamic Society aggressively disrupted her talk on blasphemy, heckling and turning off the projector. Secularists, atheists and ex-Muslims, and indeed any speaker who deals with Islam, face being 'no-platformed'. That's why initiatives like #Right2Debate are so important to changing the culture on university campuses.

Talking to the police about free speech

In March we joined up with the Christian Institute to address a National Policing Conference on how the police deal with protest. We were primarily emphasising the need for police to respect freedom of expression, but the occasion was valuable to open up a mature dialogue between police and potential demonstrators.

Those running the conference believed that the frank exchange of views had been very worthwhile, and we certainly came away believing that police attitudes on this matter are changing for the better.



Students at Godalming College's Secular Society

Secularism, healthcare and child protection

Chaplaincy

The NSS believes that all NHS care (including welfare and pastoral care) should be provided on a secular basis, with voluntary groups free to provide religious services. This year we've worked with the Secular Medical Forum to challenge inappropriate evangelism and religious discrimination in hospitals.

In November an NHS chaplain's move to a new post was blocked by the Church of England because he had entered into a same-sex marriage. Mr Pemberton's discrimination case against the diocese failed because the court (rightly) declined to enter into theological arguments, but unfortunately upheld the right of the Church of England to withhold its permission for the priest to take up the post. Such jobs should not be subject to religious veto. There should be no discrimination in NHS chaplaincy appointments, including on grounds of sex, sexual orientation, and religion or belief.

Secular Medical Forum

The Secular Medical Forum (SMF), which provides expert advice to the NSS, has mounted very effective interventions to safeguard the provision of healthcare without undue religious interference.

In June the SMF made a submission to the General Pharmaceutical Council opposing expansionist religious 'conscience exemptions' that prejudice the care of patients, typically by refusing to dispense emergency contraception. The NSS supplemented this following a US Supreme Court judgment which ruled that there is no religious freedom requirement for such exemptions.

When shocking new data on the prevalence of FGM in England was released this year SMF Chair Dr Antony Lempert warned that the figures were likely to be serious underestimates.

In submissions to both the United Nations Human Rights Committee and the UK Joint Committee on Human Rights we raised the UK's shocking failure to successfully prosecute a single case of FGM, despite the practice being made an offence thirty years ago.

All forms of forced genital cutting risk serious sexual, physical and emotional harm and the unregulated nature of non-medical male circumcision (usually for religious reasons) has resulted in serious injury and even death. We raised this issue in the aforementioned submissions and called for boys to receive similar legal protection from forced genital cutting as girls.



Clerical sex abuse

Scrutiny on this topic continues to be important as religious bodies continue to fail to bring perpetrators and enablers to secular justice, or to compensate victims – seeking to evade responsibility wherever possible. We know of no religious body, even now, acting openly in this respect.

Many religious institutions provide environments where abuse of minors is easily perpetrated. They have attracted those intent on and prone to such abuse; and have a record of protecting from secular justice perpetrators and those who enable them, thereby allowing the abuse to continue. We have made these points in response to an invitation from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England & Wales (IICSA) and assisted victims and lawyers.

The NSS was a lone voice asserting that the apparently affable Pope Francis, like his predecessors, was doing all in his power to keep clerical abusers and those who shielded them from secular justice. This is now widely accepted.

He said blandly in February that “any bishop who moves a suspected paedophile priest from parish to parish should resign”, then in June issued a decree (not yet enforced) ostensibly to make bishops more accountable for abusers. We learned in February that new bishops were told during training at the Vatican that they don't “necessarily” need to report sex abuse of children.

Francis personally intervened ahead of charges being dropped in July against French Cardinal Philippe Barbarin for failure to report abusive priests. The NSS assisted our kindred organisation in France in publicising the charges.

Briton Peter Saunders, one of only two abuse survivors on the Pope's Commission investigating abuse, told the world's press in February that the Pope had done little to tackle paedophilia within the clergy. Predictably, Mr Saunders was quietly dropped from the Commission and no longer receives invitations to its deliberations. We honoured Peter's bravery at Secularist of the Year.

We have also provided evidence for the Church of England's internal review, and more widely, into its handling of the case of former Bishop of Gloucester Peter Ball, jailed in October 2015 for multiple incidents of abuse against young males stretching back decades. The Crown Prosecution Service has already admitted culpability over failure to charge Ball in the 1990s, which followed high level interventions by the Church. The review, and hopefully also the IICSA, should uncover the Church's role in one of the biggest establishment cover-ups of recent times.

Beyond the abuse itself, the Anglican Church's treatment of victims has been appalling, including the Church evading paying compensation through hard-ball tactics of lawyers from their in-house insurance company.

The Church has declined our proposal that bullying of victims (of which we have seen shocking evidence) be added specifically to the review's Terms of Reference (ToRs) to ensure it is investigated, albeit the ToRs do not exclude it. Archbishop Sentamu of York personally declined our request to make available online a report into alleged serious abuse by a former Dean of Manchester, the late Robert Waddington. The report was highly critical of the treatment by the former Archbishop of York, David Hope, of the Dean's abuse. Dr Hope was reported this year to be under police investigation.

International Work

United Nations

As reported above, the NSS has been granted special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council, the body responsible for accrediting NGOs to permit them special access to the UN, for example to speak at the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva. Our interventions at the UNHRC in the past have only been possible with the goodwill of kindred European and international organisations that already had this status.

The long process of accreditation – sometimes, (as in the case of the NSS), stretching out for years – has caused other NGOs to abandon their attempts to achieve this status. There has been growing consternation about this, including at the UN itself.

In order to secure our own accreditation, the NSS has been working at diplomatic level including with senior staff at the Foreign Office in London, Geneva and New York.

UK diplomats helpfully intervened several times at the ratification meeting in New York on 26 July this year. They emphasised that the UN “benefited from the expert opinions and advice of civil society” and that “NGOs should not be perceived as a threat to the proper functioning of the UN”.

We formally put on record our gratitude to all who assisted with the successful granting of our status.

We have made written submissions since accreditation, but our first formal intervention at the Human Rights Council was in September 2016.

We have also submitted a wide-ranging submission to the UN Human Rights Council for the United Kingdom's Universal Period Review. In it, we said that previous recommendations related to equality and human rights had not been acted upon. We highlighted a number of areas where religious privilege was restricting human rights, particularly in education. We also made a submission to the British Institute of Human Rights, which made its Joint Civil Society Report for the UPR, including many of our recommendations and concerns, including the discriminatory nature of faith schools.

Our work in Europe

The NSS was one of few organisations invited by the Parliament's First Vice President Antonio Tajani MEP to address a seminar at the European Parliament on *Education as part of Inter-religious Dialogue*. Keith spoke in November 2015 on *How can Education Contribute to Tackle Radicalism and Fundamentalism in Europe?* He said that success in tackling radicalism and fundamentalism will depend on our ability to make sure that as many as possible of the

young are encouraged to embrace the values including human rights, equality, tolerance, the rule of law – and that school was the obvious place to do this. He pointed to growing difficulty in achieving this because of the rise in religious orthodoxy – particularly among the young – particularly in Judaism and Islam, the latter fuelled by funding from the Middle East. This drew applause from the audience, including from Muslims – a valuable signal to the MEPs there.

We addressed a European Network on Religion and Belief seminar in November 2015 in Brussels on *Manifesting Religion or Belief: A Human Rights Perspective*. Despite there being a speaker from the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the NSS provided the only speaker not coming from a religious perspective, so our input was key.

We set out the alarming extent to which religious exemptions, accommodations and conscience clauses have already unfairly privileged the religious at the expense of others. We are convinced, from observations in Europe and more widely, that this is part of ever more aggressive attempts to create a hierarchy of rights dominated by religion, frequently funded by evangelicals from the USA. Executive director Keith Porteous Wood was able to point to our success in stemming this tide through three of our interventions at the European Court of Human Rights.

Keith lamented the failure of the UK Government to outlaw caste discrimination, despite strictures from Parliament and the UN, which he put down to religious pressure. This drew a furious response from an audience member describing herself as the most senior Hindu in Europe, but support from most of the rest of the audience.

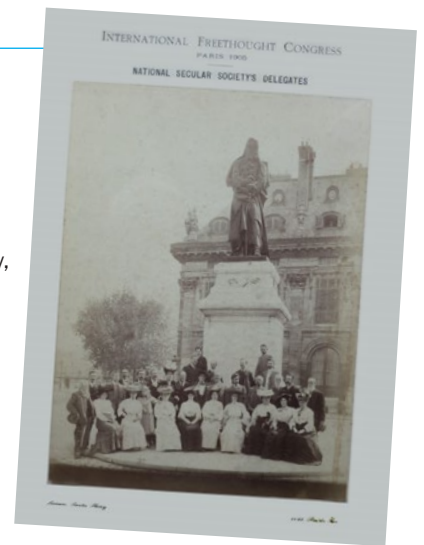
We have also continued our work supporting the European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics, contributing to meetings on *The Role of Religion or Belief in Asylum Policies* and *Impact of Religion on Women's Rights*.

Our role relative to EU institutions will need to be reassessed with the UK's changing relationship with the EU following the Referendum, but contributors are not limited to EU nationals and secular perspectives still need to be voiced as widely as possible.

NSS advocates for free speech around the world

Following a series of brutal murders in Bangladesh, we wrote to the Foreign Office and to the Bangladesh High Commission urging the Bangladeshi Government to take serious action against Islamists targeting secular and human rights activists. We also took part in a demonstration outside the High Commission in London.

Blasphemy laws cause suffering and persecution around the world, and there are still examples of blasphemy legislation in Europe. We joined fifty organisations in an open letter calling on Greece to abolish its blasphemy law.



The NSS has a long history of working internationally



Keith Porteous Wood gave a keynote speech at a European Parliament event on the role of education in tackling radicalism and fundamentalism in Europe

Events

Secularist of the Year 2016: Educate Together

We celebrated secular education in action at our annual awards event.

We awarded the Secularist of the Year prize to Education Together, an education charity which runs popular schools based on human rights principles with equality in admissions and a properly inclusive ethos.

Paul Rowe, CEO of Educate Together, received the £5,000 prize, which was once more donated by Dr Michael Irwin to whom we are very grateful.

Mr Rowe said: "We are humbled and thankful to the National Secular Society for highlighting our work through this award."

The awards were presented by our honorary associate, the columnist and broadcaster Julia Hartley-Brewer, and the event as usual was planned by the President.



Secularist of the Year is kindly sponsored by NSS honorary associate Dr. Michael Irwin



Paul Rowe, CEO of Educate Together



Peter Saunders, (pictured with Julia Hartley-Brewer) a prominent champion of the victims of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy, was also recognised



NSS president Terry Sanderson



Peter Tatchell discussed his campaign work for free speech



Josephine Macintosh was thanked for making an intervention at the Human Rights Council on behalf of the NSS



Brighton Argus journalist Joel Adams was praised for his work in bringing to light an establishment cover-up of Anglican sex abuse

“ It is a great honour to accept this award on behalf of the thousands of volunteers, parents, staff and pupils who have been involved in Educate Together over many years. Today, ethical education, and the provision of schools in which children of all backgrounds can learn together in equality and respect are really important. They are the foundations and building blocks for the inclusive, peaceful and sustainable societies that are urgently needed in all parts of the world.”

Paul Rowe, Educate Together

Events (cont.)**Secularism 2016 Conference:
Secularism ‘on the frontline of the
most important issue of our time’**

Our conference was the highlight of our year, in which we celebrated 150 years since the founding of the NSS. The conference explored the theme ‘living better together’ and had panels on human rights, education and on Islam in a secular democracy and was hosted by the president.

We were joined by a line-up of excellent speakers including Turkish opposition MP Safak Pavey, and Tehmina Kazi, formerly of British Muslims for Secular Democracy, who joined our executive director Keith Porteous Wood to discuss secularism’s role in protecting human rights.

Jacques Berlinerblau was our keynote speaker and he gave an interesting and well-received speech, urging the secularist movement to pick its battles carefully and warning that our cause was constantly misrepresented as intolerant.

Education is the policy area that dominates most of our work, and our education panel featured Secularist of the Year winner Educate Together, represented by Paul Rowe, and our campaigns director Stephen Evans. It was

chaired by Council member Judy Audaer. Perhaps the most anticipated panel was on tackling Islamism. Secularist Muslims Raheel Raza and Maajid Nawaz (an honorary associate), along with Douglas Murray, all gave fascinating and forceful contributions. Douglas Murray concluded that the NSS was now on the “frontline” of the “most important issue of our time”. The panel was chaired by Afonso Reis e Sousa, who is also chair of Council.

Stephen Evans led the organisation of the conference, along with events co-ordinator Claudia Fragapane and the rest of the NSS team. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive and we are immensely grateful to our staff and volunteers who made the event such a resounding success.

After the conference attendees at our gala dinner heard speeches from our former presidents David Tribe (1963–1971), Barbara Smoker (1971–1996) Denis Cobell (1997–2006), and our current president Terry Sanderson, on the evolution of the NSS from an atheistic organisation to a strictly secularist organisation. There was much to celebrate, they said, but many difficult challenges lay ahead in a country that had changed so drastically since 1866, when the NSS was founded.



Stephen Evans, Paul Rowe and Judy Audaer



Safak Pavey



Douglas Murray



Tehmina Kazi



Jacques Berlinerblau



Richard Dawkins



Questions from the audience



Afonso Reis e Sousa, Raheel Raza and Maajid Nawaz

Celebration: 150 years of the NSS

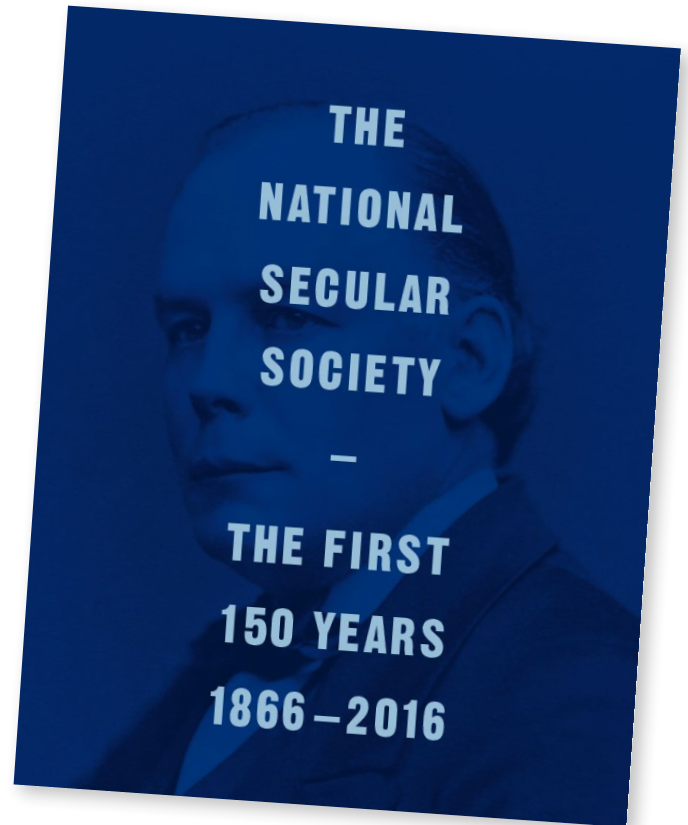
To mark our 150th anniversary we published a commemorative brochure – *The First 150 Years* – which was sent to all members in October. Additional copies are available on request.

Our conference in September featured historian Deborah Lavin discussing the founding and 150 year history of the NSS. Lavin has also made presentations about Charles Bradlaugh for the Houses of Parliament.

We've also marked this important anniversary in other ways. Two commemorations of the life of Charles Bradlaugh have been held – one at the site of Bradlaugh's grave, organised by Council member Peter Revell, and the other in Northampton (Bradlaugh's parliamentary constituency) arranged annually by the Charles Bradlaugh Society. Our president Terry and executive director Keith represented the NSS at both.

The most exciting part of this year's commemoration is the unveiling of the bust of Bradlaugh, commissioned by the NSS to be displayed prominently in Parliament. The NSS underwrote the cost of the bust, and invites contributions to help support this permanent display in Westminster Palace about our founder, Charles Bradlaugh MP, for example about the Oaths Act for which he responsible, allowing MPs to affirm rather than only swear on the Bible.

We would like to express our immense gratitude to everyone who has donated money to our 150th anniversary appeal. If you haven't had a chance to give yet, please give online today via our website (secularism.org.uk/150-appeal). All surplus funds will go directly towards our campaigning and advocacy work.



Then and now: NSS members pay their respect to Bradlaugh at his grave in Brookwood Cemetery, near Woking



Suzie Zamit, a member of the Society of Portrait Sculptors, putting the final touches to the bust of Bradlaugh prior to it being cast in bronze

Other Campaigning

Advocating for a secular rather than multi-faith approach for Britain

This year we published *Rethinking religion and belief in public life: a manifesto for change*, setting out a positive vision for a modern British secular democracy.

Britain's increasing religious diversity and irreligiosity makes the need for a new approach to balance freedom of (and from) religion with other human rights, one of today's most pressing political issues. Copies of the booklet, which sets out the secularist approach to many areas of public life, will be sent to all Members of Parliament. The booklet is on the NSS website and is available to members by post by request.

In December 2015, the Woolf Institute's Commission on Religion and Belief, a self-appointed group of mostly 'faith leaders', published their Report: *Living with difference: Community, diversity and the common good*. Although the NSS did not contribute, because of the bias in the Commission's composition, our critique of the Report was widely featured in resulting media coverage.

Despite acknowledging Britain's changing religious landscape and making many reasonable recommendations, the Report predictably reflected the religious interests of its contributors. It recommended an essentially *multi-faithist* approach to increase the role of religion in public life and institutions, albeit with religious privileges shared more equally between different religious groups. Such an approach will empower 'faith leaders' and religious groups over ordinary religious believers while marginalising the non-religious majority, the religiously unconcerned, and in some cases women and minorities.

Following the report the NSS was approached by Dr Steven Kettell at Warwick University to contribute to a secular academic response which will be published later in the year.



While only a tiny fraction of the population still regularly attend Anglican Church services and Anglicans express increasingly liberal views on social issues, the Archbishop of Canterbury was celebrating the bishops' conservative opinions. He told a meeting of Anglican Primates from around the world that the bench of bishops was the "most orthodox" bench of bishops since the Second World War. He told them: "A recent attempt to introduce assisted suicide was crushingly defeated in Parliament. We are exempted from the Same Sex Marriage Act, showing that our voice is still heard against the prevailing wind of our society, and at much cost to ourselves, by the way."

No religion is the new norm in our society; orthodox bishops should have no influence over our legislature.

The Archbishop of Canterbury himself said in February to members of the judiciary that separating church and state by disestablishing the Church of England "would not be a disaster or a great advantage" to the Church. ... [but] "if we're going to abuse establishment as we have done in the past, then absolutely [the Church should be disestablished]".

NSS defends cinemas' commercial freedom not to screen religious ads

The NSS provided a much needed counter-narrative in the run-up to Christmas when the Church of England launched a major press offensive, launching a one-minute 'Just Pray' advert.

They claimed victimisation and censorship because Digital Cinema Media (DCM), which supplies cinema chains, had declined to show their advert.



Stephen Evans on ITV's This Morning

DCM's policy precludes screening religious or political advertisements. They have the right to decline to show adverts as they wish.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission unwisely intervened appearing to side with the Church, claiming that not showing the advert infringed freedom of expression, in contravention of the EHRC's own guidelines.

The Church claimed it could take legal action on grounds of discrimination and a breach of their freedom of expression, which the EHRC appeared to support. We explained on two television channels why there was no legal basis for such action, a position later confirmed by a specialist QC opinion we obtained. We enclosed this with a letter to the EHRC regretting their role in this matter.

We will always defend free speech, but questioned on what free speech or legal grounds a commercial organisation should be forced to show an advert against its own policy.

Disestablishment: thousands call for bishops to leave the Lords

We promoted a petition in January on removing the bishops from the House of Lords. It quickly gained over 10,000 signatures – meaning the Government was forced to respond.

The Government said that the bishops were not a "priority" for constitutional reform, and praised their "spiritual insight".

“The Bench of Bishops is described by the longer standing members as the most orthodox since WWII.”

Dr. Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

Council prayers

Though the last Government rushed through legislation to reverse our High Court victory in 2012 prohibiting councils from holding prayers during meetings, local councils themselves are turning away from the divisive practice.

Bridgnorth Council was one of a number that stopped doing so altogether – with one councillor arguing that “By saying prayers at council meetings we are, as a group of people, essentially imposing our beliefs on others.”

We are only aware of one that went the other way. In that case, on East Herts District Council, a counter-motion by Conservative councillor Adrian McNeece to end council prayers, with which the NSS assisted, was defeated. He told the local paper that the “separation of government and religion is essential” and we supported him. He felt he had to resign after this vote.



Call for state-owned crematoria in England to be religiously neutral

The demographics of the UK have changed drastically in the past fifty years. The Government launched a consultation over concerns that crematoria were not suitable for minority faiths.

We welcomed this review, but pointed out the rapid rise of the non-religious, who now constitute a majority of the UK's population. We also asked why the Department for Communities referred to England as a “Christian country” in press statements about the review.

Research by the Bristol Secular Society and the Nottingham Secular Society found that of the 251 crematoria in England, 29% have fixed religious icons – usually a cross. In our response to the Government's consultation we called for state-owned crematoria to be religiously neutral by default, with the option of religious iconography being provided for individual services.

NSS calls for the date of Easter holidays to be fixed

While Easter itself is a religious matter, the wildly fluctuating date it occurs on each year can have adverse effects in the secular world, for example in school planning and in the leisure industry where Easter often marks the start of the season. The Easter Act 1928 enables the date of the Easter/Spring bank holidays to be fixed after consultation with the churches, but it has not yet been brought into force.



Earlier this year, the Church of England attempted to broker a fixed date with the Orthodox churches and for a while there was some optimism of a pan-Christian fixed date. However, the Orthodox churches have since rejected this. We have sought to encourage, as a compromise, a fixed Western Easter, and have written to the Business Secretary to encourage negotiations to achieve this.

Gift Aid small donations scheme

As charities, places of worship claim Gift Aid on collections when the donor is identified as a taxpayer. The Church of England alone claims back £80 million p.a., in their words “sufficient to fund 1,600 stipendiary clergy!” The Government obligingly introduced a Gift Aid Small Donations scheme to refund yet further tax, on cash received anonymously – for example from wall collection boxes. It is expected to benefit the CoE by an additional £15 million p.a.

The scheme does not specifically exclude non-religious charities, but is drafted in such a way as benefits places of worship but excludes charities making a compulsory charge, something unfairly benefitting religious charities where those attending are expected to pay through ostensibly voluntary collections.

In July our treasurer Ed Moore and the executive director Keith Porteous Wood met senior HM Revenue and Customs officials administering the scheme to discuss our concerns and we responded to a consultation on the scheme, calling for changes so that more non-religious charities can also benefit from it.

Communications

Throughout the year we've continued to provide a secular voice in the media, challenging religious privilege and defending freedom and equality as a counterbalance to the powerful religious lobby. We've been quoted in major national and international news outlets almost 100 times since November 2015, and we have spoken on radio over 130 times and made around a dozen TV appearances in the same period. We've also been quoted in sixty stories by specialist or online news sources since November.

We recently produced a short video explaining the work of the NSS which features prominently on the home page of our website.

Our site secularism.org.uk received 462,000 unique visitors this year (with almost 1.1 million unique page views) and continues to keep our supporters informed with breaking news analysis and resources. 186 news stories and 74

opinion pieces were published in the last year. 154,000 people read our daily media round-up on the website, where we shared over 5,000 news stories of interest to secularists. Many more people discussed these articles via our Facebook page or Twitter account.

Newsline, our email newsletter, keeps over 16,000 subscribers up to date on a weekly basis and continues to grow.

On Facebook, our page grew from just over 13,200 likes to just under 15,900 over the last year. On the average day 541 people engage with the page, with just over 6,000 people seeing our content.

On Twitter, our followers grew from 23,800 to 28,500 and on the average day our tweets are seen 35,000 times.



Keith Porteous Wood on Sky News



NSS Communications Officer Ben Jones on Sunday Morning Live

Honorary Associates

Eric Avebury: a life well spent

Long-time Honorary Associate Lord Avebury, who was a great humanitarian and very hard-working and effective on secular causes, died in February. He had been a Parliamentarian for over fifty years, initially as Eric Lubbock MP, following a spectacular by-election victory in Orpington in 1962.

We were able to pay our respects to him speaking at his memorial meetings in the Lords and the Royal Institution,



Lord Avebury with Keith Porteous Wood

the latter attended by party leaders, the Lords' speaker, numerous parliamentarians and at least one bishop. Keith was able to tell them all that Eric wanted any parliamentary prayers to take place away from the Chamber so that everyone could enter together. Also, that he groaned when, in the Lords, any peer stopped speaking and sat down the moment a bishop arose, the ancient custom still followed – but something Eric would never do.

We will all miss him greatly. We send our condolences to his widow and family. The world will be a poorer place without him.

NSS mourns the loss of Lord Peston

We are also sad to report the death of Lord Peston who had been ill for some time but had been very helpful to the NSS particularly in the House of Lords on education, his area of great expertise. We are grateful for his past help and send our condolences to his family.

NSS bids farewell to Terry Mullins

We're sad to report the death of Terry Mullins, the former company secretary of the NSS for sixteen years to 1996, who died on 11 October 2016, aged 85.

Honorary Associates

Graham Allen MP	Mrs Asma Jahangir
Prof Peter Atkins	Prof Steve Jones
Joey Barton	Baroness Kinnock of Holyhead
Rt Hon. Baroness Blackstone of Stoke Newington	Stephen Kinnock MP*
Prof Colin Blakemore	Prof Lawrence Krauss
Edward Bond	Stewart Lee
Rt Hon. Nick Brown MP	Graham Linehan
Prof Ted Cattle CBE	Baroness Massey of Darwen
Lord Cashman of Limehouse CBE	Kerry McCarthy MP
Nick Cohen	Jonathan Meades
Prof Richard Dawkins	Sir Jonathan Miller
Prof Lord Desai of St Clement Danes	Baroness Murphy of Aldgate
Angela Eagle MP	Maryam Namazie
Baroness Falkner of Margravine	Taslima Nasrin
Jim Fitzpatrick MP	Maajid Nawaz
Baroness Flather of Windsor and Maidenhead	Lord O'Neill of Clackmannan
Caroline Fourest	Pragna Patel
Michael Frayn	Safak Pavey
Rt Hon. Lord Garel-Jones	Philip Pullman
Ricky Gervais	Geoffrey Robertson QC
Lord Goodhart of Youlbury QC	Martin Rowson
Prof AC Grayling	Gita Sahgal
Baroness Greengross OBE*	Joan Smith
Nia Griffith MP	Dan Snow
Dr Evan Harris	Dr David Starkey
Lord Harrison of Chester	Peter Tatchell
Julia Hartley-Brewer	Lord Taverne of Pimlico
Patrick Harvie MSP	Baroness Thornton of Manningham*
Prof Ted Honderich	Baroness Tonge of Kew
Mary Honeyball MEP	Polly Toynbee
Kelvin Hopkins MP	Baroness Turner of Camden
Sophie in 't Veld MEP	Rt Hon. Lord Warner of Brockley
Virginia Ironside	Baroness Young of Hornsey
Dr Michael Irwin	

*Honorary associates we were pleased to welcome in 2016



Baroness Greengross OBE



Stephen Kinnock MP



Baroness Thornton of Manningham

Your Council

As of 1 October 2016

President

Terry Sanderson



Terry Sanderson

Vice-Presidents

Alistair McBay

Adrian Tippetts



Alistair McBay



Adrian Tippetts



Ed Moore

Treasurer

Ed Moore

Council

Judy Audaer

Josephine Macintosh (co-opted)

Ray Newton

Gerard Phillips

Sadikur Rahman

Afonso Reis e Sousa

Peter Revell

Dorothy Smith

Robert Stovold



Judy Audaer



Josephine Macintosh



Ray Newton

Executive director and company secretary

Keith Porteous Wood, FCCA

Campaigns director

Stephen Evans



Gerard Phillips



Sadikur Rahman



*Afonso Reis e Sousa**



Peter Revell



Dorothy Smith



Robert Stovold



Keith Porteous Wood



Stephen Evans

*Afonso Reis e Sousa has customarily chaired Council meetings during the year

Affiliated Groups

Local, student and special interest groups are a great way of raising local awareness of secular issues, running localised campaigns and socialising with like-minded secularists. Below is a list of groups affiliated to the National Secular Society.

These groups are independent of the NSS, but all support the aims of the society.

Find out more at secularism.org.uk/groups

National

Humanist and Secularist Liberal Democrats
Secular Medical Forum

Local

Basingstoke Humanists
Bedfordshire Humanists
Belfast Humanist Group
Birmingham Humanists
Bradford Atheist & Humanist Society
Brighton Secular Humanists
Chiltern Humanists
Cornwall Humanists
Coventry & Warwickshire Humanists
Dorset Humanists
Edinburgh Secular Society
Farnham Humanists
FLASH (Freethinkers of Leicester; Atheists, Secular, Humanist Group)
Gloucestershire Humanists
Greater Manchester Humanists
Humanist Society of West Yorkshire
Isle of Wight Secular and Humanist Society
Lancashire Secular Humanists
Leeds Atheist Society
Leicester Secular Society
Ludlow and Marches Humanists
Milton Keynes Humanists
Norfolk Secular and Humanist Group
North East Humanists
North London Humanist Group
Oxford Humanists
Plymouth Humanists
Sheffield Humanist Society
South East London Humanist Group
South Hampshire Humanists
South London Humanists
Suffolk Humanists and Secularists
West Glamorgan Humanist Group
West London Humanists and Secularists

Student

Cambridge University Atheist and Agnostic Society
Durham University Humanist and Secularist Society
King's College London Atheist Humanist and Secular Society
LSE Atheist Secularist and Humanists
NU-Think (Newcastle University Skeptics Society)
Oxford Atheists, Secularists & Humanists
Queen Mary Atheism Secularism and Humanism Society
St. Andrews University Atheist Society
UCL Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society
University of Birmingham Atheist Secular and Humanist Society
University of Bristol Atheist Agnostic Secular Society
University of Leicester Atheist Humanist and Secular Student Society
University of Lincoln Secular Society
University of Nottingham Secular Society

Find out more at:
secularism.org.uk/student

Thanks

As an organisation solely focused on campaigning, the NSS is not eligible for charitable status – and we neither seek nor receive funding from publicly-funded bodies. We are therefore reliant on members' subscriptions, donations and legacies to fund our campaigning work. We are immensely grateful for this support. You are the NSS.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to everyone who has donated money in the last year or remembered us in their wills. If you would like to take out a direct debit, please contact the office or visit secularism.org.uk/donate. If you would like to leave a legacy to the NSS to help secure secularism for future generations, the executive director will be pleased to assist: he can be contacted through the office.

We also thank the many people who generously donate their time, expertise and advice to the NSS.

Events: Alex Crawford, Amir Haddad, Shaun Joynton, Sven Klinge (photography), Paul Lopez, Erica Lopez, Anthony Loraline, Alison Meek, Paul Orton, Susannah Rosenberg and Dominic Wirdnam helped us with running and preparing for our Secularism 2016 conference. Shaun Joynton, Paul Orton, Claudine and Bob Baxter also helped at the 2015 AGM.

Graphic design: Francesca Sturiale and Michael van Zyl have helped us with graphics for social media and the website, as well as the Secular Charter. Bradley Davis of WhiteLight has helped us with other graphic design, the Bulletins and Annual Report.

Research: a number of volunteers have worked on small and large research projects over the last year. We are grateful to: Tom Archer, Amir Haddad, Rosalind Hulse, Ben Iorio, Jake Levy, David Mackie, Celina Parker, Alan Paton, Angela Sandford, Harriet Solomon, Barry Thorpe, Dominic Wirdnam and Ben Young.

Legal: We are grateful to all of the barristers, solicitors and lawyers who have provided us with invaluable pro bono assistance over the year.

A massive thank you goes to Claudine Baxter, who regularly assists us with membership administration in the office.

Thanks also to Dr Antony Lempert, Chair of the Secular Medical Forum, who has provided valuable assistance to the NSS throughout the year.

Thanks also to all those who ran stalls at freshers' fairs and local events and got involved with campaigning locally.

In our members' words...

"I enjoy your news output and seeing the NSS quoted in the press. The professional way in which you deliver the message is excellent. The NSS is more relevant with every passing day. Please keep up the excellent work."

— Jane, new member from Gloucestershire

"I am a big believer that secularism is the best way to counter the divisions in our society. Schools are where children should be brought together and state funding should never be used to separate children on religious grounds and further the aims of particular religious groups."

— June, new member from London

"I joined the NSS because I can no longer leave unchallenged a supposed assumption that everybody wants religion to have a position of privilege in our country."

— Clive, new member from Gloucester

"I've always shared the views of the society but what particularly motivated me to join was the dominance of the church in rural primary schools. There is so little provision of community schools without a religious bias here that I feel Christianity is being forced down my family's throat. When I did complain to the school I was told, 'this is a Christian School' but there really is nowhere else for us to go."

— Vivyan, new member from Derbyshire

"I am particularly interested in education and healthcare provision, but am also acutely aware of the influence of religion throughout our systems of government which I believe is wholly inappropriate and pernicious. I think it is vitally important to bring these issues to the fore and I agree with the focus of the National Secular Society and its campaigns. I would like to add my voice in the hope that effective and positive change can be achieved for the benefit of all members of our society."

— Elizabeth, new member from Essex

"As a Pagan, I believe that a secular society is the only way to achieve real religious freedom. I believe that the Church of England should be disestablished and not have the privileges that it does."

— Yvonne, new member from Oxford

"For some time I have followed the Society on Twitter and I subscribe to *Newsline*. This is a very useful public service and it has now led me to seek actual membership. This is such important work that you are doing and I, for one, appreciate the contribution that you are making towards the growth of a more equal, compassionate and tolerant society."

— Richard, new member from Gloucestershire

Cover illustration: Charles Bradlaugh, the National Secular Society's founder, was elected to the House of Commons in 1880, but as a well-known atheist was prevented from taking the requisite religious oath of allegiance. He even tried to administer the oath to himself. He was later fined the then enormous sum of £1,500 for voting in Parliament illegally.

Bradlaugh was ejected from the Commons and on trying to re-enter was arrested and held in a prison cell located under Big Ben in the Clock Tower. Only on his fifth election to Parliament in 1886 was he finally allowed to swear and take his seat, and it was his Oaths Act of 1888 which extended the right to affirm to atheists and anyone else who objects to swearing a religious oath.