

challenging religious privilege

15 November 2012

Julie Bentley
Chief Executive, Girlguiding UK
Commonwealth Headquarters
17-19 Buckingham Palace Road
London
SW1W 0PT

chg@girlguiding.org.uk

national
secular
society

25 Red Lion Square
London WC1R 4RL
TEL: 020 7404 3126
FAX: 0870 762 8971
EMAIL: enquiries@secularism.org.uk
WEB: www.secularism.org.uk

Dear Ms Bentley

We are writing to congratulate you on your recent appointment as chief executive, and to raise the issue of the promise taken by Guides and Brownies.

Girlguiding UK is a much admired institution and the largest voluntary organisation in the UK for girls and young women. It is therefore unfortunate that the religious element of the promise – “to love my God” – currently acts as a barrier to full membership to a significant proportion of young girls.

We understand that increasing Girlguiding’s membership is one of your key priorities. The removal of this barrier would send a very clear signal that guiding activities are inclusive and equally welcoming to all girls, regardless of their religious beliefs.

While we entirely support the core values of tolerance, justice, respect, co-operation, we hope you will share our contention that there no need to contextualise them in a religious framework.

Independent research has revealed that two thirds of young people don't regard themselves as belonging to any religion. Replacing the existing oath, or allowing a secular alternative, would enhance your appeal to the non-religious and at the same time assist the organisation to achieve its stated aim of promoting equality and diversity.

In addition, the introduction of a secular oath would provide equal opportunity for adults who want to be leaders and ensure a better representation of social diversity.

From correspondence with Jo Hobbs last year, we understand the issue is on the Executive Committee's agenda. We were informed that when the time is right, the current approach would be reviewed.

Other WAGGGS Member Organisations have implemented similar changes in recent years. We very much hope that you will also feel that the time is now right to ensure that Girlguiding UK becomes true to its policy of being “fair, open and inclusive”. Those who cannot, in good conscience, promise to love their God, should be welcome to belong to the worldwide guiding family.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Evans
Campaigns Manager