

10 January 2008

Rt Hon David Hanson MP
Minister of State
Ministry of Justice
Selborne House
54 Victoria Street
London SW1E 6QW

I am writing to request a meeting with you, to discuss the ongoing reforms of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and specifically the current NOMS consultation 'Believing We Can. Promoting the contribution faith-based organisations can make to reducing adult and youth re-offending'.

The British Humanist Association (BHA) is the principal organisation representing the interests of the large and growing population of ethically concerned but non-religious people living in the UK. It exists to support and represent people who seek to live good lives without religious or superstitious beliefs. The BHA is committed to human rights, equality and democracy, and has a long history of active engagement in work for an open and inclusive society. We have always taken a particularly strong interest in freedom of belief and in working with those of other worldviews for the common good.

While we are aware that many 'faith-based' organisations are already involved in working with offenders and some do good work, we have a number of serious and specific concerns and reservations regarding the premise and desired outcomes of 'Believing We Can', which aims to increase the number of 'faith-based' organisations working with offenders in prisons, probation and in the community.

We are concerned that the focus of 'Believing We Can' is to increase the number of religious organisations working with offenders, despite the fact that the consultation document itself states that there is 'no hard evidence' (p13) available nationally or internationally to suggest that faith-based interventions have a direct impact on reducing re-offending. Moreover, there are a number of very serious implications for equality, human rights and public accountability related to the provision of services through religious organisations which we do not feel this consultation has addressed at all. Discussions of these are set out in our report on public services, 'Quality and Equality: Human Rights, Public Services and Religious Organisations', which includes a short case study on NOMS in appendix F, and which I have enclosed for your information.

Given the impending deadline for response to this consultation, I am sure you will agree that a meeting with us ahead of the 22nd February will be useful, in order to discuss the problems we have identified and seek ways to rectify them in the context of NOMS.

Hanne Stinson
Chief Executive