



Candidates for the role of Humanist Students President-Elect

Please see below for the details of all candidates standing for the role of Humanist Students President-Elect. Please use the [Voting Form](#) in order to cast your vote. You are only able to vote in this election if you are a student member of Humanists UK. Each member has one vote only.

Candidate 1: James Dart

Biography:

My name is James Dart, I am 27 years old and I am currently studying for an MA in European Politics at the University of Exeter. Prior to this year I worked as a teacher in a special school in Devon and I now work as a supply teacher alongside my studies. I enjoy volunteering and have recently worked at the RAMM museum in Exeter. Finally, I am active in local politics and have twice acted as an election agent, most recently in the GE in 2016. I enjoy chess and reading and play football most nights of the week.

Supporting statement:

Hello,

As a passionate humanist, I believe the position of President-Elect to be one of great importance. As the scope and reputation of humanism grows across the UK, the important role of university societies will continue to grow with it. Humanist societies offer students a valuable community on UK campuses and provide unique and stimulating events – this is something I wish to help strengthen.

As the President and founder of Exeter Humanists I have come to find that the space offered by humanist societies to be one that is greatly valued by a large cross section of society. From ‘spiritualists’ and sceptics to agnostics and atheists; from students and the lay-person, to professionals and academics; from the young and energetic to the old and experienced; humanism brings people from all different backgrounds and experiences together. The liberal values of humanism transcend gender, race and sexuality and building upon our USP is something that I am passionate about. To that end, I would love to help integrate our student societies with Young Humanist and local groups.

As the General Secretary of Exeter Humanist Students and President of Exeter Humanists I hold a unique position of being active in both local and university societies simultaneously. This experience has strengthened my view that a strong partnership between local and student groups helps create a richer, deeper and more vibrant culture.

Furthermore, in my capacity as General Secretary of Exeter Humanist Students, I have organised and run a number of events. As President-Elect (and President) I would communicate with societies



listening to and offering insights into good practice, focusing on the importance of event type, identity and advertisement.

As a humanist trained school speaker, I have helped deliver training on how to run assemblies, lessons and workshops on the topic of humanism. This has not only broadened my understanding of humanism and its history, but has also given me a greater insight into how students of all ages ask questions and think about different world views. Equally, as a school teacher I have taught Religious Education in schools around the country, including Cardiff, Oxford and Devon. When planning these lessons, it was important that I acted as a co-learner and did not dominate the conversation. The students were empowered to ask questions in a safe environment and were encouraged to challenge different ideas courteously and with respect.

Continually, it is with this spirit that I sit on the Devon Faith and Belief Forum Committee. This organisation brings representatives together from the different religious communities that exist across Devon and work together on shared goals and projects. As the humanist representative for Devon it often falls to me to make the case for the non-religious community. This role requires sensitivity, patience and the ability to compromise, skills that I would utilise as President-Elect (and President).

If I were to become the President-Elect, these are some of the skills and experiences that I would bring to the role. I believe that inter-faith work is important for humanist societies. Whilst it is not always easy, having a voice at the table, building bridges and opening dialogue and trust is a great way to achieve shared goals. Equally, I believe that building humanist communities is really important and as such I would build on the excellent work that Hannah Timson and Hari Parekh have done over the past two years, listening to students and offering advice and direction where needed.



Candidate 2: Alex Martin

Biography:

Hi! I'm Alex, 27 years old, from Northern Ireland, now living in Oxford. I left school at 15 with no qualifications, and somehow have ended up at the University of Oxford studying a DPhil in Engineering Science. I'm just a normal person, hard work, dedication and honesty has gotten me to where I am. I believe that all people are and should be treated equally. I grew up in a society where that was not always the case, and with the rhetoric surrounding current political issues, I want to help prevent similar occurring in the future through reason and logic.

Supporting statement:

As students, are we not already on the path to being critical and rational thinkers? No matter what you study, from English to Engineering we all have to critically evaluate and rationalise the information in front of us.

I believe that all humans, no matter where they are born are equal. Some have been born into privilege and we are all a product of our environment and experiences. I was born and lived in Northern Ireland for the first 27 years of my life. I have seen and continue to see what religious bigotry contributes to my small country. I think we all, especially as students, have a responsibility to look to the future and try and contribute, in whichever way possible, to making society more equal and fair for everyone, no matter their race, creed or class. How can we do this? We already have the tools, critical thinking and rationalisation that will see us through our education, and we as students, are the future policy makers and current voters, let's make the logical choice and act now to help others.

As a DPhil student in Engineering Science, the same tools I use to analyse data and come to reasoned conclusions I would apply in my role (if fortunate enough to be voted in). I can see a difficult time ahead with Brexit and what that could do to our society as a whole, and how this could impact on people who want to come here to study and learn at some of the best universities in the world.



Candidate 3: Angelos Sofocleous

Biography:

My name is Angelos Sofocleous and I study Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Durham. I have been the President of Durham Humanist Students Society since May 2016. I am currently involved in Humanist Students as an Officer and I am a board member of the Atheist Alliance of America and Cyprus Humanist Association. I frequently write for issues relating to humanism, religion, culture, and secularism, at Conatus News, Secular Nation, Palatinate UK, and The Bubble UK, for which I am also an editor.

Supporting statement:

Dear Humanist Students members,

Humanism in the UK is facing great challenges which pose a threat not only to humanism itself, but to the notions of freedom, human rights, and reason, values which we, as Humanist Students, endorse, adopt, and implement in our campaigns.

There is now an unprecedented momentum for humanism, as indicated by the fact that, according to the annual British Social Attitudes Survey, 53% of Britons are non-religious, setting a concrete foundation upon which humanism can flourish.

I am putting myself forward as candidate for President-Elect for Humanist Students for this exact reason: To take advantage of this momentum that has been created in decades of campaigns, demonstrations, and battles by humanists, atheists, freethinkers, human rights activists and opponents of religious privilege.

We need to secure that the voice of reason, rationality, and free thinking, prevails over any notion of faith, belief, and superstition.

We need to ensure that no person or organisation enjoys privilege or is treated differently or unfairly because of their religion or faith (or their lack of).

We need to take action: Removing the Bishops from the House of Lord, campaigning against faith schools and successfully bringing them down, and establishing a nationwide network for non-religious students, are only a few of the campaigns through which humanism can emerge victorious in the upcoming years.

I envision Humanist Students to be the primary proponent of reason around UK campuses. Thereupon, I look forward in putting my ideas into practice, as president of Humanist Students.

These include:



Humanist Students

1. Create and maintain stronger bonds with Young Humanists section of Humanists UK to ensure that our common campaigns will reach as many people of our age as possible, increasing the effectiveness of our campaigns.
2. Establish a Humanist Students online newspaper and portal which will serve as the voice of humanist societies and students across the UK. It is a threatening problem for young people and students today who, despite living in a world which is more interconnected than ever before, find it difficult to expand on their ideas and develop their thoughts.
3. Focus on taking action at university-level in issues that affect students, a widely neglected but maximally important part of the population. These include provision of non-religious pastoral support to students, ensuring that students of no faith are treated equally to students of faith, and raising the issue of the unfair treatment and benefits that religious student societies receive.

I aspire to be the one who leads Humanist Students in tackling these challenges in an attempt to provide an environment where rationality, reason, and free thinking can flourish and prosper.

I ask you to accept my call to take action for the issues that most matter to us as humanists, and vote for a candidate whose passion, zeal, and experience can make Humanist Students societies thrive.



Candidate 4: David Stanley

Biography:

Final year Mechanical Engineering student at Southampton, originally from Exeter. Now serving my third year on Humanist Students Southampton committee, having taken year out to work for an engineering company last year, in Essex. Served as Internal Communications Officer for previous incarnation of Humanist Students, and again as general Officer during transition period.

Attended two CofE schools growing up, but was an atheist from my early teens, and never a Christian. The social and psychological reasons for people's continued belief in religions has always fascinated me and, perhaps in part due to my schooling, I am stridently passionate about secularism.

Supporting statement

I would love to become President-Elect of Humanist Students, to help grow our national community, help others grow local communities, and forge strong working links between the two.

I've experienced the struggles of the previous incarnation of Humanist Students, during my time as an Officer, and have directly experienced the struggles of running a university society, somewhat exacerbated by my year away in industry. The recent restructuring of Humanist Students allows us to achieve the success we've been working so hard for over the years, but never quite attaining. At Southampton, as in the past, we've been able to maintain regular, weekly events - excellent ones at that - but numbers have always been low. We hope to change that.

For both, learning lessons from the past; applying them; and ensuring that knowledge is shared and passed down, is absolutely essential. Despite having been involved with the national movement for a few years now, I've always felt that the lessons learned by other students and other societies, their routes to specific successes, have always been rather hidden - when they should be out in the open, championed, and taken on board by all. We are all striving for the same goals, putting on similar events, and have similar interests. We all want to provide support for apostates, champion human rights, prompt national change. That we should learn from one another to achieve these things is just common sense.

My hometown is fortunate to enjoy both a university and local group, who have good links and enjoy shared success. Success comes about through a combination of factors. Inescapably, though, it requires the skill and effort of fantastic individuals. But we are dooming ourselves to brief successes and inevitable failures if that's all we rely upon. Fantastic individuals come and fantastic individuals go. It's vitally important we look to keep them involved and invested in our movement, but they are small in number and their impact is lessened without connections between groups.

What we need are systems in place to support those with less time, those who are less skilled, those who don't have the connections. We have a wealth of individual knowledge across our membership



and there are incredible numbers of people who share our interests. We have student members of Humanists UK, we have young members, we have LGBT members, and much more besides. We need to connect them together. What comes naturally to our fantastic individuals needs to be distilled down and shared. As a national body, Humanist Students needs to coordinate and empower people for this to happen.

The Humanist Students that I want to see is one with a recognized public voice on issues important to us. A body that is able to support students who are leaving oppressive religions. A body that can develop the skills of our members so that they can contribute more and more to our communities and movement, and bring about local and national change. I hope to make this happen.



Candidate 5: Scott Jacobsen

Biography:

I am an undergraduate student in my final year at the largest online in Canada, Athabasca University, and am attending the Open University, where, with the flexibility of online education and limited funds as a student, I would intend to be the Humanist Students President-Elect remotely or at-a-distance I founded and run an academic interview-based journal: In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal. I am the Vice President of the International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organisation (IHEYO), which is the 18- to 35-year-old branch of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). I am a frequent writer in venues on a variety of topics, especially women's rights and non-religious topics. One is a UK outlet called Conatus News. Another is Humanist Voices of IHEYO. There are numerous others. My areas of emphasis are journalism and publishing.

Supporting statement:

I devote my life to advocacy for science and human rights. I have work to pay the bills. But my life orients around these things, week- and weekend-round. I do not see many functional ways forward as a global community, except in the direction of the implementation of universally agreed upon ideals - such as those found in the United Nations Charter and similar documents at national levels.

Asserted transcendent moral laws pull the public less as life becomes better, especially notable in the younger demographics of countries in developed nations. Even more so, I see this in the university educated, who set the tone for high-level discourse in the public for decades.

Insofar as I have specific, delineated values, the principles of humanism asserted as abstract ideals, but easily seen as empirical realities in daily life, are values I adhere to, aim for, and hope to achieve.

I want to take part in advancing these values more. This education juncture of young people's lives as humanists remains involved, exciting, and will, no doubt, leave a lasting impact on their lives.

Whether heading into the trades or corporate finance, or the information technology sector or working on the ground through social work, these are important points in early life, or crucial transitions in training for personal development or professional advancement.

Humanist students, whether explicit or simply living it out without much need to make a public statement about it, will build friendships, professional connections, strengthen irreligious coalitions, bolster non-religious causes, and advance reason, compassion, and science generally.

These don't have to be particularly august expressions of principles. In fact, the small daily interactions in life can be the real markers of someone living by these values. Simply because there are more of these acts than the big ones, as well as being a more consistent source of humanism in practice, small investments multiplied over users with long-term investment yields large gains for



the humanist movement.

I believe the university environment is the same as the public in this regard, and the humanist sector of it no different in the benefits accrued from consistent, long-term investment in practice of humanist values.

In terms of the targeted objectives for this long-term humanist orientation, I would want to know what the membership wants most with the resources of Humanist Students and how they feel, and likely know - given the wisdom of crowds, those should be invested by the elected leadership: whether elect, present, or emeritus.



Candidate 6: Dale Claridge

Biography:

My name is Dale and I am a 3rd year student at the University of Nottingham. I have been involved with Atheist and Humanist societies since I first came to university, including WASH (Warwick Atheist Secularist and Humanist Society) and Nottingham Humanists. I was President of Nottingham Humanists last year and have been on the committee for the last three years. I was elected secretary for the AHS last year and have worked in a transitional role for Humanist Students following the restructuring. I very much look forward to helping you shape Humanist Students

Supporting statement:

I want you to choose me as President of Humanist Students because I've loved my society at Nottingham so much. Not only has the society provided me with the best friends that I've made at university, but I've seen what good management practice can do for a society and what a well-run society has to offer. Nottingham Humanists has brought me into a world of ideas, discussion and community which I've found absolutely lacking in other parts of my university experience.

During my chemistry degree, I've engaged with a variety of questions that can only be approached with reason and evidence. Humanist societies across the country have made me do the same thing with questions that help us understand the world in which we live, and our role in that world.

Humanist Students is the body that will make sure that a group like Nottingham Humanists is available to students at all universities.

I believe I am the best candidate to make this happen because of the experience I've had with student humanist groups. When I joined Nottingham Humanists, it was a disorganised group of people who would meet infrequently. There were many students who, although they agreed with the ideas that the society stood for, couldn't get involved because the society did nothing about it.

In my first year on the committee, we answered the question that every student asks at the Fresher's Fair: "What do you do?". We decided to hold weekly events: panel discussions, rationality workshops, speakers and socials. However, this did not become a success overnight. Organising speakers and creating thought provoking events, regularly, requires a lot of work and I am currently in my third year of doing it for a thriving society.

I have the experience and knowledge to not only provide you with material, but also strengthen the social community directly through Humanist Students, and get involved with helping individual societies develop.

I will build the community of Humanist Students: I will use our administration and funding to directly oversee events that students from all universities can enjoy. These will happen in different regions so that they are easy for students around the country to access. This will be useful to students who



are at universities without societies.

I will support individual societies: I will ensure that Humanist Students directly support societies which want to hold events that they consider beyond their current means with organisation and financial considerations. I will also facilitate cooperation between societies.

I will ensure fuller participation and review controversial policies: Humanist Students is in a new phase of centralisation. This is good because it means that the hard work is done by the professionals at Humanists UK. However, Humanist Students cannot function without the confidence of its members and member societies. Therefore, I will consult Humanist Students on our current policies and review the controversial naming policy, which has already cost affiliation and confidence, with a view to finding an improved, consistent compromise for otherwise enthusiastic societies.
