

What do the parties say? Comparing key humanist issues to the 2015 UK general election manifestos

BHA question	Conservatives	Labour	Liberal Democrats	UK Independence Party	Scottish National Party ¹	Green Party (Eng & Wales)	Plaid Cymru
http://humanism.org.uk/GE2015Qs	http://humanism.org.uk/GE2015Con *	http://humanism.org.uk/GE2015Lab *	http://humanism.org.uk/GE2015LD *	http://humanism.org.uk/GE2015UKIP *	http://humanism.org.uk/GE2015SNP *	http://humanism.org.uk/GE2015Green *	http://humanism.org.uk/GE2015Plaid *
'Will your party end religious selection in school admissions?'	Supportive of 'faith' schools. ² The Coalition Government 'supports inclusive admission arrangements', ³ but the Conservatives have no plans to reduce the degree of religious selection.	Supportive of 'faith' schools and have not committed to reducing the percentage of places which they are able to select in admissions, but have committed to a review of the admissions system more generally. ⁴	Supportive of 'faith' schools but 'We will ensure all faith schools develop an inclusive admissions policy and end unfair discrimination on grounds of faith when recruiting staff, except for those principally responsible for optional religious instruction.'	Christian manifesto says 'UKIP backs faith schools provided they are open to the whole community... [and] do not discriminate against any section of society'. ⁵ But have also said that employment discrimination 'should be a matter for the schools and no one else'. ⁶	Matter is devolved in Scotland but the SNP Government is supportive of 'faith' schools and has not taken steps to limit religious selection by denominational schools in Scotland.	'We will phase out public funding of <i>schools run by religious organisations</i> . Schools may teach about religions, but should not encourage adherence to any particular religious beliefs.'	When contacted by the BHA, said 'We don't have a specific policy on this but we believe that parents have the right to decide upon an appropriate education for their children. Faith schools are funded by the state should be properly scrutinised for public benefit.'
'Will your party include Humanism in GCSE and A Level RE syllabuses? (On an equal footing to the major religions?)'	Opposed inclusion of Humanism when recently reviewing GCSE and A level RE syllabuses, beyond a few mentions. But did require schools to study two religions at GCSE level for the first time. ⁷	No publicly stated policy on the question, but want 'faith' schools to have to teach about other religions and have their RE inspected by Ofsted. ⁸	Supportive of inclusion and diverse RE: 'To ensure all children learn about a wide range of religious and nonreligious world views, religious education will be included in the core curriculum'.	Unclear on Humanism, but 'teaching about Christianity will be a core part of religious education. RE shouldn't be disparaging towards Christianity, or to any other religion, but taught in a neutral manner explaining the reasons why some people believe and others don't. Children should be taught about all religions'. ⁹	Matter is devolved in Scotland but the SNP Government have not taken steps to require Humanism to be taught about to the same extent as the principal religions in Religious and Moral Education (RME) in Scotland.	Party policy states 'Education should encourage critical engagement with, and non-dogmatic exposure to, diverse, sometimes competing, worldviews and beliefs – whether based on culture, religion or spirituality... [Faith-based] Religious instruction... may only take place outside of school curriculum time'. ¹⁰	When contacted by the BHA, said 'Following the Donaldson review [into the school curriculum in Wales], we believe that there should be less micro-management of schools. However, it's important that schools don't favour one perspective over the other.' Matter is devolved in Wales.
'Will your party make high-quality PSHE and SRE part of the statutory school curriculum?'	Does not support making PSHE and SRE statutory, as they 'trust schools to provide the right education for their pupils'. ¹¹	'We will introduce compulsory age-appropriate sex and relationships education' and work 'with schools to stop the blight of homophobic bullying.' No plans however to make PSHE compulsory as well as SRE.	Core curriculum 'will include PSHE: a 'curriculum for life' including financial literacy, first aid and emergency lifesaving skills, citizenship, and age-appropriate sex and relationship education... We will require the teaching of sexual consent in schools as part of age-appropriate sex and relationships education.'	'We support age-appropriate sex and relationship education at secondary level, but not for primary school children.' Does not support making PSHE and SRE statutory, and wants to scrap all SRE for primary school children. ¹²	Matter is devolved in Scotland. Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education (RSHP) is a core part of the new Curriculum for Excellence and the SNP Government has produced new guidance on it. However, denominational schools can go against this guidance. ¹³	Will make 'PSHE (including sex and relationships education, and also first aid) compulsory.' SRE will be 'age-appropriate and LGBTQ-inclusive – in all schools from primary level onwards.'	Matter is devolved in Wales but in last Welsh election pledged 'We will ensure schools deliver preventative education about domestic violence, gender equality, healthy relationships and self-esteem'. ¹⁴ 2015 manifesto makes similar pledges.

¹ The SNP has stated that its MPs will vote in the UK Parliament on matters primarily concerning England and Wales that have financial implications for Scotland. But it has given no indication it will vote on other matters concerning England and Wales. This includes some of the issues discussed in this table. SNP First Minister Nicola Sturgeon comments reported in *The Guardian*, February 2015: <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/feb/08/scottish-mps-vote-english-laws-nicola-sturgeon>

*All party policies come from the respective party manifestos unless a specific reference is given.

² Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron comments to the *Lancashire Telegraph*, March 2015:

http://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/11861293.GENERAL_ELECTION_2015_Prime_Minister_David_Cameron_s_free_schools_plan_triggers_debate/

³ Conservative Schools Minister Lord Nash comments in Parliament, July 2013: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldhansrd/text/130722-0001.htm#st_2

⁴ Labour shadow education secretary Tristram Hunt Q&A in *The Guardian*, March 2015: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/mar/30/labour-education-policies-schools-tristram-hunt>

⁵ UKIP Christian Manifesto, April 2015: http://www.election2015.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/UKIPChristian_Manifesto-1.pdf

⁶ Press release from UKIP education spokesperson Paul Nuttall, February 2015: <http://ukipnw.org.uk/on-faith-schools/>

⁷ New GCSE Religious Studies subject content, February 2015: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-religious-studies>

⁸ Tristram Hunt comments to *The Guardian*, June 2014: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/jun/14/taxpayers-should-not-fund-faith-schools>

⁹ Paul Nuttall Q&A in *The Guardian*, March 2015: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/mar/17/ukip-education-policies-schools-paul-nuttall>

¹⁰ Green Party education policy: <http://policy.greenparty.org.uk/ed.html>

¹¹ Conservative Schools Reform Minister Nick Gibb comments in Parliament, March 2015: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm150310/halltext/150310h0002.htm#150310h0002.htm_spnew3

¹² Press release from UKIP education spokesperson Paul Nuttall, February 2015: http://www.ukip.org/labour_sex_education_plans_a_disgrace

¹³ Scottish Government Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education guidance, December 2014: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00465948.pdf>

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'Will your party get rid of the requirement for daily collective worship in schools?'	Supportive of the requirement for collective worship in schools. ¹⁵	Supportive of the requirement for collective worship in schools. ¹⁶	'[W]e will give schools the freedom to set policy on whether to hold acts of collective worship, while ensuring any such acts are strictly optional.'	'Children should... not [be] required to partake in a religious act or ceremony.' ¹⁷	Matter is devolved in Scotland but the SNP Government has not supported calls to end the requirement to have six acts of religious observance in schools per year. ¹⁸	Party policy says 'we will abolish the requirement for a compulsory daily act of worship. Schools which choose to continue to hold acts of worship will provide an alternative activity for learners who choose not to take part. Pupils who do not participate in worship will not suffer any form of discrimination.' ¹⁹	When contacted by the BHA, said 'Plaid Cymru does not have a party position on this matter. Our spokesperson on education has said that he believes the statutory obligation to hold a religious service should be removed and schools should be able to choose how to bring the whole school together and reflect upon citizenship.' Matter is devolved in Wales.
'Will your party remove the bishops from the House of Lords?'	No plans to reform the House of Lords: 'While we still see a strong case for introducing an elected element into our second chamber, this is not a priority in the next Parliament'.	'Labour is committed to replacing the House of Lords with an elected Senate of the Nations and Regions, to represent every part of the United Kingdom, and to improve the democratic legitimacy of the second chamber.'	'We will: Reform the House of Lords with a proper democratic mandate, starting from the proposals in the 2012 Bill.' The 2012 Bill had some reserved seats for bishops, but party policy is that there should be a fully elected second chamber. ²⁰	No stated policy.	'The SNP believes the House of Lords should be scrapped and replaced with a fully elected second chamber.'	'The Green Party will: <i>Reform the House of Lords</i> to become a fully elected body chosen by PR'.	'We want to see an elected House of Lords, elected by Single Transferable Vote, while decisions affecting Wales continue to be made there.'
'Will your party legalise humanist marriages?'	No plans to legalise. The Prime Minister's Office blocked the legal recognition of humanist marriage last year. ²¹ The Government instead asked the Law Commission to review wider marriage law, which may take several years. ²²	Have pledged to give legal recognition to humanist marriages if returned to power. ²³	'To promote equality in relationships... we will: Permit humanist weddings.' Have described the ban on humanist marriage is 'illiberal and unfair'. ²⁴	No stated policy. 'UKIP opposed same-sex marriage legislation because it impinged upon the beliefs of millions of people of faith' but 'We will not repeal the legislation, as it would be grossly unfair and unethical to 'un-marry' loving couples or restrict further marriages'. ²⁵	Matter is devolved and humanist marriage is already legal in Scotland. The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act, proposed by the SNP Government, established a separate category of 'belief-based' marriage for non-religious organisations and hence clarified and strengthened the relevant legal provisions.	'Clearly the law should allow those who wish to have a humanist marriage ceremony the same rights as couples who want a religious ceremony with the celebrant of their choice. The Green Party is committed to ending the current discrimination as soon as possible.' ²⁶	When contacted by the BHA, said 'We don't have a party policy on this issue.'

¹⁴ Plaid Cymru's 2011 Welsh Assembly manifesto: http://www.english.plaidcymru.org/uploads/Manifesto_2011/Main_manifesto_English_SP.pdf

¹⁵ Conservative Secretary of State for Education Nicky Morgan comments at the TES pre-election debate, March 2015: <http://www.edcomsteachers.com/blog/2015/tes-pre-election-debate-part-2/>

¹⁶ Tristram Hunt comments at the TES pre-election debate, March 2015: <http://www.edcomsteachers.com/blog/2015/tes-pre-election-debate-part-2/>

¹⁷ Paul Nuttall Q&A in *The Guardian*, March 2015: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/mar/17/ukip-education-policies-schools-paul-nuttall>

¹⁸ Scottish Government response to petition on religious observance in schools, October 2013: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_PublicPetitionsCommittee/General%20Documents/PE1487_U_Scottish_Government_17.10.13.pdf

¹⁹ Green Party education policy: <http://policy.greenparty.org.uk/ed.html>

²⁰ Liberal Democrats 2012 Federal Conference report motion on 'Reform of the House of Lords': http://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/libdems/pages/2012/attachments/original/1390841944/Conference_Report_Brighton_2012.pdf

²¹ *Sunday Times* report, December 2014: <http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/Politics/article1496012.ece>

²² Outcome of Government consultation on humanist marriage, December 2014: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/388986/marriages-by-non-religious-belief-organisations.pdf

²³ Labour Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities Baroness Thornton comments to the BHA, December 2014: <https://humanism.org.uk/2014/12/18/labour-pledge-legalise-humanist-marriages-government-blocks-proposals-disappointing-thousands-couples/>

²⁴ Liberal Democrat Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg Q&A with *Pink News* readers, April 2015: <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2015/04/10/nick-clegg-calls-for-surrogacy-reform-and-action-on-gay-cure-therapy-in-pinknews-qa/>

²⁵ UKIP Christian Manifesto, April 2015: http://www.election2015.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/UKIPChristian_Manifesto-1.pdf

²⁶ Green Party Leader Natalie Bennett blog entry on the Green Party website, December 2014: <https://www.greenparty.org.uk/leaders-blog/2015/01/11/humanist-marriages-of-course/>

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'Will your party commit to retaining the Human Rights Act?'	'The next Conservative Government will scrap the Human Rights Act, and introduce a British Bill of Rights. This will break the formal link between British courts and the European Court of Human Rights.'	'A Labour Government will stand up for citizens' individual rights, protecting the Human Rights Act and reforming, rather than walking away from, the European Court of Human Rights.'	'We will: Protect the Human Rights Act and enshrine the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in UK law. We will take appropriate action to comply with decisions of UK courts and the European Court of Human Rights.'	'We will remove ourselves from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights... We will also repeal Labour's Human Rights legislation.'	'Given the central place of human rights in Scotland's constitutional settlement, and their importance at the heart of our politics, we will oppose scrapping the Human Rights Act or withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights.'	Party policy states 'The Green Party supports the Human Rights Act... fully supports the right of appeal to, and the primacy of, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg... [and] will seek the incorporation into law of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.' ²⁷	'We support the Human Rights Act and the European Convention on Human Rights, and will oppose any moves by a UK Government to withdraw from those.'
'Will your party legalise assisted dying for people who are terminally ill and people who are permanently and incurably suffering?'	No plans to legalise. The Prime Minister supports a free vote on the issue, ²⁸ but told MPs that he was 'not convinced that further steps need to be taken. I worry about legalising euthanasia because people might be being pushed into things that they don't actually want for themselves'. ²⁹	No plans to legalise. Party leaders support a free vote on the issue. ³⁰	Party policy states that 'medical assistance to die should be available to patients in particular circumstances', however, 'any such legislative proposal should be determined by way of a free vote in order to respect the freedom of conscience of Parliamentarians'. ³¹	'UKIP has no plans to change existing legislation on euthanasia or the "right to die." ³²	The SNP Government has not supported assisted dying legislation proposed in the Scottish Parliament. It has, however, allowed its MSPs a free vote on the matter in the past and is likely to do so again. ³³	'We would: Provide the right to an <i>assisted death</i> within a rigorous framework of regulation and in the context of the availability of the highest level of palliative care'.	When contacted by the BHA, said 'We don't have a party policy on this issue.'
'Will your party introduce protected 'buffer zones' around abortion clinics?'	No stated policy. The Conservative-led Coalition Government did not seek to change the abortion laws more generally.	'Women should be able to attend appointments or make difficult decisions about abortion with their family and doctors. And they shouldn't be filmed or accosted.' ³⁴	When contacted by the BHA, said that the matter is a conscience issue that Lib Dem MPs would have a free vote on. No policy otherwise, nor policy in support of changing the abortion laws more generally.	No stated policy. 'We will encourage compliance with the Abortion Act 1967 and seek to make gender abortions illegal.' ³⁵	No stated policy. The SNP Government in Scotland has not sought to change the abortion laws more generally. ³⁶	When contacted by the BHA, said 'yes we support this'. ³⁷ Policy also states the party 'will not support any change to the current laws on abortions which would aim to more difficult for women to obtain abortions'. ³⁸	When contacted by the BHA, said 'We don't have a policy on this issue.'

²⁷ Green Party human rights policy: <http://policy.greenparty.org.uk/rr.html>

²⁸ *Guardian* report on progress of Lord Falconer's Assisted Dying Bill, January 2015: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/jan/17/assisted-dying-bill-held-up-in-the-house-of-lords>

²⁹ David Cameron statement to Parliament, July 2014: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm140716/debtext/140716-0001.htm#140716-0001.htm_spm34

³⁰ *Guardian* report on progress of Lord Falconer's Assisted Dying Bill, January 2015: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/jan/17/assisted-dying-bill-held-up-in-the-house-of-lords>

³¹ Liberal Democrats 2012 Federal Conference report motion on 'Medically Assisted Dying': http://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/libdems/pages/2012/attachments/original/1390841944/Conference_Report_Brighton_2012.pdf

³² UKIP Christian Manifesto, April 2015: http://www.election2015.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/UKIPChristian_Manifesto-1.pdf

³³ *BBC News* report on progress of the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill, January 2015: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-31505627>

³⁴ Labour Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper's writing for *The Independent*, December 2014: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/women-attending-abortion-clinics-have-a-right-not-to-be-menaced-9913654.html>

³⁵ UKIP Christian Manifesto, April 2015: http://www.election2015.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/UKIPChristian_Manifesto-1.pdf

³⁶ *BBC News* report on SNP First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP's views on abortion, October 2012: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-20002895>

³⁷ We were also pointed to Green Party MP Caroline Lucas's primary sponsorship of an early day motion on the issue from December 2014: <http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2014-15/612>

³⁸ Green Party health policy: <http://policy.greenparty.org.uk/he.html>

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'Will your party introduce an ambassador on international freedom of religion or belief?'	As part of the Coalition Government the Conservatives did this, including introducing an FCO Advisory Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief of which the BHA is a part.	'We will appoint a Global Envoy for Religious Freedom, and establish a multi-faith advisory council on religious freedom within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.' Have clarified that this includes non-religious beliefs. ³⁹	As part of the Coalition Government the Liberal Democrats did this, including introducing an FCO Advisory Group on Religion or Belief of which the BHA is a part.	No stated policy. Has advocated only admitting Christian refugees to the UK. ⁴⁰	No stated policy.	No stated policy. 'We will: Uphold the principles of freedom of speech and peaceful protest, including support for vulnerable communities of all religious faiths and none.'	No stated policy. When contacted by the BHA, said 'We believe in the freedom of individuals to practise religion or not.'

About the BHA

The British Humanist Association is the national charity working on behalf of non-religious people who seek to live ethical and fulfilling lives on the basis of reason and humanity. We promote Humanism, support and represent the non-religious, and promote a secular state and equal treatment in law and policy of everyone, regardless of religion or belief. Founded in 1896, we have around 40,000 members and supporters, and over 90 local and special interest affiliates.



The BHA is independent of all political parties and does not support, fund or advocate any particular political party.

All party policies come from the respective party manifestos unless a specific reference is given. Where policies are not stated we contacted the parties to seek further clarity and the table incorporates any replies we received. If you spot something where you think we've got it wrong, or have missed a piece of information, then please do contact us.

Some of the issues we discuss are devolved to Scotland and/or Wales and so the Scottish National Party's and/or Plaid Cymru's policies are aimed at the devolved governments and not at the UK Government in Westminster. Where this is the case we have stated it. The SNP has stated that its MPs will only vote in the UK Parliament on matters primarily concerning England, Wales or Northern Ireland when those matters have financial implications for Scotland. But it has given no indication it will vote on other matters primarily concerning England, Wales or Northern Ireland and in the past has not done so. This includes some of the issues discussed in this table.

You can find out more about our election work, including how to write to your prospective parliamentary candidates (PPCs) about these issues, at <https://humanism.org.uk/what-you-can-do-to-help/take-action-2015-general-election/>

For more information please contact:

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³⁹ Labour Shadow Foreign Office Minister Kerry McCarthy tweets, April 2015: <https://twitter.com/KerryMP/status/587581990356049921> and <https://twitter.com/KerryMP/status/587582313350963200>

⁴⁰ UKIP Leader Nigel Farage comments reported in *politics.co.uk*, April 2015: <http://www.politics.co.uk/news/2015/04/22/refugee-crisis-only-take-in-christians-insists-nigel-farage>