Distinguished supporters’ letter on creationism, 2002

In March 2002, 43 of the British Humanist Association's eminent scientist supporters and Humanist Philosophers signed and sent the letter below, deploring the teaching of Creationism in schools, to Prime Minister Tony Blair and relevant Government departments.

The letter was copied to: The Secretary of State for Education and Skills; the Minister for Schools Standards; the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Science; Professor David King, Government Chief Scientific Officer; Sir William Stubbs, Chair, QCA; and Martin Hollins, Principal Officer, Science, QCA.

The Right Hon Tony Blair MP, Prime Minister
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
LONDON SW1A 2AS
26 March 2002

Dear Prime Minister

Creationism in British schools

We are alarmed to learn that creationists are now teaching in at least one state-funded school, Emmanuel College in Gateshead, that the Darwinian evolutionary hypothesis is “a matter of faith” (TES, 25/1/02, Guardian 9/3/02, Channel 4 News 11/3/02). Creationist science teachers appear to be exploiting the wording of KS4 Science in the National Curriculum, which refers to pupils learning “how scientific controversies can arise from different ways of interpreting empirical evidence [for example Darwin’s theory of evolution]”. Scientists may disagree about the details and processes of evolution, but they do not disagree about whether it happened, and it is disingenuous of teachers to claim otherwise.

We urgently call for: a tightening up of the legal requirements in National Curriculum Science to prevent creation stories being taught as anything other than religious myths; clear guidance from GCSE examination boards to teachers and pupils that creationism is not a scientific hypothesis; reform of the Science curriculum to enable teaching about Darwinian evolution well before KS4, which may become optional in the future - we suggest teaching it at KS2.

Yours sincerely

Dr David Archard
Sir Michael Atiyah OM FRS
Dr Julian Baggini
Dr Piers Benn
Professor Simon Blackburn
Professor Colin Blakemore ScD FMedSci FRS
Professor Margaret Boden
Sir Hermann Bondi
Dr Malcolm Cass
Peter Cave
Michael Clark
John Christie
Sir Kenneth Clucas
Dr Helena Cronin
Professor Richard Dawkins FRS
Professor Robin Dunbar FRA FBA
Professor Sir Anthony Epstein
Professor Antony Flew
Dr Steven French
Professor John L. Harper CBE FRS
Dr Alan Haworth
Professor Robert A Hinde CBE FRS
Professor Hugh Huxley MBE, ScD, FRS
Dr Matthew Kiernan
Dr Brendan Larvor
Dr Stephen Law
Professor David Levene
Professor John Maynard Smith FRS
Professor Richard Norman
Professor David Papineau
James Parry
Sir Roger Penrose FRS
Professor Hugh Pyper
Dr Janet Radcliffe Richards
Jonathan Réé
Dr Ben Rogers
Professor Sir Joseph Rotblat FRS
Professor Peter Simons
Sir David Smith FRS
John Maynard Smith FRS
Dr Suzanne Uniacke
Dr Nigel Warburton
Professor Lewis Wolpert CBE FRS

(Signatures available for inspection at BHA office)