

What do the parties say? Comparing key humanist issues to party positions in Northern Ireland for the 2017 General Election

All party policies come from the respective party manifestos unless a specific reference is given. Sinn Féin do not take their seats or vote in the Westminster Parliament.

A number of the issues that we work on are devolved to Northern Ireland. This means that in Westminster, the parties only legislate for England, or for England and Wales. As such, on some issues we have presented the views of the parties in a Northern Irish context, and explained where it isn't clear that the party would take the same approach in Westminster.

| Northern Ireland Humanists question | DUP | Sinn Féin | UUP | SDLP | Alliance Party | TUV | Green Party (NI) | People Before Profit |
|---|--|--|---|---|--|---|--|--|
| Manifesto link | https://humanism.org.uk/GE2017DUP | https://humanism.org.uk/GE2017SE | https://humanism.org.uk/GE2017UUP | https://humanism.org.uk/GE2017SDLP | https://humanism.org.uk/GE2017Alliance | https://humanism.org.uk/GE2017TUV | https://humanism.org.uk/GE2017Green | Manifesto not yet published |
| 'Would you support an end to religious discrimination in the employment of staff in all state-funded schools?' (This matter is devolved in Northern Ireland; the Westminster Parliament only legislates on it for England.) | In the context of Northern Ireland, 'The DUP supports equality of treatment for all education sectors, including removal of discrimination in teacher employment.' Unclear for Westminster. | Won't vote in Westminster. In Northern Ireland in February 2016 opposed an attempt to end religious discrimination in teacher employment – although supported such a move in principle in 2013. ¹ | In the context of Northern Ireland, 'We have: Called for the removal of Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Equal Treatment Order 1998 which exempts teachers in schools from protections against discrimination on the basis of religion.' ² Unclear for Westminster. | In the context of Northern Ireland, in February 2016 opposed an attempt to end religious discrimination in teacher employment. ³ Unclear for Westminster. | In the context of Northern Ireland, when contacted by us, said 'We do not support the "teacher exception" contained within Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998 and have voted to remove it'. Unclear for Westminster. | In the context of Northern Ireland, TUV is committed to 'getting rid of the exemption for teaching from fair employment legislation. Everyone should have an equal chance to avail of employment opportunities.' Unclear for Westminster. | In the context of Northern Ireland, when contacted by us, said it 'opposes religious discrimination of all kinds, which would include employment in public schools.' Unclear for Westminster. | In the context of Northern Ireland, when contacted by us, said 'PBP is for: an end to religious discrimination in schools'. Unclear for Westminster. |
| 'Do you think we should get rid of faith-based religious education in state schools, and instead treat all major religious and non-religious worldviews equally?' (This matter is devolved in Northern Ireland; the Westminster Parliament only legislates on it for England.) | In the context of Northern Ireland, the DUP has supported 'shared education' and 'the Shared Education Bill', whereby different single faith schools share the same campus, and ultimately wants there to be a 'single education sector', but does not support integrated schools as the way there. ⁴ No clear views on changing education about religious and non-religious worldviews. Unclear for Westminster. | Won't vote in Westminster. In Northern Ireland, will 'Continue to encourage & facilitate the growth of... Integrated and Shared Education.' ⁵ But also supports 'parental preference – whether it be in the integrated, Catholic maintained, the controlled or Irish medium sectors.' ⁶ No clear views on changing education about religious and non-religious worldviews. | In the context of Northern Ireland, calls for 'a single education system, where children mix from age four... but which also protects a family's right to education within a religious context.' ⁷ When contacted by us, said 'Religious Education should remain taught in state schools, school children should also be made aware that there are many different religions around the globe, as well as non-religious viewpoints.' Unclear for Westminster. | In the context of Northern Ireland 'We recognise the value of faith based education and the initiative of various churches in this regard. The SDLP is committed to parental choice and access for pupils to faith based, integrated, Irish medium and state education.' Unclear for Westminster. | In the context of Northern Ireland want at least 20% of children in integrated schools within ten years. When contacted by us, said 'We support undertaking a full and comprehensive review of the curriculum to ensure that a wide-range of academic and vocational options is available. This could be considered as part of that.' Unclear for Westminster. | In the context of Northern Ireland, has described 'shared and integrated education' as 'social engineering'. ⁸ Unclear for Westminster. | In the context of Northern Ireland, when contacted by us, said 'We would call for the creation in Northern Ireland of a single, publicly funded, non-selective, integrated secular education system, so we would oppose any attempt to enshrine one religion above others (or above agnosticism or atheism).' Unclear for Westminster. | In the context of Northern Ireland, 'People Before Profit wants to see: An integrated, all-ability education system... We oppose the sham "shared education" programme which simply reinforces segregation.' When contacted by us, said 'PBP is for: Education about religious and non-religious beliefs'. ⁹ Unclear for Westminster. |

¹ BHA news item 'Bid to end religious discrimination in teacher recruitment defeated in Northern Ireland Assembly', February 2016:

<https://humanism.org.uk/2016/02/24/bid-to-end-religious-discrimination-in-teacher-recruitment-defeated-in-northern-ireland-assembly/>

² UUP Assembly Election Manifesto 2017: <https://uup.org/assets/policies/2017%20assembly%20manifesto.pdf>

³ BHA news item 'Bid to end religious discrimination in teacher recruitment defeated in Northern Ireland Assembly', February 2016:

<https://humanism.org.uk/2016/02/24/bid-to-end-religious-discrimination-in-teacher-recruitment-defeated-in-northern-ireland-assembly/>

⁴ *Belfast Telegraph* report, January 2015: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/dup-leader-peter-robinson-turns-his-back-on-the-policy-to-create-more-integrated-schools-30932883.html>

⁵ Sinn Féin Assembly Manifesto 2016, April 2016: <https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2016/MANIFESTO2016Assemblytogether.pdf>

⁶ *News Letter* article on parties' views on integrated education, March 2016: <http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/northern-ireland-news/integrated-education-where-do-ni-parties-stand-1-7291875#ixzz4727vPOps>

⁷ UUP Assembly Election Manifesto 2017: <https://uup.org/assets/policies/2017%20assembly%20manifesto.pdf>

⁸ TUV statement on the Stormont House Agreement, December 2014: <http://tuv.org.uk/tuv-commentary-on-the-stormont-house-agreement/>

⁹ People Before Profit Assembly Manifesto 2017: <http://www.peoplebeforeprofit.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/PBP-Manifesto-Assembly-Elections-2017.pdf>

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| 'Will your party make high-quality, accurate, and inclusive personal, social, health, and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) compulsory in all English schools, including faith schools?' (This matter is devolved in Northern Ireland; the Westminster Parliament only legislates on it for England.) | No. Has voted against any attempts to strengthen sex and relationships education in Westminster. ¹⁰ | Won't vote in Westminster. In the Republic of Ireland advocated for 'comprehensive, evidence based sex education' to be introduced in schools. ¹¹ | In the context of Northern Ireland, 'We want to empower our young people through age-appropriate sex and relationships education and support schools and teachers by equipping them with the knowledge of how to recognise instances of homophobic and transphobic bullying so it can be tackled at the first signs.' ¹² Unclear for Westminster. | In the context of Northern Ireland have called for comprehensive, age-appropriate SRE to be introduced, including in primary schools. ¹³ Unclear for Westminster. | In the context of Northern Ireland, 'In order to refresh the curriculum, we will: Introduce age-appropriate sex and relationship education (SRE) in schools.' ¹⁴ Unclear for Westminster. | No stated policy. | In the context of Northern Ireland, the Green Party had previously committed to requiring Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) in all schools and ensuring comprehensive and age-appropriate relationship and sexuality education for all school pupils. Unclear for Westminster. | In the context of Northern Ireland, when contacted by us, said 'PBP is for: Comprehensive compulsory RSE'. Unclear for Westminster. |
| 'Will your party remove the 26 unelected bishops from the House of Lords?' | No stated policy. All DUP MPs in 2012 voted against the House of Lords Reform Bill which would have seen the number of bishops reduced to 12. ¹⁵ | Won't vote in Westminster. The party does not recognise the jurisdiction of the Westminster parliament over Northern Ireland so wouldn't form a specific policy on this. | No stated policy. | No stated policy. | 'We will support: direct elections to the House of Lords. Elected representatives could be elected by proportional representation from the 12 regions of the UK, including Northern Ireland.' | No stated policy. | Yes. 'Move to a system of proportional representation for Westminster elections, and will make the House of Lords a fully elected body.' | No stated policy. |
| 'Would you support the decriminalisation of abortion across the UK and/or extending the right to access abortion in Northern Ireland, at a minimum in a similar way to how it is legal in Britain?' (This matter is devolved in Northern Ireland; the Westminster Parliament only legislates on it for England and Wales.) | No. Opposes any change in abortion law. ¹⁶ | Won't vote in Westminster. In Northern Ireland, party policy supports the legalisation of abortion in the case of fatal foetal abnormality. ¹⁷ All MLAs that voted in February 2016 also voted in favour of changing the law in cases of rape and incest. ¹⁸ | When contacted by us, said that this is a matter of individual conscience. 73% of MLAs that voted in Northern Ireland in February 2016 voted against changing the law in the case of fatal foetal abnormality and all voted against doing so in the cases of rape and incest. | No. 'At Westminster the SDLP will continue to oppose any proposals to extend the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland.' | When contacted by us, said that this is a matter of individual conscience. All MLAs that voted in February 2016 voted for changing the law in the case of fatal foetal abnormality but 71% voted against doing likewise in the cases of rape and incest. | No. 'TUV does not believe that the unborn child should be denied his or her fundamental human rights. Though there is a superficial plausibility within the promotion of abortion in cases of potentially fatal abnormalities, the experience of the 1967 Act in Great Britain is a salutary warning against such glib assurance.' | Yes. 'Decriminalise abortion. The UK is not meeting its minimum human rights requirements for people across the UK in this regard, and especially in Northern Ireland.' | When contacted by us, said 'PBP is for: Free, safe, legal abortion'. |

¹⁰ See e.g. <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2010-07-21&number=39>; <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2011-05-04&number=266>; <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2015-07-15&number=49>; <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2015-07-15&number=49>

¹¹ Sinn Féin Republic of Ireland Education Spokesperson Jonathan O'Brien comments, April 2014: <http://www.sinnfein.ie/contents/29591>. See also Sinn Féin Northern Ireland Education Spokesperson Chris Hazzard comments, October 2015: <http://www.sinnfein.ie/contents/36846>

¹² UUP Assembly Election Manifesto 2017: <https://uup.org/assets/policies/2017%20assembly%20manifesto.pdf>

¹³ *Belfast Telegraph* report on SDLP Education Spokesperson Sean Rogers comments, February 2015: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/stormont-should-consider-sex-education-for-primary-pupils-31001350.html>

¹⁴ Alliance Party Assembly Manifesto 2017: <https://www.allianceparty.org/document/manifesto/2017-general-election-manifesto#document>

¹⁵ BBC News on House of Lords Reform Bill: Rebel MPs, July 2012: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-18793449>

¹⁶ *News Letter* report on votes on legalising abortion in cases of fatal foetal abnormality, rape, and incest, 11 February 2016: <http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/health/bid-to-change-abortion-law-fails-after-emotive-debate-1-7208996>

¹⁷ *Guardian* report on Sinn Féin policy amendment, 7 March 2015: <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/mar/07/sinn-fein-drops-opposition-to-abortion-at-derry-congress>

¹⁸ Report of February 2016 vote on abortion amendments in the Assembly, March 2016: <http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&eveDate=2016/03/01&docID=261095#2051553>

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| 'Will your party legalise humanist marriages, as is the case in Scotland?' (This matter is devolved in Northern Ireland; the Westminster Parliament only legislates on it for England and Wales.) | No stated policy. | Won't vote in Westminster. Supported legalisation of humanist marriages in the Republic of Ireland, which occurred in 2012-13. ¹⁹ | When contacted by us, said it does not currently have policy in this area. | No stated policy. | In the context of Northern Ireland, when contacted by us, said 'We would support the extension of the authority to solemnise marriages to accredited humanist celebrants.' Unclear for Westminster. | No stated policy. | In the context of Northern Ireland, told Northern Ireland Humanists, '[we are] perfectly happy to support humanist marriages.' Unclear for Westminster. | In the context of Northern Ireland, when contacted by us, said 'We are for legal recognition for humanist weddings, as is the case in the Republic of Ireland'. Unclear for Westminster. |
| 'Will your party commit to retaining the Human Rights Act and remaining part of the European Court of Human Rights?' | No. 'The DUP has long been critical of the Human Rights Act and the way in which it has been interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights... We support, as a minimum, the reform of the Human Rights Act, to remove the "right to family life" defence against deportation upon conviction for a serious criminal offence.' ²⁰ | Won't vote in Westminster. But has nonetheless spoken out against the scrapping of the Human Rights Act and remaining part of the Convention. ²¹ | Yes. When contacted by us, said 'We believe that the rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights are essential to a free society. We are open to the idea of a British Bill of Rights replacing the Human Rights Act, but only if the same rights and protections are given. We oppose any attempt to weaken Human Rights legislation in Northern Ireland.' | Yes. 'The SDLP will stridently oppose any attempt to caricature and devalue human rights at home and abroad. The Human Rights Act underpins the Good Friday Agreement; it must be complemented by rather than supplanted by a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights.. We will also vehemently oppose any attempts to withdraw from the European Convention on Human Rights.' | Yes. 'We will oppose any proposed repeal of the Human Rights Act or withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights.' | No stated policy. | Yes. Pledges to 'defend the UK Human Rights Act.' | Yes. When contacted by us, said 'We are for retaining [the Human Rights Act].' |
| 'Will your party legalise assisted dying for people who are terminally ill and people who are permanently and incurably suffering?' (This matter is devolved in Northern Ireland; the Westminster Parliament only legislates on it for England and Wales.) | No. Has voted against proposals to legalise assisted dying in Westminster. ²² | Won't vote in Westminster, but at any rate has no stated policy. | When contacted by us, said that this is a matter of individual conscience. Has voted against proposals in Westminster. ²³ | No. Has voted against proposals to legalise assisted dying in Westminster. ²⁴ | When contacted by us, said that this is a matter of individual conscience. | No stated policy. | In the context of Northern Ireland, has previously stated that it will support dignity in dying. Unclear if this refers to incurably suffering, as well as terminally ill, individuals. | No stated policy. |

¹⁹ Civil Registration (Amendment) Bill 2012: <http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/bills28/bills/2012/10512/document1.htm>

²⁰ Statement of DUP Parliamentary Chief Whip Jeffrey Donaldson, May 2015: <http://www.mydup.com/news/article/donaldson-human-rights-act-has-failed-victims>

²¹ Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams' statement on the Human Rights Act, European Convention, and Good Friday Agreement, July 2016: <http://www.sinnfein.ie/contents/40835>

²² House of Commons Assisted Dying Bill vote results, September 2015: <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2015-09-11&number=69>

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

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About Northern Ireland Humanists

Northern Ireland Humanists is part of Humanists UK, working with the Humanist Association of Ireland. At Humanists UK and Northern Ireland Humanists, we want a tolerant world where rational thinking and kindness prevail. We work to support lasting change for a better society, championing ideas for the one life we have. We do this because we're humanists, people who shape our own lives in the here and now, because we believe it's the only life we get. Our work helps people be happier and more fulfilled, and by bringing non-religious people together we help them develop their own views and an understanding of the world around them. We're committed to putting humanism into practice. Through our ceremonies, pastoral support, education services, and campaigning work, we advance free thinking and freedom of choice so everyone can live in a fair and equal society.

Northern Ireland Humanists and Humanists UK are independent of all political parties and do not support, fund, or advocate any particular political party.

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You can find out more about our election work at <https://humanism.org.uk/GE2017>

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