

Humanist and Secularist Liberal Democrats

AGM 2025 Chair's report

Conference stalls and fringes

As in prior years, much of our activity has been based around the Liberal Democrat Conferences.

We have had stalls at both Spring and Autumn Conferences, providing a fantastic opportunity to discuss our activities and recruit new members and supporters.

At Autumn conference, we also held a packed fringe event where our panellists - Andrew Copson, CEO of Humanists UK; Cameron Thomas, MP for Tewkesbury; Gary McLelland, CEO of Humanists International; and Rebecca Vincent from Big Brother Watch - shared their thoughts and reflections around the topic on the role of humanist and liberal values in tackling the global rise of nationalism, populism and irrationality.

I was also delighted to speak alongside several of our MPs at Humanist UK's conference reception and we had a drafting amendments accepted on a couple of policy motions, ensuring that humanist and secularist values are reflected in our Party policies.

Administrative matters

Our committee members continue to be busy working behind the scenes on technical and administrative matters. The Lighthouse system is still not working effectively for us in managing our members records and this is an ongoing challenge. However, more positively, we have had a rebrand this year, with a new logo and some refreshed publicity materials.

Campaigns

We continue to work closely with Humanists UK, the National Secular Society and our MPs, particularly members of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanists Group. Areas of particular focus this year include:

Assisted dying

We have been closely monitoring the progress of the Assisted Dying Bill, a subject that we have been campaigning on for many years and we are hopeful that this will be passed over the coming months.

Religious selection in schools

In January, we wrote to Munira Wilson MP, in her capacity as Education Spokesperson, to raise concerns regarding certain elements of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. Whilst we are supportive of the bill as a whole, we are concerned about Clause 51 which effectively drops the current 50% cap on religious selection in school admissions, enabling new 100% religiously selective schools to open. We understand that new Voluntary Aided schools will not be subject to the '50% faith cap', which allows religious selection for only the first 50% of a school's pupil intake and which has been applied to new academies/free schools since 2007 (and so all new schools since 2011). Munira is on the Committee for the Bill, alongside Ian Sollom MP, and tabled an amendment to ensure the faith cap remains in place for new schools. Unfortunately this was rejected by the Government.

Collective worship

Baroness Lorely Burt, Honourary Co-President of HSLD, has tabled her Education (Assemblies) Bill calling for the removal of the requirement for daily Christian collective worship in schools in England without a religious character, replacing this with inclusive assemblies.

The last couple of months have seen positive news in respect of:

Humanist weddings

In October the Government announced that it will legally recognise humanist marriages. This is existing Party policy and something we have long been campaigning for. However, this is subject to further consultation and legislation will only be introduced when Parliamentary time allows, meaning that reform could take years. We urge the Government to act now and use its powers under the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) 2013 Act to lay an Order so that humanist couples will be given the same rights to get married in line with their beliefs as our religious counterparts.

School curriculum reform

The Government's Curriculum and Assessment Review has recommended a number of reforms, including adding a reformed, and possibly renamed, Religious Education (RE) into the National Curriculum. We expect this to include humanism. The Review has also proposed making citizenship a statutory part of the primary National Curriculum, and to place a stronger emphasis on scientific literacy.

Future plans

Over the coming months, communications will continue to be an area of focus for us. Over this year we have started producing semi-regular members' updates, something we will continue to develop and we are also intending to continue with online members' events during the course of the year, following a successful pilot over the summer where we welcomed Julian Huppert to share his experiences of assisted dying.

We are also focused on updating our website and enhancing our social media presence. If any members have an interest in or experience of these areas support would be very welcome.

A further area of focus is on our membership. I have recently discovered that both the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum and Labour Humanists each have around 500 members, so this gives us a target to work towards – and we are a very long way off at the moment.

Thank you to everyone in HSLD, especially my fellow committee members, for all your support over the year. I very much look forward to continuing to work with you all if I am re-elected.



Jenny Wilkinson
Chair of HSLD