



A Humanist Manifesto

HUMANISM is a way of life based on reason, tolerance and compassion and a belief in the right of every person to the greatest possible freedom, compatible with the rights of others. Humanists believe in the worth and dignity of individual human beings and our ability to think, feel and act for ourselves. We also believe that our morality and values are not derived from religious texts, but that they spring from our human nature and social needs.

The Humanist Association of Northern Ireland has a vision for our society in which diversity is celebrated and political decisions are based on practical reason, compassion and science, free from religious dogma, recognising the rights and responsibilities of those who live in a democratic society. Northern Ireland is one of the most conservative societies in Western Europe but we believe that, by adopting these values, it could be one of the most progressive. In the society that we want to see:

- Everyone is able to live in a manner of his or her own choosing, consistent with the rights of others.
- Everyone is able to determine his or her own identity and is not labelled by others.
- Every child is free from indoctrination and is encouraged to question and explore.
- The Earth's resources are conserved for future generations.

In 2016 those who share our vision will have an opportunity to vote for an MLA and political party prepared to deliver a more tolerant, secular society. We want to see the election of Assembly candidates who will work to bring forward the following policies:

- A change to the legislation on abortion which recognises the rights of women to make decisions about their own bodies and brings Northern Irish law into line with the rest of the UK.
- Legal recognition for same-sex marriage which allows any couple to commit themselves to each other in a lifelong relationship and provides all families with equal rights under the law.
- Adoption of a regulated system for assisted dying with strict medical and legal safeguards. Such a system would recognise the fundamental right of those who are terminally ill and suffering from indignity and pain to choose how, in very specific circumstances, their life might end, free from coercion.

Assisted dying would be recognised as a core part of comprehensive, patient-centred approaches to end of life care.

- The provision of an education system which ensures that children from all backgrounds are educated together and are able to form friendships across perceived community boundaries. This requires ensuring that the NI Executive fulfils its obligation to promote and facilitate integrated education and rejects the concept of Shared Education, which has failed elsewhere in Europe.
- The development of an alternative to traditional Religious Education in schools which includes non-religious world views such as humanism, promotes the teaching of critical thinking and comparative moral philosophies, and allows pupils to engage with serious ethical and philosophical questions in a way that develops important skills of reasoning and inquiry.
- Recognition of the right of anyone to self-identify as having no religion and not belonging to either of the so-called 'two communities'. This would include removing the bias, in official surveys, statistical returns and employment monitoring, towards reporting the whole native-born population as having either a Catholic or Protestant background.
- Introduction of a registration scheme for trained Humanist celebrants, as in the Republic of Ireland and Scotland, who can offer legally-binding civil marriages and partnerships which enable couples who share humanist values to have a ceremony that reflects their way of life.
- A commitment to upholding the Equality Act (Sexual Orientations) Regulations 2006, and a rejection of attempts to undermine it which could lead to discrimination in the provision of services due to prejudice.
- Revision of the proposed Racial Equality Strategy to ensure that all Executive Departments are required to have a resourced action plan which secures equal rights and active protection of ethnic minorities from abuse and attacks.
- Strengthening of guidance to those responsible for public institutions and other publicly-funded facilities on the need to ensure these are equally welcoming to all members of society, regardless of their beliefs or non-belief, ethnicity or cultural background, and that this is not consistent with religious ceremonies, notices or texts based on only one religion.
- A commitment to investment in a programme for the public understanding of science as this is essential for full participation in a democratic society