



Monthly Bulletin — November 2025

RECAP OF RECENT NEH EVENTS

NEH to take a stand

State-funded faith schools are allowed to religiously discriminate in who they admit as pupils, if they are oversubscribed. Non-religious parents are therefore faced with a terrible choice: claim belief when they have none or accept that their child cannot go to the school of their choice.

Now NEH is going to explore the options to campaign against this invidious position locally.

This was a key outcome of a meeting of the charity's trustees and members who discussed whether NEH should take a stand on issues which are consistent with its values. The question arose following programmes of work around poverty and the plight of refugees and asylum seekers in the North East.

'It's absurd that families have to christen their child if they want them to go to the school of their choice,' said NEH Trustee and school governor Les Milne. He acknowledged that this issue is being addressed by Humanists UK at a national level, but that should not stop us working on it in the North East. 'I have always believed that we should think global and act local,' he said.

Other potential campaign issues which were discussed included the emerging links between the political far right and some factions within the Christian church, and the opportunities we as individuals have to make a stand (by carrying a placard with a Humanist message at public gatherings, for example).

In this month's Bulletin:

- *A Secular Remembrance*
- *Huge poll explodes the myth of 'broken Britain'*
- *Podcast: How to live a good life in an increasingly fragmented world*

The Secular Salon

Irene Wilkinson

During October's session, participants engaged in a *Topics from a Hat* discussion evening. Five thought-provoking topics were selected, encouraging a wide range of perspectives and lively conversation.

What advice would you give Keir Starmer?

Our group discussed advice for Keir Starmer, noting the rise of Reform UK and the effects of current economic conditions on Labour Party decisions. Some choices needed more consideration, but he could not afford more time with Nigel Farage snapping at his heels. It was recognised that the times ahead were going to be difficult for our Prime Minister. Sadly, no one offered any constructive advice for him.

Would *you* like to be in Starmer's shoes?

Have you observed any changes of attitude in society? If so, what are they and what was the reason?

We next explored whether there had been any notable shifts in societal attitudes over the past few years. There was particular concern about a growing erosion of trust in public services, especially within Education and the NHS. Instances where politicians appeared not to trust professionals to carry out their roles effectively were referenced. This lack of confidence from government towards key public sector professionals was seen as having a direct impact on both public perception and the effective delivery of these essential services.

However, it was also noted that there had been positive developments, particularly regarding attitudes towards minority communities, including LGBTQ individuals, people with disabilities, and issues of racism and discrimination. Members reflected on the significant progress made in the early 2000s, for example, when the Labour Party introduced its equalities agenda, which became law in 2005. This legislation, coupled with practical support for implementation, was seen as effecting profound change and fostering an environment of greater inclusivity and support. Personal experiences of working with anti-racist initiatives were also shared, illustrating the tangible impact of these efforts.

Have any changes of attitudes in society directly impacted on you personally?

Should Andrew lose his Princely Title?

The short discussion as to whether Andrew should lose his princely title, concluded with the realisation that at this present time, due to the law, it was not possible for this to happen. However, at the time our discussion was taking place it was felt that if more information was revealed, this situation, could well change.

What do *you* think should be done about Prince Andrew and the monarchy in general?

Are there any world leaders or other prominent people you admire for their moral stances?

The next topic led to reflections on world leaders like Dame Jacinda Adern, who was the 40th Prime Minister of New Zealand, and has earned worldwide respect for taking decisive, common-sense actions during the Covid crisis. The present pope, Leo XIV was admired for his candidness when commenting on the actions of certain world leaders.

Do *you* have a world leader who you admire?

What do you think of people who sign petitions? Is it worth it?

Finally, attendees debated why people choose to sign petitions. The motivations behind this form of civic engagement were explored, and whether petitioning is really an effective mechanism for enacting change or even whether setting up a petition is justifiable.

It was agreed that it's important to give people opportunities to express concerns and allow elected officials to act if possible. It was a useful way to publicise issues with a wider audience and may generate donations to their cause. Some participants felt petitions offer people a sense of involvement in issues —they let people show concern and feel proactive, even if immediate change isn't guaranteed.

What motivates *you* to sign petitions if you engage in this activity?

NEH NEWS Forthcoming meetings

Secular Salon:

Join us for a *Secular Remembrance* – a reflective community gathering to honour those who have lost their lives in conflict, and to recognise the continuing impact of war on people and communities today.

This inclusive event offers space for reflection, gratitude, and hope for peace — without religious observance. The focus will be on community, shared values, and remembrance.



There will be readings, reflections, and music, with an opportunity for anyone who wishes to share a short thought.

Free to attend – all are welcome.

A voluntary collection will be taken for the Royal British Legion.

Stay afterwards for tea, coffee, and conversation.

When: Saturday 15 November, 2pm

Where: Merryoaks Community Hall, Park House Rd, Durham DH1 3QF

Sunday Breakfast in Newcastle

Every two months we meet for a social breakfast at the Five Swans in Newcastle. At 10.15 am, when we gather, the pub is quiet. For less than £10 you can have anything from a slice of toast to a full English fry-up and unlimited tea or coffee. Humanism is not on the menu. There is no need to contact us beforehand, just turn up and look for our group on the ground floor.

The pub is at 14 St Mary's Place, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7PG, very convenient for car parks, the Metro and the Bus Station.

The next meeting is on Sunday 16th November.

Further to our coverage in previous Bulletins on the issue of asylum seekers in the North East:

Some facts

- The population of the North East is over **2.7 million**. The region is home to **7,296** asylum seekers
- **1%** of the world's refugees live in the UK
- **94%** of asylum seekers say they want to work but they're banned from doing so
- The UK ranks **17th** in Europe for asylum applications per capita
- **1 in 6** people crossing the Channel in small boats are children
- Nearly **1 in 3** wait more than a year for a decision

HUMANISTS UK NEWS

Success! Finally, after more than a decade of tireless campaigning, the UK Government has officially committed to granting legal recognition to humanist marriages in England and Wales. This means that humanist couples, who want a ceremony that is personal, authentic, and true to their values, will finally have that choice respected in law.



This is a moment to celebrate just how far we have come. For 12 years, our policy team has worked tirelessly – but they have never worked alone. Our celebrants, members, and supporters have been with us every step of the way: writing to parliamentarians, signing petitions, speaking to the media, and keeping the pressure on. We also owe huge thanks to the members of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group, who have been powerful champions for change inside Westminster. This breakthrough belongs to all of you. Thank you.

The change will not be immediate. The Government has said recognition will come as part of a wider package of marriage reform, with yet another consultation next year. That means couples are still being denied the recognition they deserve. We are urging ministers to do what is simple and fair: use the powers they already have and lay the order now – so that no one has to wait any longer for the wedding they truly want to be recognised in law.

Despite the delay, it is a landmark victory. Legally recognised humanist marriages are set to become a reality in England and Wales. In Scotland, where they've been legally recognised for 20 years, they account for 29% of all marriages, outnumbering all religious marriages combined. And in Northern Ireland, just six years since recognition, they already account for one in seven marriages.

Faith schools are failing children across the UK. That's why we've launched *Every Child, Every Chance* – our annual campaign against faith school discrimination, and for a fairer education system for all. Media attention on this issue may come and go, but discrimination in our schools persists – and so does our work.

Ofsted has reported a surge in investigations into illegal schools in England, with 284 suspected unregistered settings identified in the past year alone. Many are religious institutions, where children are denied a proper education, and forced to study scripture endlessly. Many children are at risk of sexual and physical abuse. We first exposed this scandal more than a decade ago, prompting the establishment of Ofsted's 'unregistered schools team'. Now we're urging Parliament to back the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which will give Ofsted stronger powers to close these settings for good.

In Northern Ireland, faith schools continue to divide communities. This week, a judge ruled against two schools that sought to become integrated, siding with Education Minister Paul Givan MLA, who blocked them despite overwhelming parental support. The case exposes how outdated Northern Ireland's education law has become – still defined by the Protestant and Catholic binary, ignoring the growing number of non-religious families.

To read about Every Child Every Chance click [here](#)

OTHER NEWS

Huge poll explodes the myth of 'broken Britain'

The biggest survey of its kind - with over 45,000 people taking part – shows that Britain is more tolerant, more united, and more open-minded than recent high-profile rhetoric would have us believe.

The poll, carried out by HOPE not hate and backed by the TUC, looked at over 80 issues; social, political and economic. And the results are clear.

- 66% of people say they live in peaceful, friendly communities. Just 11% disagreed.
- 80% enjoy mixing with people of different backgrounds, ethnicities and religions.
- Cost of living is by far the biggest concern (56%), with the NHS next at 38%. Immigration and asylum ranks fourth, at 25%.

Most people want action on climate. Two out of three respondents believe climate change is caused by human activity, and they know it threatens their families' futures. Half the country supports Net Zero by 2050, but they want the government to make the economic case, not just the moral one.

To read more, click [here](#)

Enjoying international cuisines makes people more tolerant, UK study finds

Whether it is the kedgerree of the British Raj, the Victorian 'penny lick' ice-creams of Manchester's Little Italy, or the battered fish brought to the UK by Sephardic Jews, international influences on the country's food are longstanding, diverse and many.



Now, research has revealed that eating international food does not merely spice up the diet – but makes people more tolerant.

Research from the University of Birmingham and the University of Munich has found that frequently enjoying

a greater number of international foods reduced the likelihood of perceiving immigrants as ‘cultural or economic threats’ by a tenth.

The study focused on more than 1,000 white British adults, measuring attitudes towards immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean, Asia and the rest of Europe; people’s likelihood of voting for politicians who would cut immigration and apply stricter rules to settlement and access to public funds; their enjoyment of six cuisines – Indian, Turkish, Chinese, Thai, Caribbean, and Spanish – and how often they ate them.

To read more, click [here](#)

Waiting isn’t a bad thing – it can actually boost your wellbeing

Ayşe Burin Baskurt, Senior Lecturer, Applied Positive Psychology, University of East London

Waiting can be boring, which is why we typically do anything we can to avoid it. We fill moments where we have to wait with something to keep our minds busy – such as scrolling on social media, reading the news or listening to a podcast.

But waiting isn’t always bad. Research shows that it can be beneficial as it improves self-control – an ability important for many social, cognitive and mental health outcomes.

Self-control refers to a person’s ability to regulate their thoughts, emotions and behaviour when long-term goals conflict with short-term temptations.

Self-control has broad importance – whether that’s in school or the workplace – because of its implications for learning, decision-making, performance, social relationships and wellbeing. The skill is key in resisting temptation in these settings.

To read more, click [here](#)



Why we should embrace being average

Like other elite establishments, Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, is known for its excellence. It is also famous for encouraging an exceptional a cappella scene that became part of the inspiration for the hit film Pitch Perfect. But in 2018 a new group arrived on the scene: Mediocre Melodies. And this small group of singers made a huge impact – not by striving for perfection, but by embracing being average.

In *Perfectly Mediocre*, an episode from the BBC Radio 4 podcast *Sideways*, Matthew Syed explores the pitfalls of perfectionism, the potential benefits of embracing mediocrity and why getting comfortable with being ordinary could be a source of true happiness.

To watch, click [here](#)





PODCAST

How to live a good life in an increasingly fragmented world

What happens when an internationally bestselling historian, a Nobel peace prize-winning journalist and a former politician get together to discuss the state of the world, and where we're heading?

Yuval Noah Harari is an Israeli medieval and military historian best known for his panoramic surveys of human history, including *Sapiens*, *Homo Deus* and, most recently, *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to AI*. Maria Ressa, joint winner of the Nobel peace prize, is a Filipino and American journalist who co-founded the news website Rappler. And Rory Stewart is a British academic and former Conservative MP, writer and co-host of *The Rest Is Politics* podcast.

Their conversation ranged over the rise of AI, the crisis in democracy and the prospect of a Trump-Putin wedding, but began by considering a question central to all of their work: how to live a good life in an increasingly fragmented and fragile world?

To read more, click [here](#)



Why do we still think that we're the goal of evolution?

In this episode of *Skeptic*, Harvard primatologist Christine Webb challenges one of our deepest beliefs: that humans stand apart from the rest of nature. She traces the roots of human exceptionalism from Aristotle and Descartes to modern science, and explains why we still cling to hierarchies of intelligence

Christine Webb is a primatologist at Harvard's Department of Human Evolutionary Biology, with expertise in social behaviour, cognition, and emotion. Her new book is *The Arrogant Ape: The myth of Exceptionalism and Why it Matters*

To watch, click [here](#)



XX/YY – not always what you think

How is the complex and widely variable physical state we call 'sex' determined at the levels of genetics and embryological development? In this talk, Dr Jane Stewart, a recently retired NHS Consultant In Reproductive Medicine and Gynaecology, will share her experiences from a career in medical management of the developmental problems that can arise during the various processes by which our bodies acquire the features of sex. She will examine the diagnostic treatment dilemmas that arise when sex turns out not to be as simple as we widely expect, and will explore the related complexities which surround sexuality and gender dysphoria.



When: Thursday November 13 at 7.30pm

Where: Tyneside Irish Centre

Pay-as-you-feel. All civil humans welcome!

CONTACT US FOR MORE

North East Humanists

All of the latest information about North East Humanists is available on our [website](#). You can also follow us on social media via [Facebook](#) or [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#). Interacting with us there is a great way to help spread the news about Humanism.

Please consider a membership with us if you do not already have one. Our fees are very low, but they really do support so much local grassroots work, as we hope you see in these bulletins.

The monthly bulletin is free for members and supporters of North East Humanists. If membership is more of a commitment than you can make, you can be a supporter if you just [sign up to our email list](#). For NEH members without email, the bulletin is printed by Mike and Moira Turner and sent by post. Contact them on 07740 427132 to arrange this if you need it.

Durham Secular Salon

This local group is run by Susan Walker. Contact her at 0191 384 1432 or susan.walker@northeast-humanists.org.uk if you would like to attend events here.

Teesside Humanist Group

If you would like to join this group, please [contact us](#) for more details. You can also follow them on Twitter [@TeesHumanists](#) or like the [Teesside Humanists](#) group on Facebook run by Terry Waites and Ben Collier.

Humanist Funerals:

The death of a close relative or friend can be traumatic, the feelings of shock and loss deep. The funeral is an opportunity to reflect on your feelings with love and respect. Also, to celebrate the life of the person you have lost, to express gratitude and appreciation, to say goodbye with care and dignity.

While acknowledging the sadness, a Humanist funeral ceremony celebrates life, for we believe that life itself is the greatest cause of all to celebrate. Our ceremonies are non-religious and based on the life-affirming values of love and concern for others.

We also offer support for *Baby Namings, Weddings and Vow Renewals*

We can provide celebrants through the Tyne Wear Celebrants Group, those accredited by Humanists UK, and other individuals serving the North East region.

For more information, please contact Ian Hunter (Secretary, North East Humanists) on 07969165024, ian.hunter@northeast-humanists.org