# What do the British parties say? Key humanist issues at the 2024 UK general elections

All party policies come from the respective party manifestos unless a specific reference is given.

| Humanists UK question | Labour | Conservatives | Reform | Liberal Democrats | Green Party of England and Wales | Scottish National Party | Plaid Cymru |
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| **Manifesto link:** | https://humanists.uk/GE2024LAB | https://humanists.uk/GE2024CON | https://humanists.uk/GE2024REFORM | https://humanists.uk/GE2024LIBDEM | https://humanists.uk/GE2024GREEN | https://humanists.uk/GE2024SNP | https://humanists.uk/GE2024PLAID |
| Does your party support immediately legally recognising humanist marriages in England and Wales? | Yes. Labour has consistently supported immediate legal recognition since 2015, when Ed Miliband pledged it in his election campaign.[1] Support has been reaffirmed by the Labour front bench several times since, including under and by the current leader.[2] | No. Since 2015 the Conservatives have consistently said they will not recognise humanist marriages without wider reform of marriage in England and Wales. | No stated policy. | Yes. 'Expand the rights of couples by introducing legal recognition of humanist marriages.' | Yes. In response to questions from us, said 'We support humanist celebrants and couples in the campaign for the same recognition as humanist celebrants in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Green Party believe that everyone has a right to have their partnerships legally recognised.' | Will not support. This matter is devolved so unlike other parties in Westminster, SNP MPs won't vote on it. | Yes. In response to questions from us, said 'Plaid Cymru supports the legal recognition of humanist marriages and wants the Senedd to have the powers to legalise humanist marriages in Wales.' |
| Will your party support making time for an assisted dying bill to be fully debated?[3] | Yes, but it is unclear whether this commitment covers the terminally ill or the incurably suffering or both. The party views this as a conscience issue. However, Keir Starmer has repeatedly said he is 'personally in favour of changing the law' and has promised to give Parliament time to debate the issue[4] – but with the lack of clarity as to who is covered mentioned above. | Unclear. 'We will maintain the position that assisted dying is a matter of conscience and will respect the will of Parliament.' Rishi Sunak recently said he was 'not against [assisted dying] in principle.'[5] But no Bill has been debated since 2022 (when Boris Johnson was Prime Minister) and that Bill fell because the Government didn't make time for it.[6] | No stated policy. | Yes for the terminally ill, but unclear for the incurably suffering. '[W]e will give Parliament time to fully debate and vote on legislation on assisted dying for terminally ill, mentally competent adults with strict safeguards, subject to a free vote.' 2021 policy endorses assisted dying for the terminally ill, but with a free vote for Parliamentarians.[7] | Yes for the terminally ill, but unclear for the incurably suffering. 'Elected Greens will back changing the law on assisted dying. We support a humane and dignified approach to terminal illness, allowing people to choose to end their lives to avoid prolonging unnecessary suffering, if this is their clear and settled will.' But party policy states that 'people have a right to an assisted death' whether terminal or incurable.[8] | Will not support. This matter is devolved so unlike other parties in Westminster, SNP MPs won't vote on it. | Yes, but it is unclear whether this commitment covers the terminally ill or the incurably suffering or both. In response to questions from us, said it 'would support time being made for a vote on assisted dying in the UK Parliament'. The party views this as a conscience issue, so it is for individual MPs to decide how they vote. |

[1] Humanists UK, 'Labour leader pledges to legalise humanist marriage', 28 April 2015.
[2] E.g. Humanists UK, 'Opposition calls for immediate legal recognition of humanist marriages', 9 July 2021.
[3] Most parties view assisted dying as a conscience issue, with individual MPs having a free vote. However recent efforts have failed to change the law because even though the Government is neutral, it has not allowed enough parliamentary time for private members' bills to complete their passage even when they have enough support to otherwise do so. So it is vital that the Government makes this time available.
[4] Humanists UK, 'Humanists UK welcomes Starmer's commitment to assisted dying vote', 13 March 2024.
[5] The Guardian, 'Rishi Sunak says he is not opposed to assisted dying', 16 June 2024.
[6] Humanists UK, 'Queen's Speech: Assisted dying and inclusive assemblies bills fall', 10 May 2022.
[7] Liberal Democrats 2021 policy motion F15: Dignity, Care and Choice at the End of Life.
[8] Green Party, *Health Policy*, updated June 2019.

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| Does your party support the inclusion of humanism in Religious Education equally to the major religions, in line with UK case law? | Yes. In 2023, the party welcomed a bill in the Lords that would do exactly this, except for not wanting piecemeal curriculum reform.[9] But the manifesto says 'Every child should have a broad curriculum… Labour will launch an expert-led review… Our reforms will… deliver a curriculum which is rich and broad, inclusive, and innovative.' Labour also introduced this precise reform in Wales in 2021.[10] | Unclear. In 2015, the party opposed inclusion of humanism when reviewing GCSE and A level RE syllabuses, beyond a few mentions.[11] But in 2023, it rolled out new guidance making clear that humanists should be equally included in relevant committees.[12] Implicit in that is equal inclusion in the curriculum, too. | No stated policy. | Yes. Party policy 'ensures that religious education in all state-funded schools… covers all the major religious and non-religious viewpoints.'[13] | Yes. In response to our questions, said 'We support learning about humanism alongside religions in Religious Education. [We] understand the importance of human values and the moral dimension in learning, and the role they play in different belief systems.' Party policy says 'education should encourage critical engagement with, and non-dogmatic exposure to, diverse, sometimes competing, worldviews and beliefs.'[14] | Will not support. This matter is devolved so unlike other parties in Westminster, SNP MPs won't vote on it. | Will not support. When questioned by us, told us that 'we do not take a stance on English education policy'. |
| Does your party support changing the law so school assemblies must be fully inclusive of all pupils, rather than being acts of collective worship? | Unclear. During a 2021 debate on a bill in the Lords to do just this, Labour stated 'It is surely the Government's duty to… ensure that the legislation is brought up to date and that it aligns with the views and concerns of the broad population, whether or not they identify with a particular faith.'[15] In a 2022 debate, welcomed amendments towards the same end as 'admirable' and 'a way forward'.[16] | No. Opposed amendments to the Schools Bill in 2022 that would have done just this.[17] | No stated policy. | Yes. Party policy would see the repeal of 'the existing legal requirement for all state-funded schools to hold acts of collective worship'. Schools would be required to 'ensure that any act of worship and any religious instruction is optional … and that suitable alternative activities are provided.'[18] | Yes. Party policy states that 'we will abolish the requirement for a compulsory daily act of worship. Schools which choose to continue to hold acts of worship will provide an alternative activity for learners who choose not to take part. Pupils who do not participate in worship will not suffer any form of discrimination.'[19] | Will not support. This matter is devolved so unlike other parties in Westminster, SNP MPs won't vote on it. | Will not support. When questioned by us, told us that 'we do not take a stance on English education policy'. |

[9] Baroness Wicox in Lords debate on Education (Non-religious Philosophical Convictions) Bill, 3 February 2023.
[10] Humanists UK, 'Goodbye RE, hello RVE! Welsh Bill making curriculum fully inclusive of humanism will become law', 9 March 2021.
[11] Humanists UK, 'Response to DfE statement on the religious studies GCSE judicial review', 26 November, 2015.
[12] Humanists UK, 'High Court win for humanist leads to new Government guidance for local authorities', 22 August 2023.
[13] 'F16: The Role of Faith in State-Funded Schools', Spring 2017, as quoted by Humanists UK in 'Liberal Democrats vote to end religious selection amongst state schools', 19 March 2017.
[14] Green Party, 'Education Policy', last updated April 2024.
[15] Lord Watson of Invergowrite during Lords debate on Education (Assemblies) Bill, 10 September 2021.
[16] Baroness Wilcox during Lords committee stage debate on Schools Bill, 13 June 2022.
[17] Humanists UK, 'Government blocks inclusive RE and assemblies during Schools Bill debate', 14 June 2022.
[18] 'F16: The Role of Faith in State-Funded Schools', Spring 2017, as quoted by Humanists UK in 'Liberal Democrats vote to end religious selection amongst state schools', 19 March 2017.
[19] Green Party, 'Education Policy', last updated April 2024.

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| Does your party support fully inclusive school admissions with no religious discrimination? | No. In 2023, Keir Starmer said Labour in power would be 'even more supportive of faith schools' than the Conservatives.[20] Neither supported nor opposed the lifting of the 50% cap on religious discrimination by new state schools, during a 2024 debate in the Lords,[21] though opposed the same proposal in 2016. | No. In Government, proposed to lift the 50% cap on religious discrimination by new state schools.[22] In manifesto: 'Lift the cap on faith schools, allowing them to offer more places to children based on faith and encouraging them to expand.' | No stated policy. | Yes. Supportive of faith schools but party policy calls for 'a new approach to state funded faith schools which… ensures that selection in admissions on the basis of religion or belief to state funded schools is phased out over up to six years.'[23] | Yes. Party policy states 'no publicly-funded school shall be run by a religious organisation. Schools may teach about religions, comparing examples which originated in each continent, but are prohibited from delivering religious instruction in any form or encouraging adherence to any particular religious belief.'[24] | Will not support. This matter is devolved so unlike other parties in Westminster, SNP MPs won't vote on it. | Will not support. When questioned by us, told us that 'we do not take a stance on English education policy'. |
| Does your party support legislation to close loopholes and enhance government powers to shut down unregistered religious schools? | Yes. Supported the relevant parts of the 2022 Schools Bill which sought to do just this. Since then, Shadow Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson has assured Humanists UK that this is still their position. | Yes in principle. Introduced the 2022 Schools Bill which sought to do just this. But then abandoned it for unrelated reasons, and while saying it was still committed to the plans, failed to bring them back. In the manifesto, 'We will legislate to create a register of children not in school', which would go some way to identify children absent from school due to attendance at illegal schools. | No stated policy. | Yes. Supported the relevant parts of the 2022 Schools Bill which sought to do just this. In the Manifesto, 'Tackle persistent absence by setting up a register of children who are not in school, and working to understand and remove underlying barriers to attendance', which would go some way to identify children absent from school due to attendance at illegal schools. | Yes. In response to our questions, told us 'Privately-funded schools run by religious organisations [which presumably includes unregistered schools] must be properly regulated and reflect the inclusive nature of British society and become part of the Local Authority admissions system.' | Will not support. This matter is devolved so unlike other parties in Westminster, SNP MPs won't vote on it. | Will not support. When questioned by us, told us that 'we do not take a stance on English education policy'. |
| Does your party support removing the automatic right of the 26 bishops to sit in the House of Lords? | Unclear. 'Labour is committed to replacing the House of Lords with an alternative second chamber that is more representative of the regions and nations. Labour will consult on proposals, seeking the input of the British public on how politics can best serve them.' | No. In a 2023 Westminster Hall Debate, Alex Burghart MP, Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office, and speaking on behalf of the Government, said 'this issue is not something the Government will be engaging in'.[25] | Unclear. 'Replace the crony-filled House of Lords with a much smaller, more democratic second chamber. Structure to be debated.' | Yes. 'Reform the House of Lords with a proper democratic mandate.' | Yes. 'Push for replacing the House of Lords with an elected second chamber.' | Yes. 'Support the abolition of the undemocratic House of Lords.' | Yes. 'Plaid Cymru does not support the House of Lords, and we will continue to make the case for its abolition.' |

[20] *Jewish News*, 'Starmer: Labour in power would be "more supportive of faith schools"', 10 September 2023.
[21] Baroness Twycross in Lords debate Faith Schools: Impact of Removing Admissions Cap, 7 May 2024.
[22] Humanists UK, 'Breaking: UK Government plans for 100% religious discrimination in all state-funded faith schools', 1 May 2024.
[23] Liberal Democrat party policy as passed at Spring Conference, March 2017, as quoted by HSLD in 'The new Faith Schools policy - in full', 22 March 2017.
[24] Green Party, 'Education Policy', last updated April 2024.
[25] Westminster Hall, 'Bishops in the House of Lords', 6 July 2023

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| Does your party support there being an envoy or ambassador for global freedom of religion or belief? | Yes. Committed to this before the 2019 election[26] and have long had a shadow envoy in place. Also supported legislation in 2024 to make this position statutory. | Yes. 'Put the existing role of Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief on a statutory footing.' Also supported legislation in 2024 to make this position statutory. | No stated policy. | Yes. 'Protect, defend, and promote human rights around the world by […] appointing an ambassador-level Champion for Freedom of Belief.' | In response to questions from us, the Party confirmed they have no policy here. | No stated policy. | In response to questions from us, the Party confirmed they have no policy here. |
| Does your party support decriminalising abortion across the UK? | Neutral. The Labour Party considers abortion a matter of conscience, allowing MPs a free vote. | Neutral. The Conservative Party considers abortion a matter of conscience, allowing MPs a free vote. | No stated policy. | Neutral. The Lib Dems consider abortion a matter of conscience. The Manifesto says 'Protect everyone's right to make independent decisions over their reproductive health without interference by the state and ensure access to high-quality reproductive healthcare, including enforcing safe access zones around abortion clinics and hospitals', but no commitment to decriminalisation. | Yes. Party policy states 'no person should face imprisonment for ending their own pregnancy. A Green government would ensure that abortion is removed from the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act and is instead governed by the same robust regulatory and ethical frameworks as all other medical procedures.'[27] | This matter is devolved so we expect SNP MPs won't vote on it. However, abortion is not criminalised in Scotland, and the manifesto calls on the Government to 'follow Scotland's lead in reviewing the law on abortion to ensure that abortion is first and foremost treated as a healthcare matter'. | Yes. In response to questions from us, said 'Plaid Cymru are firm in our support of a woman's right to make decisions over her own body, and to always be able access the care and support that they need. We do not believe criminal law is the way to ensure this right, and support decriminalisation efforts.' |

**About Humanists UK**

At Humanists UK, 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. Since 1896, our work has been helping people be happier and more fulfilled. By bringing non-religious people together we help them develop their own views and an understanding of the world around them. Together with our partners Humanist Society Scotland, we speak for 120,000 members and supporters and (at the end of the last Parliament) over 115 members of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group. 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.

Humanists UK is independent of all political parties and does not support, fund or advocate any particular political party. Parties are ordered based on their polling average at the time the table was compiled. Unless a specific reference is given, all party policies come from the respective party manifestos. Where policies are not stated we contacted the parties to seek further clarity and the table incorporates any replies we received. If you spot something where you think we've got it wrong, or have missed some information, please contact us. Some of the issues we discuss are devolved to Scotland and/or Wales and so the Scottish National Party's and/or Plaid Cymru's policies are aimed at the devolved governments and not at the UK Government in Westminster. Where this is the case we have stated it. Our guide is a guide as to whether your MP will vote in support of particular proposals in Westminster. The SNP has stated that its MPs will only vote in the UK Parliament on matters primarily concerning England, Wales, or Northern Ireland when those matters have financial implications for Scotland. But it does not otherwise vote on other matters primarily concerning England, Wales, or Northern Ireland. This includes most of the issues discussed in this table. Similarly, Plaid Cymru told us 'we do not take a stance on English education policy'. Some of the policies we have set out are ones that the SNP/Plaid will support in Scotland/Wales but will not support in Westminster and where this is the case, we have indicated this non-support.

You can find out more about our election work, including how to write to your prospective parliamentary candidates (PPCs) about these issues, at https://humanists.uk/ge2024/.

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[26] 'Appoint a Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief to work across government to promote Freedom of Religious Belief in the UK and abroad.' Labour Party, *Race and Faith Manifesto*, November 2019.
[27] Green Party, 'Health Policy', last updated April 2024.