



**Humanist
Society
Scotland**

For an ethical future

Your Rights at School

A Guide for Non-religious Young People



About Humanist Society Scotland

We are Scotland's national humanist charity. We help to make Scotland a more rational, secular, and humane country.

We speak for people in Scotland with a non-religious, humanist view of life. We want to create a Scotland built on respect for human rights and individual autonomy rather than religious rules. We are also Scotland's original and most trusted provider of humanist weddings, funerals, and naming ceremonies.

What is humanism?

Humanists believe in finding out about the world by thinking and looking rather than magical explanations or unquestioned rules. We think science can explain many things, but we also know it's important that people are

happy and treat each other well. We promote cooperation towards a better world for human beings, plants, and animals, because we know this life and planet are all we have.

If you want to be a good person and live a happy life, but you're not interested in being a part of any religion, you might be a humanist. If so, Humanist Society Scotland speaks up for you and for thousands of people like you around the country. We try to change the way laws work so that they treat people as individuals rather than favouring religion or big organisations, and we put humanists in touch with each other so they can learn and grow together.

We are a member of Humanists International, working with groups around the globe. We also help to promote humanism across the world, and we support people who are in danger because they don't believe in the religion of their country.

Our values



Co-operation

We will reach out and work with others for positive change and equality.



Integrity

We are committed to our humanist principles and will act honestly.



Reason

We will use evidence and thought to guide and direct what we do.



Courage

We will be courageous in our work. We will stand up for what we believe is right, and challenge where needed.



Sustainability

We will work in a sustainable way that assures our future strength, and seeks to minimise negative impacts on the wider environment.

Religion in Schools Q&A

Here are some answers to common questions about the role of religion at school.

Q What will I learn about in my religious and moral education class?

Religious and moral education (RME) helps you to learn about different world religions and also non-religious worldviews such as humanism. Most schools focus more on Christianity than other beliefs and views. But you should get lessons on other faiths too, and on non-religious belief systems. You might visit different places of worship or be visited by people from different religions who will speak to you and answer questions. You might even get a visit from a humanist. Ask your RME teacher about this if you would like this to happen.

Q Where else might I encounter religion in school?

You are likely to take part in regular prayer or religious reflection sessions called “religious observance.” The law in Scotland means that all pupils have to attend these sessions. But individual schools can decide how they run the sessions and how often they happen. You will probably attend religious observance during assembly. A chaplain, minister, priest, or other faith leader will speak to you. You might also attend religious services such as Mass, or have prayers at certain times of day. In some schools, religious services have been replaced by “time for reflection.” This normally explores moral questions or world events, but it doesn’t have a religious theme.

Q What is a school chaplain?

Many schools appoint chaplains to provide advice and guidance to young people. Many chaplains are religious, some are priests and ministers from Christian churches. Recently, some schools have invited humanists to become chaplains. You do not have to speak to the chaplain at all if you don’t want to. If you would like your school to think about having a humanist chaplain, you can talk to your headteacher about this.

Q What if I don’t want to attend religious observance because it focuses on a religion I don’t believe in?

The current law in Scotland and the UK means that young people have to attend religious observance sessions, whether they want to or not. We believe this is wrong, and that young people should not have to attend the sessions if they don’t want to. You can get out of religious observance with support from your parent(s) or carer(s). They will have to send a letter to your headteacher making the request. We have provided a template letter that you can download and edit. You can access it via our education resources page at humanism.scot/get-involved/education-resources/. The school will have to provide something worthwhile for you to do while other students are at religious observance.



Q What if my parent(s) or carer(s) won't agree to opt me out or I don't want to ask them to do this?

You could ask to speak with the headteacher about religious observance, perhaps alongside friends who feel the same way. You could also write to your headteacher directly asking that you be withdrawn. We recommend you let your parent(s) or carer(s) know that you are doing this. Here is a link to a template letter you can use: humanism.scot/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Letter-requesting-withdrawal-from-RO-for-young-people.docx. You can also access it via humanism.scot/get-involved/education-resources/

If you choose to speak to your headteacher, you could suggest different ways that the current time provided for religious observance could be run. For example, you could ask them to provide non-religious "time for reflection" instead. Government regulations mean that headteachers have to take pupils' views into account when deciding how to offer religious observance.

Q I think it's unfair that the law means I have to attend religious observance. What can I do?

You can get in contact with your local Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYP) and tell them what you think. You can find their details and what they do online at www.syp.org.uk. You can also find out lots of ways to get involved with humanism at humanism.scot, including by becoming a Young Humanist and campaigning against compulsory religious observance.

Q I'm not sure about how to do any of this, is there somewhere I can get help?

We have gathered together a number of organisations that work with and can help young people at the back of this book. These are all organisations that we know you can trust and will help you understand your rights. If you feel your rights or beliefs are not being respected at any time we would recommend contacting the Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland. Humanist Society Scotland also provides information for parents, carers, and young people on these issues. We can be contacted on admin@humanism.scot.

Key Contacts

Article 12

Phone: 01674 674086

Email: respond@article12.org

Web: www.article12.org

Article 12 is a young-person-led network that works to promote young people's participation and information rights.

ChildLine

Phone: 0800 1111

Web: www.childline.org.uk

Childline is a free, private and confidential service where you can be you. Whatever your worry, whenever you need help, however you want to get in touch.

Children & Young People's Commissioner for Scotland

Phone: 0800 019 1179

Text: 07702335720

Web: www.cypcs.org.uk

The Commissioner's job is to help you understand your rights and to make sure those rights are respected. Their goal is for Children and Young People in Scotland to be as safe and happy as possible. The commissioner looks after the rights of:

- Everyone in Scotland under 18
- Everyone in Scotland under 21 who has been looked after or is in care

Education Scotland

Phone: 0131 244 4330

Email: enquiries@educationscotland.gov.uk

Web: www.educationscotland.gov.uk

Education Scotland is the national body in Scotland for supporting quality and improvement in learning and teaching.

Humanist Society Scotland

Phone: 0300 302 0680

Email: admin@humanism.scot

Web: www.humanism.scot

Humanist Society Scotland is Scotland's national charity for non-religious people. We offer a range of non-religious ceremonies and campaign for religious influence to be removed from laws.

LGBT Youth Scotland

Website: www.lgbtyouth.org.uk

Email: info@lgbtyouth.org.uk

LGBT Youth Scotland is a national youth organisation working towards the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people in the life of Scotland. They provide a range of services for young people, families and professionals.

Scottish Child Law Centre

Phone: 0800 328 8970

Text: text 'SCLC' and your question to 80800

Web: www.sclc.org.uk

Free legal advice for under 18s – they can help you with any questions about the law.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

Phone: 0800 377 7330

Web: www.spsos.org.uk

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) is the final stage for complaints about councils, colleges and universities, the Scottish Government and its agencies and departments, and most Scottish authorities.

Scottish Youth Parliament

Phone: 0131 557 0452

Web: www.syp.org.uk

The Scottish Youth Parliament represents Scotland's young people. Their vision is for a nation that listens to and values its children and young people.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission

Phone: 0845 604 5510

Web: www.equalityhumanrights.com

The Equality and Human Rights Commission Helpline gives information and guidance on discrimination and human rights issues.

Who Cares? Scotland

Phone: 0300 302 0680

Email: hello@wscot.org

Web: www.whocaresScotland.org

Who Cares? Scotland is a national voluntary organisation, working with care experienced young people and care leavers across Scotland. Who Cares? Scotland supports care experienced people to have their voice heard.

Young Scot InfoLine

Phone: 0808 801 0338

Web: www.youngscot.org/infoline

If you have a question and don't know who to turn to then call Young Scot InfoLine. You can ask anything from how to get all your charges back from the bank to how you can improve your diet. All calls are confidential and are free from landlines and your mobile.





www.humanism.scot

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