

# Michael Paynter

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## ***Application for the role of Secretary of the AHS***

I am a confident and enthusiastic individual who believes that rationalism is absolutely key to solving the problems that confront us in the world. I have been on the committee of the Bristol Atheist, Agnostic and Secular Society (AASS), South-West Regional Development Officer (RDO) for the AHS and I am currently the Head of Membership for the AHS.

I am comfortable working with people of different backgrounds and faiths and believe that empathy and understanding can be used as tools to improve the persuasive power of a rational argument. I want to get to know more people in the AHS and help the organisation to be ever more welcoming and inclusive.

## **Experience**

I have been a member of Bristol AASS for nearly 3 years now, 2 of those years on the committee, firstly as the Academic Secretary and then the Treasurer. In this first role I organised speakers and pub discussions for the society, occasionally baking delicious cake for these events as well! As Treasurer, I wrote the grant application for the £450 we needed to run our society's first ever Reason Week which was a great success.

Whilst I was Treasurer, I was the South-West RDO for the AHS. At first this role was quite quiet, Bristol being the only society in the region. However, towards the end of my tenure, a number of societies have begun to appear as potential members and I made contact with a number of these. At this point I took a more proactive approach, writing an article for the University of the West of England newspaper which generated quite a lot of interest from people interested in setting up a society there. Jenny Bartle is the new South-West Regional Development Officer and is working to help turn these leads into active societies.

## **Current Role as Head of Membership**

I am now the Head of Membership for the AHS. I have helped a number of new societies to join the AHS as well as keeping the records up-to-date on existing members. In this role, I have sought to motivate the RDOs to be more active in their regions, encouraging them with group activities such as collecting contact details for student newspaper publications and collecting university Freedom of Information Officer contact details. I have also encouraged them to make personal contact with societies in their region to promote AHS events including the AGM and Questival.

## **Freedom of Information**

As Head of Membership, I have been running the AHS FOI campaign on the sale of pre-stunned meat in Universities. I have received over 50 replies from institutions and shall be presenting my interim report at the AHS AGM.

## **Proposals**

### **Diversity**

One of my key observations is that AHS societies can tend to be white and male, unrepresentative of university populations as a whole. I would like to investigate why this is and what can be done about it.

### **Press and Media**

I would seek to work with the Press and Media Officer to get more stories in the newspapers. Getting more endorsements like the BHA's list of distinguished supporters would increase the standing of the AHS.

### **More delegation**

As Secretary, I would seek to enable the Regional Development Officers to take a larger role in their region. I want to see the establishment of regional socials and mini-conferences.

### **Database**

At the moment we have a large number of datasets which replicate each other. These include the societies spreadsheet, the committee members spreadsheet, the society website pages and the many mailing lists. This was appropriate when the number of societies was small, but is rapidly becoming unmanageable as the AHS grows. At the start of the last year we had 14 member societies. This has grown to 33 active societies and the contact details for 178 committee members. Keeping these details up to date consumes a lot of time, especially when societies are holding their AGMs in the Spring.

I propose a web-based database should be implemented to hold these data. A proper database would allow us to update information in one place without having to manually propagate and check multiple data sets. We would need to find someone within the AHS who had the time to do this, or buy in the expertise from outside. I would want to work with the Board to find an appropriate solution.