



**ANNUAL  
REPORT**

**2008-  
2009**

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This document reports on the first year of the AHS, including highlights and developments in the organisation. It relates the situation of the organisation in terms of financial and membership activity as at July 2009.

**Laying the  
Foundations**

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## Summary Report

The AHS is a student-run national umbrella organisation for atheist, humanist and secular student groups. The AHS aims to provide a network of resources and support as well as a platform so that students belonging to these societies have a voice in the national and international arena. The work of the AHS is to assist new groups setting up, help sustain existing groups, and to lobby on behalf of them. Over the past 12 months the AHS has held two conferences and a successful national launch which has gained us the attention of the national press. In the run up to the launch, fundraising was a priority and the AHS has been fortunate in the generous financial support it has received. We have been equally fortunate in the support of the British Humanist Association, the National Secular Society, and the Humanist Liaison Group, and in the endorsements of distinguished atheists, humanists and secularists who have spoken on our behalf to the press and at our launch. Membership has increased from the founding seven to 14 societies. Administration has been a key task of the Executive, and the Constitution of the AHS has been ratified, and a plethora of forms and documents have been produced, setting out procedures for present and future staff and members of the AHS. Membership, finance and activities are the three areas of long term planning. The AHS aspires to 100 members within five years, and to be in contact with every higher education institution by its next AGM (July 2010). Plans are afoot for the redevelopment of our online forum and resources; a residential training weekend; awareness weeks; and Freshers' Fair help. The incoming Executive of 2009-2010 face challenges including completing the bank account procedures and managing the AHS' finances, retaining membership and meeting the ambitious targets set out by the outgoing Executive.

## **Introduction to the AHS**

The National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies (AHS) is an umbrella group for higher and further education societies that represent non-religious or agnostic students in the United Kingdom. The organisation is established to provide a network, resources and a joint platform for these societies and to make sure that their needs and views are being considered on the national and international level.

The main aims of the AHS are:

- To represent its member societies locally, nationally and internationally
- To promote the philosophies, aims and objectives of its member societies
- To support and advise its member societies
- To encourage and facilitate the creation of new atheist, humanist and secular student societies and groups
- To create, maintain and promote co-operation with like-minded national organisations.

The AHS will fulfil its aims by lobbying, campaigning and debating with decision makers in government, business, the media, and all areas of public life. It will also fulfil them by providing a supportive role to its member societies.

The AHS is run by students for students and as such has their needs at its heart. This focus defines the scope of the AHS' activities, which include the following:

- Organising, publicising and administering national campaigns on atheist, humanist and secular student issues
- Promoting events and campaigns organised and run by its member societies
- Providing training and guidance to its member societies in all areas of running a student society
- Raising the profile of atheist, humanist and secular ideas, philosophies and arguments by ensuring maximum coverage of related activities
- Working alongside existing national and international organisations to increase student participation in national campaigns, events and activities.

The AHS is open to all student groups and societies that represent agnostics, atheists, freethinkers, humanists, non-theists, rationalists, secularists and skeptics.

## **Vision and Mission**

### **Vision Statement**

“A thriving atheist, humanist or secular student society in every institute of Higher Education in the UK, networked together, with a shared voice in public life, whose members can contribute to and be part of the wider national and international movement.”

### **Mission Statement**

“To build, support and represent atheist, humanist and secular student societies; to facilitate communication between them, to encourage joint actions and to ensure that their members have opportunities to be part of the wider national and international movement.”

## **Staff**

Our current staff consists of:

### *Executive:*

President	Norman Ralph
Secretary	Jenna Catley
Treasurer	Thomas Leadbeater

### *Officers:*

Press Secretary	Chloë Clifford-Frith
Web Secretary	Chris Worfolk
Director of Membership	(Acting) Alex Gibson

### *Trustees:*

Andrew Copson  
Chris Worfolk  
Alex Gibson  
Chloë Clifford-Frith

## President's Report

Welcome to the first report of the President of the National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies on the activities and achievements of the organisation over the past year and an outline of the plans and ambitions for the future.

The past twelve months has seen a number of milestones for the AHS, we have enjoyed two conferences, a national launch, record press coverage, unprecedented membership applications and an overwhelming response to our fundraising efforts.

The Secular Conference, held in Edinburgh during June 2008, was the spark that ignited the explosion that became the AHS' first year of operation. The merry band of pioneering student leaders that met at the University of Edinburgh to discuss the formation of a national umbrella organisation to represent atheists, humanists and secularists across the UK could never have known the success story that would grow from those meetings. The conference was attended by seven societies, the AHS now boasts a membership of approaching twenty student groups and there is great interest amongst many more.

The summer months saw the birth of the AHS first constitution. This was the first piece of real work undertaken by the federation and was beset by teething problems. Hard work on a number of fronts ensured that the four month deadline was met and the governing document of the AHS was presented at the November AHS Conference in Leeds.

The success of the AHS in attracting new members in just a few short months between June and November meant that the inaugural committee consisted of over ten groups and could ratify the constitution. Many other resolutions were passed in Leeds, including the formation of our executive, appointment of our trustees and hiring of our press and web officers.

With a full complement of volunteers in place we could begin planning for the future. The first task set for the newly constituted AHS was launching the organisation on the national stage.

The AHS Launch was our biggest event to date. Conway Hall, home of the South Place Ethical Society, in London played host to the event in February 2009. With the national press in attendance, the organising committee put on a fantastic show. With keynote speakers including Richard Dawkins, AC Grayling and Polly Toynbee along with stalls featuring all manner of activities and organisations of interest to student atheists, humanists and secularists, the event was a huge success. The AHS received fantastic press coverage and perhaps more importantly managed to attract a swathe of new members.

Moving forward from the launch has been the AHS' biggest challenge. Harnessing the momentum and motivation generated by holding such a successful launch was the key to the AHS maintaining direction and focus. Concentrating on consolidating and building on well laid foundations, the AHS has worked away from the public eye ensuring that continuity and legacy is woven into the very fabric of the organisation.

The themes of continuity and longevity are vital to the AHS establishing itself as a fully representative organisation. Our goals cannot and should not be set in the short term. The AHS should be planning for the medium and long terms, for the committee ten years from now.

It is with this long term mindset in place that we can set tough, but achievable, targets for ourselves. There are three areas of long term planning that are paramount to the AHS. They are membership, finance and activities.

Membership is our bread and butter. Without a large, active membership the AHS has no role, no purpose acting as an umbrella group. Without a large, active membership base the AHS has no mandate to represent atheist, humanist or secularist students. Challenging membership targets are one of the tools that the AHS needs to use in order to build on its current successes. The AHS needs to aim for representing 100 student societies within the next three to five years. The regional representatives scheme should be fully rolled out to ensure that as many universities and colleges are supported as possible.

Another important tool for building membership is retaining current members. The AHS needs to ensure that it does not develop a rotating door environment where societies come and go, both as members and at universities. Ensuring the longevity and survivability of individual members must be amongst the AHS' highest priorities.

Sound finances for an organisation like the AHS are essential. With the nature of student societies as they are, a national organisation must be in a position to offer an example of good governance and sensible financial activity. Strong fundraising activities must be coupled with sound financial judgement in terms of budgeting and expense control.

The AHS has been fortunate in the generosity of its support over the last year and has raised significant funds via donations and gifts. This is something that must be built on. Relationships need to be cultivated and other income sources need to be identified and exploited.

Setting financial targets for the AHS will not be easy. Prudent management of existing finance and careful planning of future finance will be central to ensuring the financial stability of the AHS in the long term.

The third main area of focus is activities. There is little point in societies joining or funding being sought if there is no output to show for it. Developing activities and ensuring these deliver value for money, both in terms of members' subscription fees and with respect to cost must be a cornerstone of every AHS committee in moving forwards.

Some activities are already in the pipeline such as committee training workshops and residential courses, uniting awareness weeks under one banner and delivering an annual conference including our AGM.

None of the activities and achievements to date would have been possible without the hard work of our members, our committee and our partners, the British Humanist Association and National Secular Society. I would like to extend a further thanks to Andrew Copson, a trustee of the AHS and member of staff at the BHA for his invaluable mentoring of the Executive and guiding hand through this first year.

The National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies is in a strong position to move forwards and continue the fantastic progress made so far. I wish the incoming committees of

all our members the best of luck for the next academic year and that you all get as involved in the AHS as you can.

## Secretary's Report

For the Launch Party, I put together the delegate welcome pack, invited student societies, organised post-launch catering, and took charge of layout, decorations and stall holders.

Outside of this extraordinary event, my role has been administrative. Since November, I have minuted the meetings of the AHS, producing summaries for the Committee and sending out action points to those involved. I have written agendas for these meetings and produced presentations where required.

This year has seen the drafting of all of our start up documents. As part of the Executive I have developed and then drafted policy and procedures and the results include:

### *Forms for:*

- Grant application
- Membership application
- Reimbursement application

### *Memos on:*

- Expenses
- External contacts
- Motions
- Press strategy

### *Resolutions regarding:*

- FE societies
- FE society removal
- Trustee terms

In addition, I have helped to draft the Memo of Understanding with the BHA.

I have taken on extra duties such as developing job descriptions for current and future AHS officer positions, along with 2 possible hierarchies ready for implementation.

Furthermore, I have taken the lead in developing educational resources, including overhauling the SRG and preparing tomorrow's Fresher's Fair workshop. We now have a standard letter to send to student unions and chapels seeking contact details to send AHS literature to.

As well as keeping membership records pending the appointment of a Director of Membership, I have been heavily involved in structuring our membership database by region, and conceptualising the regional representative scheme.

Finally, I have acted as a spokesperson for the AHS, presenting in London and speaking on BBC radio.

The incoming Secretary can expect to hold all of our administrative records to date. The Secretary will need to ensure databases held on Membership, Donations, and Press Contacts by other officers are sent through to the archive whenever updated.

Ad hoc drafting of memos, resolutions, letters and forms as required will be the main requirement of the Secretary over the next 12 months, along with increased administrative duties for special events.

## **Treasurer's Report**

There was no official financial activity in the year 2008-2009. The AHS received donations before the launch due to the work of Alex Gibson, and with the help of the BHA. These cheques were not banked due to the bank account not being set up fully at the time of the AGM 2009, despite the process being started in March 2009.

Chris Worfolk one of the Trustees of the AHS headed up the bank account process and reports that the delay has been caused principally by documents being lost in the post. The AHS has made no payments.

Richard Dawkins' promised donation has not yet been paid and the next Treasurer will have to chase this up as well as setting up the bank account as a matter of urgency.

## **Business Plan**

- Hard to predict or project as only recently started
- Increase new membership growth i.e. aim to gain a larger number of new societies each year
- Only spend existing funds, do not borrow to fund activities
- Help new societies to get started and encourage them to join AHS
- Look at applying for grants or corporate sponsorship - consider a fundraising officer?
- Suggest that supporters adopt a society. Supporters commit to donating and receive news and a personal link with an AHS member society
- Encourage members of AHS member groups to become supporters and donors when they graduate
- Web donations

## Marketing Targets

- HE students for membership
- FE students for membership
- Contact previous donors to suggest regular donations
- Contact the BHA list again to seek donations
- Co-operate with the BHA and NSS – BHA and NSS refer students to AHS and AHS encourages its members to become involved in the BHA and NSS. Memorandum of Understanding to formalize this agreement has been made. Encouraged to approach the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA) and the Council of Ex-Muslims with a view to memorandums of understanding that will provide benefits on campus and affiliate to IHEYO.

## SMART Objectives

- Goals from now to year 5
- Increase number of member societies with the aim of having 100 AHS members by 2014
  - Year 1: 25
  - Year 2: 35
  - Year 3: 50
  - Year 4: 70
  - Year 5: 100
- Check and make contact for each institution HE institution by AGM. Keep record of checks and contact made.
- Aim to have all places filled (100% attendance) at the residential training weekend
- Redesign the secular portal – ask Chris how to break this down into SMART objectives
- 2009 Freshers' Events. Ensure that all societies or individuals who request help or support from the AHS receive the necessary support required
- Awareness week. Ensure that 50% of member groups organize some kind of awareness week (e.g. Reason week, Humanist week, etc) during the 2009/2010 academic year

## **Members**

### **Full Members**

#### Schedule 1 – List of Members and Affiliates

- 1.1. Full members recognized by the AHS shall be as follows (year of first membership in brackets):
  - 1.1.1. Aberdeen University Atheist, Humanist and Secular Society (2008).
  - 1.1.2. Durham University Humanists (2008).
  - 1.1.3. Edinburgh University Humanist Group (2008).
  - 1.1.4. Keele Humanist Group (2008).
  - 1.1.5. Leeds Atheist Society (2008).
  - 1.1.6. University of Liverpool Atheist Society (2008).
  - 1.1.7. Oxford Atheists (2008).
  - 1.1.8. Oxford Secular Society (2008).
  - 1.1.9. Solent Secularists (2008).
  - 1.1.10. Southampton Atheist Society (2008).
  - 1.1.11. Sussex Secular Society (2008).
  - 1.1.12. Warwick Atheists (2008).

### **Ratified at AGM 2009**

Cambridge University Atheist and Agnostic Society  
Royal Holloway Secular Students

## Contact Details

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