



The National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and
Secular Student Societies

AHS

Annual Report

2010-11

A year of development and growth

Contents

Summary	4
Introduction to the AHS	6
Personnel	7
List of personnel.....	7
Handbook.....	9
Executive change of personnel	10
Finances	11
Income and expenditure.....	11
Fundraising.....	11
Merchandise	12
Membership.....	13
Existing membership.....	13
Growth in membership	14
Republic of Ireland	16
Further growth.....	16
Member participation in the AHS	16
Media	17
Events.....	18
Questival 2010	18
2010 Freshers' fairs.....	19
February 2011 Non-Prophet Week.....	19
2011 Reason Weeks.....	20
AHS 2011 Convention	21

Society awards	22
AHS 2011 AGM.....	23
Looking ahead... ..	23
Online.....	25
Website	25
Traffic report	26
Facebook, Twitter and the Newsletter	28
Resources	30
Society running guides	30
Directories.....	31
Other organisations	32
British Humanist Association	32
National Secular Society	33
Other organisations	33
Campaigns.....	35
Long-term strategy.....	36
Progress towards 2011 goals	36
Goals for 2012 AGM.....	38
In summary.....	40

Summary

2010-11 has been a banner year for the AHS. The number of member societies has grown rapidly from 14 to 34. The AHS has also expanded from a UK to a UK and Republic of Ireland organisation.

The AHS has had a number of personnel changes, but ultimately attained a stable, hardworking team. The Regional Representative scheme was relaunched with a new focus as the Regional Development Officer scheme. Sam Corcoran resigned as AHS Treasurer and was replaced in an acting capacity by James Murray, who was subsequently elected to the role. Learning from issues experienced during the year and looking to establish wider good practice, a handbook for personnel was produced to bring together a number of important external documents and also outline how different personnel can look to best work together through differences.

The AHS has not significantly fundraised, but ends the year in a more financially healthy state than it started.

The AHS has acquired a range of merchandise including leaflets, pens and clothing.

The AHS has not actively pursued national media but has made a number of appearances.

The AHS has held a number of successful national events, including Questival and Non-Prophet Week for the first time, and its first two-day Convention, which attracted 250 attendees and was part-hosted by UCLU Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society. AHS members had very successful freshers' fairs, and 5 held Reason Weeks. Society Awards were presented to members, with University of Bristol Atheist, Agnostic and Secular Society winning Best Society. The AGM was also held, hosted by University of Southampton Atheist Society.

A new website was launched at the start of the year, expanding as the year went on to become a significant hub for online activities.

The AHS wrote or rewrote almost all its society running guides to a high standard, however the Directories disappointingly did not grow.

The AHS improved its relationship with a number of organisations, in particular the British Humanist Association.

The AHS began campaigning, but did not manage to launch its own grassroots campaigns initiative.

The AHS met or almost met the majority of its long-term goals for the year, and the outgoing Executive have set new goals for the incoming team.

Richy Thompson

President, The National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies

Introduction to the AHS

The AHS is the National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies. We are the umbrella organisation for all non-religious student societies in institutes of higher education across the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

Our vision is a thriving atheist, humanist or secular student society in every institute of higher education in the UK and the Republic of Ireland, networked together, with a shared voice in public life, whose members can contribute to and be part of the wider national and international movement.

It is our mission 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.

The AHS was founded in November 2008, and now has 34 member societies. As of this year, we are facilitated and supported by the British Humanist Association.

The vision of the AHS is to see a thriving atheist, humanist or secular student society in every institute of Higher Education in the UK and Republic of Ireland; networked together, with a shared voice in public life, whose Members can contribute to and be part of the wider national and international movement.

As a means of achieving its vision the AHS aims to:

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

Personnel

This year has seen many changes in personnel, including a change of a member of the Executive (leading to an Extraordinary General Meeting in March). However, the AHS has formed into a stable, hard-working team that has been able to achieve considerable successes, as the rest of this report attests to.

At the start of the year the AHS was reconstituted, with the old Board of Trustees being replaced by a new Board. The new Board has met quarterly.

In April, the Regional Representative scheme was relaunched as the Regional Development Officer scheme, with the new name reflecting a tighter focus, and 7 new RDOs coming on board to join 6 remaining in their roles. The *Guide for Regional Development Officers* was refreshed, and new regional Facebook groups were launched. The RDOs collected contact details for each student newspaper, and Freedom of Information request emails for every University.

In July, the AHS introduced an internal Handbook, outlining the policies and procedures that members of the Executive and senior Officers should follow.

List of personnel

Our personnel this year have consisted of:

Executive:

- President – Richy Thompson
- Treasurer –
 - July to December: Sam Corcoran
 - January to March, acting: James Murray
 - March to July: James Murray
- Secretary – Nicola Jackson

Senior Officers:

- Events Co-ordinator –
 - September to November: Ray Thomas
- Head of Education –
 - July to February: Natasha Barrett
 - March to May: Ray Thomas
- Head of Membership –
 - September to November: Samuel Muluka
 - November to March: Ray Thomas
 - March to July: Michael Paynter
- Press Officer –
 - October to July: Emma Bryce
- Webmaster: Thomas Gibson-Robinson

Regional Development Officers:

- East Midlands –
 - July to September: Fran Bull
 - April to July: Benjamin Mee
- East of England: Jens Christensen
- Greater London –
 - July to April: Sam Corcoran
 - April to July: Dom Blacklock
- North East England: Paul Taylor
- North West England: Sam Ajderian
- South East England –
 - July to December: Richy Thompson
 - December to July: Ben Krishna
- South West England –
 - July to April: Michael Paynter
 - April to July: Jenny Bartle
- West Midlands –
 - July to April: Stuart Pilbrow

- April to July: Tulpesh Patel
- Yorkshire and the Humber –
 - July to April: Katie Barr
 - April to July: Cheryl Harford
- Scotland –
 - July to April: Michael Williamson
 - April to July: Ian Scott
- Wales: Ray Thomas
- Northern Ireland –
 - July to April: Niall McLaughlin
 - April to July: Gordon Beattie
- Republic of Ireland –
 - April to July: Brian Murphy

Board:

- AHS President: Richy Thompson
- BHA Chief Executive: Andrew Copson
- BHA appointees:
 - Jenna Catley-Richardson
 - Norman Ralph
- AHS appointees:
 - Alex Gibson
 - David Pollock
 - Andrew West

Handbook

Learning from issues experienced during the year and looking to establish wider good practice, towards the end of the year the AHS Executive, with support from the Board, produced a handbook for all AHS Executive members, Officers and Board members. This reiterated the constitution, and also outlined roles within the AHS, email addresses, the BHA-AHS memorandum of understanding, the AHS's relationship with the International

Humanist and Ethical Youth Organisation, the AHS's use of the BHA Office, environmental policy, recommended code of conduct, resignation, reporting, financial procedures and the annual schedule. This handbook should assist and improve the work of future AHS personnel, both by bringing together a number of important external documents and also by outlining how different personnel can look to best work together through differences.

Executive change of personnel

In December 2010, Sam Corcoran chose to resign as Treasurer, citing a lack of time to fulfil the duties of the role. In January 2011, President Richy Thompson and Secretary Nicola Jackson chose to appoint James Murray as acting Treasurer in Sam's place. An Extraordinary General Meeting was subsequently held at the AHS 2011 Convention in March, and James was elected to be Treasurer until the AGM in July.

Finances

At the start of the year the AHS was reconstituted to be facilitated and supported by the British Humanist Association. This led the AHS to move from having its own Co-Op bank account to operating through a restricted section of the BHA's bank account. As the BHA is a registered charity, this further means that the AHS has inherited the charitable status of the BHA.

Income and expenditure

This year, the AHS started year with £1,263.28 in the Co-Op account. Before the account closed, we spent £866.85 (largely on costs left over from the preceding year) and brought in £180.00 to give a closing balance of £576.43.

In the BHA restricted section, from its creation in July 2010 through to May 5 2011, the AHS transferred £576.43 from the Co-Op account, made £3,975.76 and spent £2,311.50, to give a balance of £2,240.69. In particular, Questival cost the AHS a net of £182.46 while the Convention made the AHS a net of £449.48. Further income has been secured through a pair of sizable donations. Note that these statistics do not include expenses and costs from the AHS 2011 AGM and Questival. Accommodation sales at the 2011 AGM generated £794 that will be paid to Liberty Living. £480 of AGM tickets have been sold so far, generating £320 for the transport subsidy scheme and £160 for delegate packs. £880 of Questival tickets have been sold.

Full financial records are available to members of the Caucus upon request.

Fundraising

An ongoing area of work this year has been fundraising. In February Richy Thompson put together a fundraising strategy report for the AHS Board. A number of plans from that strategy were agreed to be developed, however since then progress on these has been slow, due to competing priorities. It is

hoped that fundraising will become a major area of work for the AHS next year.

Merchandise

The AHS started the year with a supply of badges. Leaflets and hoodies were designed and produced in time for the Convention in March. Pens and t-shirts were produced for the AGM in the summer.

Membership

This year the AHS grew from 14 to 34 member societies, at an unprecedented rate of growth. The AHS also amended its constitution to cover the Republic of Ireland, in addition to the UK. Further growth is predicted, with promising new societies continuing to emerge. Members also had many opportunities to engage with the organisation.

Existing membership

The AHS started the year with 14 member societies (13 full and 1 associate):

- DeMontfort University Rationalist Society
- Cambridge University Atheist & Agnostic Society
- Durham University Humanist and Secularist Society
- University of Liverpool Humanist, Atheist, Secular and Agnostic Society
- Queen's Humanist Society
- NUI Galway Skeptic Society (associate member)
- Dundee University Atheist Society
- University of Edinburgh Humanist Society
- Oxford Atheist Society
- University of Southampton Atheist Society
- Sussex University Secular Society
- University of Bristol Atheist, Agnostic and Secular Society
- Warwick Atheists
- Leeds Atheist Society

Additionally, Aberdeen University Secular, Humanist and Atheist Society, Keele Humanist Group, Oxford Secular Society, Royal Holloway Secular Students and Solent University Secular Society had their membership withdrawn at the 2010 AGM, following going defunct.

Growth in membership

20 societies joined the AHS over the course of the year, leading to a final membership count of 34 (31 full members and 3 associate members). This was one off the target of 35 members originally set in the 2008-09 annual report. However, the target for the end of 2010 was 25 societies, so the AHS started the year 11 societies off target and recovered 10 of those 11.

Growth can be attributed to the AHS more proactively reaching out to societies, through the Executive, Officers and RDOs; the Facebook Society Searcher Tool; improvements in guides, such as the guide on *How to Start and Run a Student Society*; working with local humanist groups, especially around the freshers' fair period; and being a more visible organisation.

The following changes occurred in membership:

August:

- 6th: LSESU Atheist and Humanist Society join as full members
- 25th: UCC Atheist Society join as associate members
- 30th: Queen Mary Atheism Society join as full members

September:

- 9th: Aston Humanist Society join as full members
- 16th: University of Birmingham Atheist, Secular and Humanist Society join as full members
- 27th: Bradford Atheist and Humanist Society join as full members

October:

- 12th: Bangor University Science, Evolution and Atheism Society join as associate members
- 14th: Hull University Union Humanist, Atheist, Secularist and Agnostic Society join as full members
- 21st: UCD Humanist Society join as associate members

- 24th: Oxford Atheist Society and Oxford Secular Society merge to become Oxford Atheists, Secularists and Humanists
- 26th: UCLU Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society join as full members

December:

- 26th: Open University Secular Students join as associate members
- 26th: UAL Atheist Skeptical Society join as full members
- 29th: Reading University Atheist, Humanist, & Secularist Society join as full members

January:

- 5th: Lancaster University Humanists Association join as associate members
- 30th: University of Derby Humanist, Secular and Atheist Society join as associate members

February:

- 3rd: University of Chichester SU Atheist, Humanist & Agnostic Society join as full members
- 7th: York University Agnostic & Atheist Society join as full members
- 18th: University of Surrey Skeptic & Atheist Society join as full members

March:

- 13th: UCC Atheist Society become full members
- 13th: NUI Galway Skeptic Society become full members
- 13th: UCD Humanist Society become full members

April:

- 6th: University of Sheffield Atheist Society join as full members

June:

- 5th: Open University Secular Students become full members

July:

- 9th: University of Westminster Humanist Society join as full members

Republic of Ireland

On March 13th, the AHS had its constitution amended to expand from being a UK organisation to a UK and Republic of Ireland organisation. The AHS's three associate member societies in the Republic of Ireland all became full members and Brian Murphy was subsequently appointed as the AHS's first Irish Regional Development Officer.

Further growth

Despite rapid growth of the AHS, the number of contacts for potential member societies has grown at an even faster rate. The AHS currently has 34 potential member societies on its books. Many of these will fail to materialise, but some are already active and many will likely end up as members of the AHS.

Member participation in the AHS

Member societies have been able to participate in the AHS through the Newsletter, through events and through the Caucus. Many members have contributed In Depth articles to the Newsletter during the year. Feedback sessions have been run at the AGM and Convention.

Other sections of this guide outline the benefits members received from the AHS.

Media

The AHS has continued to produce a weekly Newsletter, with the Newsletter celebrating its first anniversary in March. News stories also now appear on the website as the week progresses, before being collected into the Newsletter each Sunday. In March the Newsletter was redesigned.

The AHS also has a significantly growing presence on Facebook, and last July a Twitter account was set up. The AHS has continued to engage with its members through both these platforms.

The AHS's magazine, *Secular Future*, ceased publication following a lengthy hiatus, with its stories effectively being replaced by In Depth articles in the Newsletter.

The AHS and its members attracted a number of stories in the national, local and student press – in Newspapers, online and on television. However, the AHS chose not to pursue a regular presence in national press as this was not considered a top priority.

A new guide, *A Guide to Press and Publicity*, was written by Press Officer Emma Bryce. Emma also wrote a media strategy report for the AHS Board in February; however most of its aims and proposals remain outstanding.

Events

The AHS had a great year of events, reflecting the growth and improved organisational capacity of the Federation.

Questival, the Camp Quest-inspired camping trip, was held for a first time, with a second being organised. The AHS actively supported its societies around freshers' fairs. Non-Prophet Week was also held for the first time, with member societies raising over £2,500 for charity. Five societies held Reason Weeks, an unprecedented number, and these were more successful than ever.

The AHS Convention took place over two days, attracting 250 attendees and featuring high-profile speakers and 13 other organisations. Society Awards were presented for the first time, with University of Bristol Atheist, Agnostic and Secular Society winning Best Society.

The AHS AGM attracted over 50 attendees, and saw the AHS's fourth Executive elected.

Questival 2010

In August 2010, Questival was held for the first time. Inspired by Camp Quest UK and sponsored by the British Humanist Association, the event took place in Dalesbridge in the Yorkshire Dales. Unlike Camp Quest, which is aimed at children, Questival was for fully grown atheists, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers and all those who embrace a naturalistic rather than supernatural world view. The event, whilst aimed mainly at students, was open to adults of all ages. It was primarily organised by President Richy Thompson.

The event featured "Skepchick" Rebecca Watson and comedian Iszi Lawrence. There was also a philosophy session, a quiz, sports, stargazing and a walk around Malham Cove.

The event attracted 20 attendees which was disappointing. This was mainly attributed to the lateness with which it was organised – tickets went on sale 2 ½ weeks prior to the event.

2010 Freshers' fairs

The AHS put a lot of effort into supporting its societies around the freshers' fair season. A new guide, *How to Run a Successful Freshers' Week*, was written, and photos of member societies' stalls were collected.

February 2011 Non-Prophet Week

In mid-February, the AHS held its inaugural Non-Prophet Week. During the charity week AHS societies were encouraged to raise and give money for charity. They choose the charities, raised the money, had fun and competed with other societies to see who can raise the most. The week was coordinated by Secretary Nicola Jackson, and was backed up by a new guide, *A Guide to Charity and Volunteering*.

In total over £2,500 was raised between most member societies and across about 30 events. In particular, Aston Humanist Society raised almost £700, and UCLU Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society raised over £500. Sponsored fundraising proved to be more successful than group events such as quizzes and charity sales.

The amount raised, whilst commendable, was slightly below the target of £3,000. The event came at a busy time for the AHS, with the Convention imminent, and 5 societies preparing for Reason Weeks. It was hence agreed that from everyone's point of view, the event would be best moved to November. Hopefully future weeks will be easier to plan, as they can build on the experience and infrastructure of the first one.

2011 Reason Weeks

Five societies held Reason Weeks this year, more than any previous year. Reason Weeks are intense weeks of events which seek to expose the type of discussion and debate that atheist, Humanist and secular student societies offer to a wider audience and raise the profile of the issues involved. They can serve to raise awareness of social, political and moral issues, recruit and retain members to the society, and generate publicity for the society or for their campaigns. The week-long events tend to involve a combination of lectures, debates, panel discussions, workshops, performances, and film showings. Events are usually free of charge, open to the public, and include catered elements.

Taking place during mid-February to early March, we had:

- Durham Reason Week, Durham University Humanist and Secularist Society's second week
- Bristol Thought Week, University of Bristol Atheist, Agnostic and Secular Society's first week
- Oxford Think Week, Oxford Atheists, Secularists and Humanists' second week
- Southampton Reason Week, University of Southampton Atheist Society's third week
- Leeds Reason Week, Leeds Atheist Society's fifth week

These proved to be very successful. Oxford's, in particular, had a large number of big name speakers and regularly saw attendance at events top 100, with Richard Dawkins and A C Grayling's joint event having 650 attendees in Exam Schools. Free tickets for this were given away through the BHA website, and ran out in 7 minutes.

Other highlights included:

- Durham having A C Grayling.
- Southampton having Simon Singh and the Pod Delusion Live.

- Bristol having Peter Atkins, getting their largest ever attendance at an event.

AHS President Richy Thompson spoke at Bristol and Durham's Weeks, and did a segment for the Pod Delusion at Southampton.

AHS 2011 Convention

Each year since its creation the AHS has held a Convention. In 2009 this occurred in Conway Hall, London and was the AHS's Press Launch, featuring guest speakers and a "non-religious organisations fair". In 2010 this occurred in Linacre College, Oxford and was mainly focussed around training, though again had a "non-religious organisations fair" as well as the BHA Choir.

The AHS 2011 Convention took place in March and was held across two days for the first time. It was very successful, attracting 250 attendees on the Saturday (speakers day) in Conway Hall and 60-70 on the Sunday (committee day) in UCL:

- 13 organisations (the AHS, British Humanist Association, South Place Ethical Society, Centre for Inquiry UK, National Secular Society, Sense About Science/Voice of Young Science, Education for Choice, the Pod Delusion, the BHA Choir, Ancestor's Trail, Central London Humanist Group and 2 AHS Greater London member societies) exhibited at the "non-religious organisations fair".
- 6 speakers spoke (philosopher A C Grayling, journalist Johann Hari, comedian Robin Ince, BHA Chief Executive Andrew Copson, All Party Parliamentary Humanist Group Chair Lord Warner of Brockley, NSS Vice President Gerard Phillips) and the BHA Choir sung.
- The training workshops on the Sunday were well received. The 'BHA Choir choral workshop' and 'Debating with Andrew Copson and David Pollock' workshops were particularly popular, with requests for both to return. The other workshops proved useful to attendees.

- In an Extraordinary General Meeting, the AHS voted to expand into the Republic of Ireland, and James Murray was elected as AHS Treasurer.
- The feedback session proved useful for the AHS.

Society awards

The final item of business was the inaugural AHS Society Awards. A C Grayling presented via video awards to member societies.

The following awards were presented:

- **Best Single Event:** University Collage Cork Atheist Society for hosting Daniel Dennett, which 450 people attended.
- **Best Collaboration:** The London Societies (UCLU Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society, UAL Atheist Skeptical Society, Queen Mary Atheism Society, LSESU Atheist and Humanist Society) for their quizzes.
- **Best Reason Week:** Oxford Atheists, Secularists and Humanists for Think Week 2011
- **Most Raised during Non-Prophet Week:** Aston Humanist Society who raised almost £700.
- **Best New Societies:** UCL Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society and Bradford Atheist and Humanist Society.
- **Best Society:**
 - **Nominees:**
 - UCLU Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society
 - Durham University Humanist and Secularist Society
 - Oxford Atheists, Secularists and Humanists
 - University of Southampton Atheist Society
 - University of Bristol Atheist, Agnostic and Secular Society
 - Aston Humanist Society
 - Leeds Atheist Society

- University of Edinburgh Humanist Society
- University Collage Cork Atheist Society
- **Winner:** Bristol Atheist, Agnostic and Secular Society.

AHS 2011 AGM

The AHS 2011 Conference featuring the 2011 AGM was held in July in Southampton, hosted by University of Southampton Atheist Society. The society was one of three to bid to host the Conference during April, and was selected as host in early March.

The Conference attracted over 50 attendees, and saw the culmination of the AHS's third fantastic year as the fourth Executive were elected, who will lead the AHS for the next twelve months. The rest of the weekend will feature socialising, training workshops (including a choral workshop with BHA Choir Conductor Chloë Clifford-Frith and Secretary Emma Bell and a debating workshop with BHA Chief Executive Andrew Copson), a preview showing of Hollywood film *The Ledge* and a speech by Dr Evan Harris.

Looking ahead...

Questival 2011 is set to take place in Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, and will feature philosopher Julian Baggini, mathemagician Matt Parker, the Pod Delusion and BHA Faith Schools and Education Campaigns Officer Richy Thompson. The event was launched in mid-May and will feature puzzles, comedy, philosophy, walks, skepticism, maths, puns (it's intense!), debate and games - and all while meeting people with similar worldviews from across the UK and Ireland.

2011 freshers' fairs have been preceded by training in how to have a successful freshers' period at the 2011 AGM, and societies will be supported by AHS Executive and Officers during the period itself.

Regional Conventions will be held throughout the autumn term. 5-7 will be held by regions/groups of regions, emulating the national Convention but on

a smaller scale. It is hoped that the local societies and RDOs will take the lead on organising these, but that some of the AHS Executive or senior Officers will attend each. It is hoped that this can be used to attract new member societies in every region, as well as training all members, and improving connections within the regions.

Non-Prophet Week will take place for a second time in November, in order to stand apart from the busy Reason Week and Convention period.

Reason Weeks will continue to expand in number, with the 5 societies who held one in 2011 all expected to hold one in 2012. UCC Atheist Society are also hoping to hold a week; Aston Humanist Society and University of Birmingham Atheist, Secular and Humanist Society are already planning a joint week; and the AHS's Greater London societies are also considering holding one.

The AHS Convention is expected to again take place in central London, with a speakers' day in Conway Hall.

Online

The AHS's online presence has grown considerably over the course of the year. Our new website was launched at the start of the year, with many new features and driving considerable traffic. Facebook and the Newsletter have seen well over 100% growth, with Twitter being set up for the first time and also growing considerably.

Website

The year started with the launch of a new website for the AHS, written by Webmaster Thomas Gibson-Robinson. The site has expanded as the year has gone on, with a number of features:

- News items are all uploaded to the website and feature prominently on the homepage. Admins are able to add and edit these pages through the content management system. News items are filterable by month and by category
- The AHS's Twitter feed also features, as does ways members can get involved
- The society calendar features events by member societies and national organisations, imported from their Google Calendars and Facebook groups/pages, with duplication detection
- The Society Hub features activities of member societies and national organisations, importing from their blogs, Facebook pages/groups and Twitter feeds. The hub is filterable to just member societies and by region
- The Our Team page outlines past and present AHS personnel, with "people" being created through the content management system
- The Photos section imports photo libraries from the AHS's Facebook page
- There are pages for AHS AGMs, Conventions, Questivals, Non-Prophet Weeks, Reason Weeks and Society Awards

- Admin documents, society running guides and past issues of Secular Future are all hosted
- The Speakers Directory, Film Directory, Debate Directory and Discussion Directory are all hosted, with users being required to register in order to access the Speakers Directory. 56 users are registered across 21 societies. Entries are filterable by subject and, in the case of the Speakers Directory, by region
- Each region and member society gets its own page, detailing the region/society and featuring a feed of its blog/Facebook/Twitter activity. Admins are able to add and edit these pages through the content management system. There is also a pin map displaying the locations of members
- New societies are able to apply to join the AHS through the website
- The Facebook Society Searcher Tool scans Facebook once a month for new societies and has proven invaluable in helping the AHS grow
- Questival has its own micro-site, through which users can find out about the event and buy tickets

At the 2011 AGM the AHS also launched member forums. It remains to be seen how these are taken up.

Traffic report

Across the year, the total number of visits were 17,464 of which:

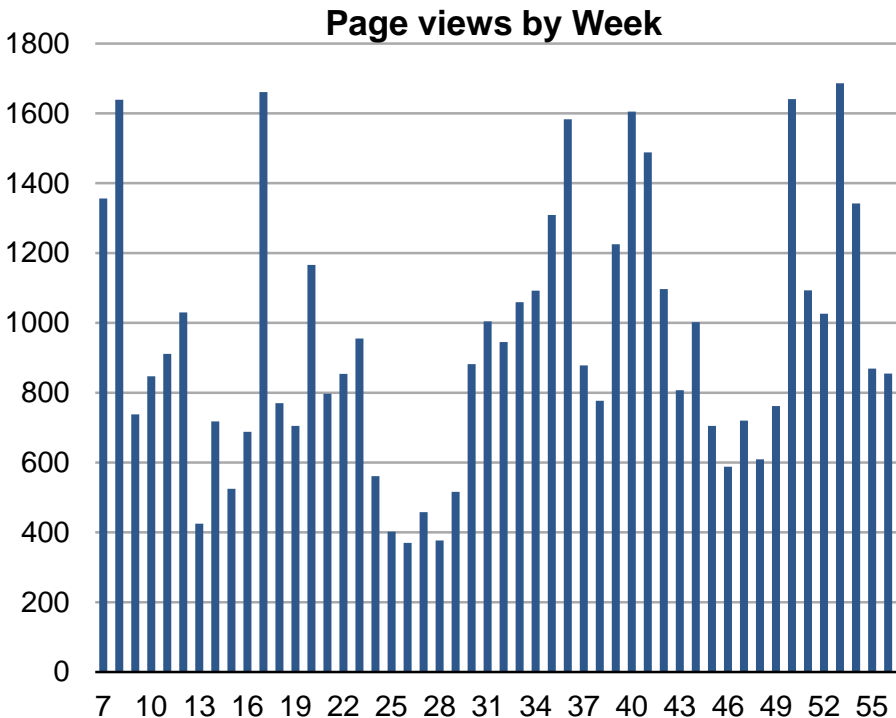
- From the UK: 88%
- From America: 3.17%
- From Ireland: 1.88%
- 'Unique' Visitors: 9,381
- Page views: 50,105
- Average time on site: 3minutes
- Average pages per visit: 2.87

Sources of traffic:

- 35% Search – keywords:
 - AHS - 12.81%
 - Federation of Atheist - 10.26%
 - Questival - 5.06%
 - The AHS - 4.61%
 - AHS Students - 2.78%
- 42% Referral:
 - Facebook 43.10%
 - twitter.com 12.95%
 - humanism.org.uk 8.68%
 - google.com 2.27%
 - oxfordatheists.org.uk 2.11%
 - questival.org.uk 1.89%
 - en.wikipedia.org 1.21%
 - secularism.org.uk 1.19%
- 21% Direct

Page views by page:

- / (home page) 22.4%
- /ahscon2011/ 5.67%
- /questival/ 2.50%
- /membership/our-members/ 2.48%
- /nonprophetweek/ 1.80%
- /resources/documents/ 1.78%
- /society-hub/ 1.52%
- /ahsagm2011/ 1.42%



Note that the year began (and the website launched) on week 7. Week 17 represents freshers’ fairs; 41 was the AHS Convention; 50 was the launch of Questival; and 53 was the launch of the AGM.

Facebook, Twitter and the Newsletter

The number of “likes” on the AHS Facebook fan page (which was first set up in February 2009) grew from 167 to 428, an increase of 156%. Monthly active users grew from 40 to 1,499, an increase of 3,647%. Growth was particularly driven by the AHS’s events.

The AHS replaced its old-style Facebook regional groups with new-style Facebook regional groups, which have proved to be much more active.

The AHS set up a Twitter account just after the 2010 AGM. This now has 254 followers.

The number of Newsletter subscribers has grown by 130% from 244 to 562. This is mainly due to people attending the AHS Convention and due to new committee members being added.

Resources

This year has seen significant improvements in the society running guides, which have been an ongoing focus of effort. Many new guides have been written and the remainder have been refreshed. However, growth of the Speakers, Film, Debate and Discussion Directories has been disappointing, having all but stalled out over the year.

Society running guides

The AHS has continued to expand its range of society running guides, with resources proving useful to member societies at all stages of development.

New guides written are:

- *How to Start and Run a Society*, primarily written by Richy Thompson and replacing the previous *Society Quick Start Guide*
- *How to Run a Successful Freshers' Week*, primarily written by Natasha Barrett
- *A Guide to Press and Publicity*, primarily written by Emma Bryce
- *A Guide to Charity and Volunteering*, primarily written by Nicola Jackson
- *How to Run a Reason Week*, primarily written by Richy Thompson and replacing *How to Run an Awareness Week*

Additionally, a number of guides are left as works in progress:

- *A Guide to Finances and Sustainability*, primarily written by James Murray
- *A Guide to Interfaith*, primarily written by Nicola Jackson and replacing *How to Run Interfaith Events*

Finally, *How to Write a Constitution* and *A Guide for Regional Development Officers* have been refreshed. The Top Tips Guides written last year also continue to be hosted.

Directories

The AHS has integrated its Speakers, Film, Debate and Discussion Directories into the website.

Growth of the Speakers Directory, which lists organisations and distinguished personnel happy to talk to member societies, has been disappointingly slow, with only a handful of speakers added to leave the list at 61 speakers and 5 organisations. This has been due to personnel issues.

The Talk Directory, which provided details of talks AHS students had previously given to member societies and which they were happy to share with other students, was taken down, after it was discovered that permission hadn't been sought from any of those listed.

Other organisations

The AHS improved relations with a large number of organisations. In particular, relations with the British Humanist Association went from strength to strength, and relations with the National Secular Society markedly improved. The AHS also acted as a stakeholder in the Equality Challenge Unit's 'Religion and Belief in Higher Education' research project, and began representing the BHA in the latter's membership of the International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organisation.

British Humanist Association

The AHS has continued to strengthen its relationship with the British Humanist Association, working more closely than ever before, and the BHA still comfortably remains the national organisation which does the most for the AHS.

At the start of the year the AHS was reconstituted to be facilitated and supported by the BHA, and to this end the BHA have supported the AHS financially, administratively and through expertise of both their Chief Executive and of their appointees to the Board, in which the BHA has a constitutional role. This constitutional role does not give the BHA any control over the AHS or advantage over other organisations in the closeness of its relationship to the AHS, and all appointees to the Board work to represent the best interests of the AHS, not those of the BHA or any other organisation.

BHA Chief Executive Andrew Copson and All Party Parliamentary Humanist Group Chair Lord Warner of Brockley spoke at the AHS Convention, and the BHA also had a stall at the Non-Religious Organisations Fair. Andrew also ran a debating workshop at both the Convention and the AHS AGM.

National Secular Society

The AHS has established a closer working relationship with the National Secular Society. The National Secular Society began passing on to the AHS details of students who contact them about setting up a society. They also took down their own guide to setting up a secular society, instead supporting the AHS's guide in this area. In return, the AHS promoted National Secular Society events, campaigns and membership in its Newsletter and on its website, and offered NSS leaflets to AHS member societies.

The AHS and NSS also collaborated on a campaign, sharing work between them.

The AHS had Vice President Gerard Philips speaking at the 2011 Convention, and the NSS also had a stall at the Non-Religious Organisations Fair. AHS President Richy Thompson was invited to and attended the 2011 Secularist of the Year.

Other organisations

The AHS re-established forgotten links with the Humanist Society of Scotland and Secular Student Alliance, and got in touch with the Humanist Association of Ireland for the first time, prior to the AHS's expansion into the Republic of Ireland. The AHS also continued its membership of the Humanist Liaison Group, and was represented at the Kindred Societies Annual Reunion.

The AHS also maintained contact with the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science. The AHS also supported Protest the Pope, and became a supporter of the Secular Europe Campaign.

The BHA Choir performed at the 2011 Convention, and there were choral workshops at both the Convention and the AGM. The AHS also promoted Ancestor's Trail to its members, arranging for a group to attend. The AHS supported the Nightingale Collaboration in challenging pseudoscientific sources at the University of Westminster.

In total, 13 organisations were represented at the Convention, with the AHS forming links with a number of groups for the first time.

The AHS began representing the BHA in the latter's membership of the International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organisation. AHS President Richy Thompson attended IHEYO's 2010 General Assembly in Krakow, and the AHS through Richy began working for IHEYO as a copy-editor.

The AHS actively participated as a stakeholder in the Equality Challenge Unit's 'Religion and Belief in Higher Education' research project, challenging the framing of a project survey and responding to a consultation. The Equality Challenge Unit is the organisation responsible for dealing with equality in Higher Education.

The AHS also actively challenged its exclusion from the National Union of Students' Interfaith Initiative, and made progress towards being accepted. Work in this area is ongoing.

Campaigns

Work began towards establishing the AHS campaigns initiative, with President Richy Thompson outlining areas member societies could campaign on. However, the AHS was unable this year to launch its grassroots campaigns initiative, due to insufficient time. It is hoped that this is launched early next year.

Towards the end of the year the Regional Development Officers collected Freedom of Information request emails for every University. AHS Head of Membership Michael Paynter used these details to ask every University their policy on non-stunned meat, with results still being collected.

The AHS supported the Protest the Pope Campaign and the BHA's Census Campaign, and supported the Nightingale Collaboration in challenging pseudoscientific sources at the University of Westminster.

Long-term strategy

In January AHS President Richy Thompson wrote a long-term strategy document, setting a number of goals for the end of each year until 2014.

Progress towards 2011 goals

The goals for 2011, with progress towards them, were:

- ✘ *35 member societies by 2011 AGM* – not met, the final number was 34. However, this target was originally from the 2008-09 Annual Report and based on a starting line of 25, when in fact the actual starting number was 14. So a deficit of 11 was recovered to just 1.
- ✘ *A Cabinet review of strategies for creating new societies will occur before the 2011 AGM* – did not occur.
- ✓ *£1400 raised (£100 per society at the start of the year) by the 2011 AGM* – this has been comfortably achieved.
- ✓ *Three national events per year, plus six local events* – Questival, the Convention and the AGM are three national events. Regional Development Officers held more than six local events.
- ✓ *50 attendees at the 2011 AGM* – met.
- ✓ *5 Reason Weeks held in 2010-11* – done – Southampton, Bristol, Leeds, Oxford, Durham.
- ✓ *Provide freshers' fair workshops and AHS leaflets to all members subsequent to the 2011 AGM* – a freshers' fair workshop was held at the AGM, and leaflets were given out.
- ✘ *Appear in the national press at least 3 times, plus the focus at least once* – appeared in the Western Mail once, and that's it –not met.
- *Gain 6 Facebook fans and 8 Newsletter subscribers a year for every member society. Aim to achieve 270 Twitter followers by the 2011 AGM* –
 - ✓ Facebook has gone from 167 to 428 fans so far this year, a gain of 7.6 per each of the 34 societies.

- ✓ The Newsletter has gone from 241 to 562 subscribers, a gain of 9.4 per each of the 34 societies.
 - ✗ Twitter has gone from 0 to 254 followers, so just fell short of the target.
- *By the 2011 AGM: Rewrite the Society Quick Start Guide and A Guide to Interfaith, write new guides on Charities, Campaigns, and Press and Publicity, have more Top Tips guides for different types of events. Additionally, consider writing guides on Sustainability and Fundraising –*
 - ✓ The Campaigns guide is off the agenda (but will hopefully be on the website instead – see below).
 - ✓ The extra Top Tips guides were instead incorporated into the new Quick Start Guide.
 - ✗ The guides on Interfaith and Sustainability and Fundraising were not quite done.
 - ✓ The Charities and Press and Publicity guides have been done.
- ✗ *150 entries in the Speakers directory by the 2011 AGM, and an entry in each region for each of the main categories. Have a minimum of 10 entries in each region – due to personnel issues, this was not met.*
- ✗ *Have at least two registered users per member committee on the website at all times – this target was not met and needs to be pursued next year.*
- ✓ *Establish good relations with the BHA, NSS, HSS, HAI, SSA and RDF by 2011 AGM, and maintain these relations from then on – this has been done.*
- ✗ *Have student campaigns outlined by the 2011 AGM – not done.*
- ✓ *Establish by the 2011 Conference rigorous guidance on how to ensure that officers continue to fulfil their roles, as well as appropriate steps if they are unable to do so – this was done through the production of the AHS Handbook.*
- ✓ *Aim to have 13 active regional development officers at all times – this is currently the case.*

So of 21 targets, 13 targets were met, but 8 were failed. Some of those failed (such as the number of member societies and Twitter follower count) were very close but others (such as the speakers directory and campaigns initiative) continue to require significant work.

Goals for 2012 AGM

Goals the outgoing Executive are setting for 2012 are:

- 50 member societies by 2012 AGM
- A Cabinet review of strategies for creating new societies will occur before the 2012 freshers period
- £3,400 raised (£100 per society at the start of the year) by the 2012 AGM
- Three national events per year, plus six local Conventions
- 70 attendees at the 2012 AGM
- 12 societies holding Reason Weeks in 2011-12
- Provide freshers' fair workshops and AHS leaflets to all members subsequent to the 2012 AGM
- Appear in the national press at least 6 times, plus the focus at least twice
- Gain 6 Facebook fans and 8 Newsletter subscribers a year for every member society. Aim to achieve 500 Twitter followers by the 2012 AGM
- By the 2012 freshers' fairs: Finish guides on Interfaith and on Sustainability and Fundraising
- 150 entries in the Speakers directory by the 2011 freshers' fairs, and an entry in each region for each of the main categories. Have a minimum of 10 entries in each region. Have a review of the directory after the 2011 freshers' fairs, with an eye to future growth and usability
- Have at least two registered users per member committee on the website at all times
- Maintain good relations with the BHA, NSS, HSS, HAI, SSA and RDF

- Have student campaigns outlined by the 2011 freshers' fair period
- Aim to have 13 active regional development officers at all times

In summary...

This year has been a very successful one for the AHS, with significant member and online growth; new events being held for the first time, with some attracting a large attendance; new society running guides giving the AHS and its members strong support; and a new website providing a hub for activity.

The AHS Executive has every hope that the growth will continue through the 2011-12 year, with perhaps an increased focus on areas such as Regional Conventions, fundraising and campaigns. The Executive is optimistic that it will attain 50 members this year, and looks forward to celebrating reaching this milestone.

So, to the outgoing Executive and Officers, it's been a great year, and fantastic fun along the way. And to the incoming Executive and Officers, all the best of luck for the year ahead!

Good luck, and have fun!

Richy Thompson

President, The National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies

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<http://www.ahsstudents.org.uk>

<http://www.facebook.com/the.ahs>

<http://twitter.com/ahsstudents>

Good luck and have fun!