



HUMANIST ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND
compassion • equality • reason

Strategic Plan 2021-2023



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Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to share with you the Strategic Plan 2021-2023 for the Humanist Association of Ireland. This document sets out our plans and ambitions for the next three years. The strategy has been prepared based upon a membership survey and a review of outcomes from the previous strategic plan.

As befits a relatively small organisation, the strategic plan is concise and succinct. We have tried to ensure that the path we are setting out for ourselves is realistic and achievable. At the core of this plan are five particular areas of focus which we believe are central to our purpose and mission, and which we are determined to advance over the next three years. These are set out on page 1.

We are confident that – through the joint and collaborative effort of all members – we can make progress across these five key areas.

I believe that working together, we can substantially advance the humanist values of a secular society over the next three years.

Aidan Pender
Chair, HAI

November 2020

Acknowledgements:

This plan has been developed with the engagement of HAI members across the country. HAI would like to thank everyone who participated in the membership survey, which was central to developing the strategic plan. HAI is a volunteer-based organisation, which has achieved great things. We would like to offer special thanks to everyone who has volunteered within the organisation, and, in expectation, to all those who will give of their time, expertise and enthusiasm to help realise our strategic goals over the next three years.

Plan Overview

The Humanist Association of Ireland's Strategic Plan 2021-2023 clarifies the Association's mission, vision and values while outlining a series of aims that will advocate for our members and the wider humanist community and strengthen the rights of the non-religious in Ireland. It builds on the detail of our previous strategic plan and reflects the changing environment of our country in recent times.

The Strategic Plan 2021-2023 intends to strengthen the Association's role as a representative for the non-religious in Ireland. It commits the Association to several key strategic goals and objectives, as follows:

1. Strengthen our focus on educating about humanism in civil society
2. Grow and develop the humanist community and HAI membership
3. Advance our ceremonies and secular support services
4. Continue to advocate for equal rights of the non-religious
5. Enhance HAI profile and organisational structures

As of November 2020, the HAI has 716 members. The Strategic Plan 2021-2023 is informed by those members and by our Board of Directors and it intends to meet the needs of these stakeholders, as well as the needs of the wider non-religious in Ireland, in a transparent and open manner. To ensure that this strategic plan would be developed in a way that reflected the values of the organisation and our members' priorities, the strategic plan development process was guided by outputs from a membership survey, undertaken in October 2020. This was key to ensuring that the needs, hopes and concerns of HAI members continue to be central to the future direction of the organisation. The plan will be reviewed periodically to ensure that it is a 'living' document and updated as necessary throughout the period it covers.

Our Mission, Vision and Values

Our Mission

The Humanist Association of Ireland (HAI) is a community of people who believe in humanist principles and aspire to a fair, balanced, ethical and responsible secular society. The HAI campaigns for the equal treatment of people of no religion by the State and provides a forum for people to meet, share experiences and develop their humanist ideals in an informal, friendly, and inclusive environment.

Our Vision

The Humanist Association of Ireland aims to be the representative voice for humanism in Ireland and our vision is for a community of non-religious people living in a fair, balanced, ethical and responsible secular society.

Our Values

The core values of the Humanist Association of Ireland are compassion, equality and reason.

Compassion

Compassion is an important quality to demonstrate in our own lives, as well as in society. It is also part of our everyday experience of being human. In the HAI, we are genuinely concerned about other people and their needs. We demonstrate a readiness to help and to do something ourselves about another person's situation.

Equality

In the Humanist Association of Ireland, we value and respect people of all backgrounds. Equality is the core value of democracy and we strive to achieve social equality in Ireland, with a particular focus on equality of treatment for the non-religious in our society.

Reason

Reason refers to human thought that is based on empirical evidence and the scientific method. In the HAI, we demonstrate the ability to think critically and to apply a logical approach to our lives.

We also strive to act with integrity, responsibility, accountability, transparency and honesty in all we do, and we endeavour to be innovative and forward-thinking in our operations.



Key Achievements 2016 – 2020

- Participated in the Coalition for Civil Society Freedom “Keeping the People’s Voice in Power” – the campaign for the reform of the Electoral Act
- Contributed Humanist Reflections at Michael D Higgins’ inauguration at Dublin Castle, and at the National Day of Commemoration
- Celebrated 25th Anniversary of HAI with a keynote lecture delivered by AC Grayling on World Humanist Day, 21st June 2018
- President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins welcomed representatives of the Humanist Association of Ireland to Aras an Uachtaráin to mark the organisation’s 25th Anniversary
- New Constitution for the HAI was approved at 2018 AGM
- Over one million people heard about humanism through our ceremonies in the last 5 years
- Senior business executive appointed
- Key events held outside Dublin
- Membership survey carried out
- Recruitment of additional celebrants
- Standards of Practice for celebrants introduced
- Formal celebrant training programme established
- Successfully meeting the challenges of Covid-19, through moving all meetings and events online via Zoom, and through our celebrants facilitating ongoing schedule changes to our humanist ceremonies

Strategic Goals 2021 – 2023

1. Strengthen our focus on educating about humanism in civil society

1.1. We will develop a school visits programme, to include training & support for school speakers

1.1.1. We will aim to train at least 20 volunteers, located throughout the country, to do school talks and we will provide ongoing support to these volunteers.



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- 1.1.2. We will create links with teaching unions/school organisations to expand our presence in schools. We will take advantage of Covid19, by doing talks remotely by Zoom. This will also allow us to liaise with schools in areas beyond where we have geographical coverage by our volunteers.
- 1.1.3. We will actively promote school talks on our website and social media, and we will create an online booking option for school talks.
- 1.2. We will build links with third level institutions, with the aim of setting up at least one humanist society within 18 months. We will create an information pack that can be provided to every third level college.
- 1.3. We will continue to work to educate people about humanism, by enhancing our media profile, through building relationships with national and local media. To achieve this, we will develop a clear strategy on the nature and type of public debate that we wish to engage in, and we will clearly outline our stance and we will appoint appropriate spokespersons to represent us.
- 1.4. We will actively promote our monthly events and annual conference to ensure the widest possible exposure for the HAI.
- 1.5. We will create and maintain a blog for our new website to keep members and the public educated about work carried out by the HAI and the international humanist community.

2. Grow and develop the humanist community and HAI membership

2.1. Further develop local groups

- 2.1.1. In recognition of the key role played by local groups in advancing humanism in Ireland, we will work to strengthen the bonds between the HAI and local groups.
- 2.1.2. We will proactively engage with local groups and we will commence this new engagement process by carrying out a dedicated survey of local groups to ascertain their needs and opinions and we will work to jointly define an agreed relationship between HAI and our local groups.

2.2. Review HAI membership strategy

HAI members demonstrate commitment, passion, intelligence and integrity and they are the centre of our organisation.

2.2.1. We will work to retain our existing members, whilst simultaneously aiming to attract new members. In particular, we will place a focus on attracting more new members from the youth sector, from the New Irish Communities and from other diverse backgrounds. We will promote ourselves on appropriate social media and online platforms to target these audiences.

2.2.2. We will work to ensure greater participation by women in positions of responsibility on the HAI Board and on occasions where the HAI is required to be publicly represented.

2.2.3. We will work to create greater opportunities for our members to meet within our community of like-minded people. We will continue to deliver monthly events, with the aim of providing a greater diversity, with a mix of speaker events and informal get-togethers for our members – subject to the lifting of Covid19 restrictions. At its most basic level, we will develop a membership pack to welcome new members.

2.2.4. We will offer newly married couples, who avail of our ceremonies, an optional free one-year membership and we will actively encourage them to avail of this.

2.2.5. We will provide the option for non-members to sign up for our newsletter. This will enable the humanist message to reach a wider audience, beyond our core membership.

2.3. Review and enhance our communications strategy with our members

2.3.1. We will provide regular updates from the Board to all members, on key policy matters and decisions.

2.3.2. We will run focus groups to seek member input on the tactical implementation of key areas of our strategy. (We would like to thank members who have already volunteered their services to be part of these focus groups).

2.3.3. We will develop and publish a quarterly online journal, to provide a platform for articles, debate and stories of humanist interest, and to promote a positive view of humanism as a progressive force in Ireland.

2.3.4. We will seek greater member input into the topics and format of our monthly events.

- 2.3.5. We will carry out another membership survey during the life of this strategic plan.
- 2.4. Increase engagement with the international humanist community and actively participate in international campaigns
- 2.4.1. We will continue to enhance our existing positive relationships with several other humanist groups, such as Northern Ireland Humanists and Humanist Society Scotland.
- 2.4.2. We will build our connections with other humanist organisations, in particular those in Europe and Humanists International, of which we are a member organisation. We will provide input and support for their campaigns and we will use opportunities to learn from these groups, as to how we can develop and expand our own presence within Ireland. We will utilise our volunteers to help us achieve this goal.
- 2.4.3. We will investigate the option of twinning with humanist organisations in other countries, particularly in regions where humanism is actively discouraged or outlawed.

3. Develop our ceremonies and secular support services

- 3.1. We will continue to ensure that an overview of humanism is included in all humanist ceremonies. This will help to promote the humanist message, as well as presenting the potential to increase membership.
- 3.2. We will focus on meeting the demand for “cradle to the grave” alternatives to religious ceremonies, by promoting and growing our secular ceremonies, especially funerals, naming ceremonies and coming of age ceremonies. We will provide ongoing training and support to our celebrants in all ceremony types.
- 3.3. We will aim to grow our celebrant numbers from 32 to 60. This will allow us to meet the growing demand for secular ceremonies. We will do this in stages, to reach 42 by end 2021, 52 by end 2022, 60 by end 2023. We will also factor in greater geographical distribution of celebrants, to ensure that more remote or rural areas of Ireland will be better catered for.
- 3.4. We will induct new trainee celebrants by way of a formal six-month training programme, covering all ceremony types. We will also maintain the trainee mentorship programme, to provide support and contact with mentees after trainees are accredited.
- 3.5. As our celebrant numbers grow, we will aim to appoint a dedicated resource responsible for ceremonies management.



3.6. We will make greater use of our website and social media channels to promote our ceremonies. We will also promote humanist ceremonies on suitable online forums, to assist in educating and informing the general public about the availability of secular ceremonies.

3.7. Secular Support Services

3.7.1. We will undertake a review of the requirements for a secular support service for our members, including an assessment of existing demand, training requirements, and options for formal provision of such a service.

3.7.2. We will assess the requirement for a network of secular support volunteers.

3.7.3. We will liaise with the HSE, private hospitals and the prison service to gain an acceptance of the rights of the non-religious to be able to avail of secular support services.

4. Continue to advocate for equal rights of the non-religious

4.1. We will continue to advocate for education equality for the non-religious

4.1.1. We will establish a volunteer education working group, to develop our education policy.

4.1.2. We will ensure that the HAI has input into the proposed Citizens' Assembly on Education.

4.1.3. We will develop template emails for parents to issue to schools requesting that humanism be included in faith education or requesting that their child be allowed to opt out of any religious education.

4.2. We will establish a volunteer working group to assess how we can carry out our campaigns and advocacy work effectively, whilst acknowledging the limitations enforced by the Civil Registration (Amendment Act) 2012 regarding promotion of a political cause.

4.3. We will continue to act as an advocate on matters of social justice, which affect non-religious people in Ireland, whilst adhering to any legislative restrictions.

4.4. We will support our fellow humanist associations across the world in the quest for justice, freedom and equality for the non-religious.



5. Enhance HAI profile and organisational structures

- 5.1. We will work to raise the HAI profile as a national institution
 - 5.1.1. We will build a national and local media presence for the HAI, through seeking greater input and representation at public events, developing relationships with journalists and broadcasters, and building our online presence and connections.
 - 5.1.2. We will promote ourselves as an open and inclusive organisation that welcomes people from all different backgrounds, regardless of gender, age, race, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status.
 - 5.1.3. We will seek out suitable humanist sponsors and supporters to endorse our work, in the form of either well-known people or organisations with a shared ethos.
- 5.2. We will aim to capitalise on the deployment of our new website and ceremony enquiry and booking system to increase and strengthen income from ceremonies.
- 5.3. We recognise and appreciate that lots of our members give willingly of their free time to volunteer in many different capacities on behalf of the HAI. We will work to develop a formal volunteer management programme to support existing volunteers and to encourage more people to volunteer. We will liaise with Volunteer Ireland to support us in this work, to put better structures in place, with formal training and support services.
- 5.4. We will aim to recruit an events coordinator and a digital media administrator to manage our online and social media presence and to ensure all platforms are professional, up to date and current. We will utilise Google Analytics and other reporting tools to assess the success of our online presence and marketing campaigns and we will tailor our content accordingly.
- 5.5. We will continue to comply with the Charities Governance Code, and we will commence reporting on our compliance from 2021 onwards.