

Annual Report 2022

Humanist Association of Ireland

Directors' Annual Report and Financial Statements

Registered Address: 34B Royal Terrace West, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin

Company Registration No. 384906

Registered Charity No. 20059910

Charity Tax Exemption No. 166500

Date of reporting period: 1 January 2022 – 31 December 2022

Board of Directors

Michael O'Kane (Acting Chair), Dara Hogan (Finance Director), Caroline Clarke (resigned 25/05/2022), Barry O'Mahony (resigned 28/02/2022), Gerard Goggin, Naomi Doyle, Iseult O'Doherty (appointed 25/05/2022), Patrick Cassidy (appointed 25/05/2022), Gerry Kennedy (appointed 15/09/2022), Natasha Dwyer (resigned 25/05/2022)

Company Secretary: Kilda Taylor

Chief Executive Officer: Jillian Brennan

Board Committees

Finance, Audit and Risk Committee: Dara Hogan, Philip Byers, Frank Crummey

Ceremonies Development and Management Committee: Naomi Doyle, Siobhán Walls, Philip Byers, Jillian Brennan, Kilda Taylor

Human Resources Committee: Dara Hogan, Naomi Doyle, Patrick Cassidy, Jillian Brennan

Auditors: NDB Chartered Accountants

Principal Bankers: Allied Irish Banks

Solicitors: Beauchamps

Purpose: The main object for which the Company is established (the "Main Object") is to advance education and in particular the study of Humanism and the dissemination of knowledge of its principles.

Subsidiary Objects

- 1.1 To promote the ideals and values of Humanism;
- 1.2 To encourage open-minded enquiry into matters relevant to human co-existence and well-being;

- 1.3 To support and represent people who seek to live full and responsible lives without religious or superstitious beliefs;
- 1.4 To provide ceremonies for weddings, funerals and other occasions for Humanists and other non-religious people through a network of accredited Humanist Officiants;
- 1.5 To publish and sell a journal and any other materials to promote Humanism, advertise services and provide a forum for information exchange;
- 1.6 To engage in such other social, educational, legal, cultural, and charitable activity as will be useful and beneficial to members of the Humanist Association of Ireland and to the community as a whole.

Mission statement: The 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.

Chairperson's Report

After the impact of Covid-19 in 2020 and 2021, normality returned in 2022. The number of humanist ceremonies recovered, with 2060 weddings being carried out during the year. The Christmas party was held in person once again and was a very welcome opportunity for a get-together of HAI members, featuring an excellent programme of readings and music. Monthly meetings continued to be held by zoom, as this enabled members to attend from all over the country and beyond.

A particular highlight was the successful Census Campaign, which raised awareness that the new census form contained a revised question - "What is your religion, if any?" which replaced the previous question which assumed that everyone had a religion. The campaign encouraged people to tick "no religion" if applicable, and it is hoped that this will result in more accurate figures on the numbers of non-religious people in Ireland when the census results are published. The Campaigns Team did a huge amount of work to raise awareness of this issue, and succeeded in generating a lot of interest and media attention.

The HAI welcomed a new team member in January with the appointment of Sylvia Farkasovksa who took up the part-time post of Advocacy/Education Co-ordinator. Sylvian has worked on the Census Campaign and on the development of a programme of schools talks, as well as greatly increasing the profile of the HAI on social media. Three issues of *Being Human* were published during the year, edited by Iseult O'Doherty with the able assistance of the Digital Magazine Team.

An independent review of chaplaincy/pastoral care was completed in June, and made a number of recommendations for the provision of these services. The Board reluctantly concluded that it would not be possible to implement the development of a pastoral care programme at this time, but the analysis and findings of the review will be invaluable when work gets underway to consider priorities for the next Strategic Plan 2024-2026.

2022 saw the completion of the training of our second group of 10 new celebrants, which brings the total number of celebrants to 51. This brings us close to our target of growing our celebrant body to 60 by the end of 2023.

I would like to thank Erin Maguire who organised the very impressive and interesting line-up of monthly events during the year. I would also like to thank Iseult O’Doherty and her *Being Human* editorial team – Selina Campbell, Dominic Moore, Leaha Holland, Neil Ward, Anthony McIntyre and Maeve Kelly. Thanks are due also to the Campaigns Team – Steve Rawson, Naomi Doyle, Natasha Dwyer, Ruth Healy and Aisling Kennedy. I would also like to thank the members of the Standing Committees – namely the Ceremonies Management and Development Committee, the Finance Audit and Risk Committee, and the HR Committee.

I would like to acknowledge the dedication and excellent work of Caroline Clarke, Barry O’Mahony, Natasha Dwyer, who stepped down from the Board during the year, and to welcome the newest Board members, Iseult O’Doherty and Patrick Cassidy.

Many other members have given of their time and enthusiasm in supporting the humanist cause throughout the country, and their work is greatly appreciated. I would like to thank my fellow Board members for all their hard work during this difficult year, and also our dedicated staff members, Jillian Brennan, Kilda Taylor, Valerie McDonogh Gliffe and Sylvia Farkasovska.

Gerard Kennedy

Chair

Introduction

The Annual Report is set out in line with the objectives set out in the Strategic Plan 2021 – 2023. This identifies five high-level strategic objectives deriving from the HAI’s purpose, as set out in its Constitution, and reflecting its overall mission and core values.

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

The principal object of the HAI under its Constitution is to is “ to advance education and in particular the study of Humanism and the dissemination of knowledge of its principles.” To that end, the HAI organises events and activities to promote understanding and debate about humanist principles and thought. During 2022 it was decided to continue to hold the monthly meetings on Zoom, as membership of the HAI is dispersed throughout the country, and remote meetings enable wide participation across the membership.

Monthly Events

The monthly programme of events continued throughout the year, with a diverse and fascinating array of topics and presenters. Topics included *Creating a Basic Income System for Ireland* (Michelle Murphy, Social Justice Ireland), *My Name is Philippa* (Philippa Ryder, trans woman, writer and activist), *Discrimination Against Non-Religious Teachers in Our Schools* (Dr. Catherine Stapleton), *Should Philosophy Be Taught in Schools?* (Marella Rice), *Being Diagnosed with Autism at Age 39* (Jody O’Neill, actor and playwright), and *Religious Involvement in Healthcare* (Dr. Peter Boylan, former Master of the National Maternity Hospital).

A Time to Remember

The annual event to remember loved ones was held on 2 January, with readings and music, and was hosted by celebrant Keane Harley.

Darwin Day Lecture

The annual Darwin Day lecture was given by Professor Henry O'Connell who drew from current leading researchers and writers in the field to make the case for the use of evolutionary principles in complementing and enhancing existing models for our understanding of both normal mental phenomena and mental illness. The lecture was held remotely on zoom, and was attended by over 60 members and friends. The event was hosted by Tony Donohue and Monica Spencer.

Christmas Party

The annual party for the festive season saw a welcome return to Buswell's Hotel on 11 December, which was mc'd by Ruth Scott, and featured an excellent programme of music and readings.

"Being Human": HAI's digital magazine on humanism

Three issues of the new digital magazine *Being Human* were published in 2022, ably edited by Iseult O'Doherty and her team of volunteers. This is a highly professional publication, featuring articles of humanist interest, including international campaigns, experiences of humanist celebrants, reviews, and stories of how people are drawn to humanism. The magazine is sent to all members, and can also be accessed on the HAI's website.

Developing a programme of schools talks

A presentation on humanism, suitable for delivery to 5th and 6th class primary school children, was completed, and plans got underway to recruit and train volunteers to deliver the presentation to schools throughout the country.

2. Grow and develop the humanist community and HAI membership

Local Groups

Many local groups resumed meetings in person, while others continued to meet remotely, using a dedicated zoom account provided by the HAI. While most local groups continued to thrive, two formerly active groups - South Dublin Humanists and the Waterford Group - ceased to operate during the year.

World Humanist Day

Local groups were sponsored by the HAI to run local events to celebrate and mark World Humanist Day in Wexford, Sligo and Cork.

Membership

Membership continues to grow, and increased from 838 at the end of 2021 to 971 at the end of 2022.

Building connections with other humanist organisations

Regular meetings were held with Northern Ireland Humanists during the year, and relations with other sister humanist organisations continued to be strengthened. HAI member Valerie Gliffe, our membership and website coordinator, represented the HAI at the Humanists International Annual Conference in Glasgow. CEO Jillian Brennan attended the European Humanist Professionals Summer School.

Monthly Newsletter

The newsletter is now sent to over 590 non-member subscribers, as well as to all HAI members.

3. Advance our ceremonies and secular support services

Ceremonies Service

2022 showed a healthy recovery in ceremony numbers, which had been adversely affected by Covid restrictions in the first half of 2021. The following number of ceremonies were carried out:

Weddings: 2,060
Baby namings: 172
Funerals and memorials: 102
Other ceremonies: 49

The ceremonies service was overseen by the Ceremonies Development and Management Committee (CDMC), a standing committee of the Board, which comprises Naomi Doyle (Chair), Siobhán Walls, Philip Byers, Jillian Brennan and Kilda Taylor.

New celebrants

10 trainee celebrants successfully completed all three modules of their training programme by February, and have been accredited as celebrants by the HAI Board. A second group of 10 trainees completed their training in December, and are now accredited as celebrants. The number of celebrants now stands at 51, and it is planned to reach the strategic target of at least 60 celebrants by the end of 2023. A further goal is to have celebrants based in every county in Ireland, and currently there are celebrants in 18 of the 26 counties, with a further celebrant based in County Tyrone.

Retirement of celebrants

Susie Kennedy conducted her last humanist ceremony in October 2022.

Susie has been a celebrant with the HAI since 2010, and has carried out hundreds of weddings, namings and funerals, and her contribution to the ceremonies service, and her role as ambassador for the HAI over the years, are much appreciated.

Professionalisation of the Ceremonies Service

The new Central Enquiry System which enables clients to make enquiries through the website has proved very successful in making it easier for clients to find a celebrant who is provisionally available for their chosen date. The integration of the enquiry and booking system through the website is also providing valuable data to the HAI for planning and marketing its services.

Marketing initiatives to promote humanist ceremonies were undertaken on suitable forums, including rip.ie for funerals and weddingsonline for weddings. The HAI took stands at a number of wedding fairs during the year to showcase humanist weddings and to inform the public about humanism generally. The HAI also became an associate member of the Irish Association of Funeral Directors.

Review of pastoral care

The Board commissioned an independent review of non-religious pastoral care and service development options, which was completed in June. The review was published on the HAI's website.

The review was extremely comprehensive and examined the provision of pastoral care services in various sectors in Ireland, including healthcare, prisons, the defence forces and education. It looked at the providers of these services, how they are structured and funded, and how professional chaplains are selected and remunerated. It also looked at the approaches taken by humanist organisations in other jurisdictions, including Northern Ireland, England and Wales, Scotland, Norway, and Denmark. The report also examined the history of the HAI's involvement with pastoral care, and sought current members' views, both by way of a survey of the entire membership, and by focus groups with those members who expressed interest, plus interviews with members of the Board and staff.

The survey of 840 members had a 10% response rate, and on the question of whether they would be interested in providing voluntary humanist pastoral care and being trained to do so, 25 responded positively. 10 HAI members participated in two focus groups, and provided useful ideas and insights. Based on the low level of response to the survey, the review suggested that the provision of pastoral care services may not be a priority for HAI members.

The report produced a number of options for the Board to consider. The first option was "Do nothing". The review found that developing effective pastoral support services is not easy or straightforward, and requires dedicated resources and governance structures. If the provision of these services is not a priority for members, and the HAI's resources are already under pressure, the Board might decide not to pursue the development of pastoral care at this time.

If the Board were to make pastoral care a priority, then the review recommends a step-by-step approach, which is set out in detail. To gain access to professional chaplaincy roles as non-religious chaplains would entail persistent lobbying and campaigning, and require dedicated staff time and a voluntary steering group.

The review concluded that the most promising avenue to pursue would be a pilot project to provide voluntary non-religious pastoral care in a hospital setting. This approach would require engagement with a suitable hospital, recruitment and training of volunteers, putting in place a clear agreement between the hospital and the HAI, and providing ongoing support for the volunteers. The pilot project would provide "proof of concept" and, if successful, could be extended to other hospitals.

The Board considered the options put forward, and saw great merit in the "step-by-step" approach. However, in reviewing the strategic and operational goals for the rest of 2022, and for next year, and taking into account the HAI's limited and stretched resources, the Board concluded that it would not be possible to prioritise the development of a pastoral care programme at this time. The Board would like to acknowledge the excellent and valuable work done by the consultant, Marjo Moonen, and believes that the review and the options put forward will be very useful when planning gets underway for the next Strategic Plan which will take the HAI into 2024 and beyond.

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

Census Campaign

The March event highlighted the HAI's information campaign which ran up to Census Day on 3 April, making people aware that, for the first time, they would have the option of ticking "no religion" on the census form. A huge amount of work was carried by the Census Campaign Team, building on the legacy of former Director Nic Johnson, who worked tirelessly to persuade the Central Statistics Office to change the census question on religious affiliation, which assumed that everyone had a religion. The question has now been changed to read "What is your religion, if any?" and the option of "No

religion" is the first on the list of possible answers. This an important milestone and should result in much more accurate figures on the numbers of non-believers in Ireland.

12 What is your religion, if any?
Mark one box only

1 No religion
2 Roman Catholic
3 Church of Ireland
4 Islam
5 Orthodox Christian
6 Presbyterian
7 Other, write in your RELIGION

It is very important that the census results accurately reflect the changing nature of Irish society, to ensure a fairer representation for the non-religious when key policy decisions are being made, such as the allocation of funding for health and your children’s education.

The Census Campaign attracted lots of coverage in the national and local media, and Jillian Brennan, CEO, was interviewed on Newstalk and many local radio stations. The campaign was also mentioned on Morning Ireland. There was an active social media campaign across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Constitutional Future of the Island of Ireland

The Seanad Public Consultation Committee invited submissions on the Constitutional Future of the Island of Ireland. The purpose of this was to consider the constitutional future of the island of Ireland given the ongoing public policy debate on the issue, the safeguarding of the peace process and the future that Ireland would like to have for generations to come. The Committee invited submissions from individuals, interested groups and organisations and it encouraged people from all traditions and opinions to lend their voices to this process and welcomed the voices of the Unionist Community and their vision for the future.

The HAI made a submission which pointed out several deficiencies in our constitution, where the non-religious are disadvantaged, and we have made several recommendations for change and for a move to a more secular constitution. HAI member Dr Alan Tuffery was invited to attend one of the public sessions and pointed out the divisive nature of the specifically Christian parts of the Constitution, especially the Preamble and the requirement for religious oaths for the President, judges and members of the Council of State.

5. Enhance HAI profile and organisational structures

National Events

The HAI was asked to represent humanism and the non-religious at a number of national commemorative events during the year. While it would be preferable for these occasions to be completely secular, at least there has been some recognition in recent years that the religious leaders do not represent all members of Irish society. Our CEO, Jillian Brennan, was invited to give a humanist reflection at the National Day of Commemoration in July, which was attended by President Michael D. Higgins and An Taoiseach. Jillian also attended the 1916 Arbour Hill Ceremony and read a reflection at the graveside. Two HAI members who had lost loved ones attended the National Day of Remembrance and Reflection in March, which was prompted by the Covid pandemic, and was televised live from the Garden of Remembrance.

Corporate Governance

The HAI maintained full compliance with the Governance Code for Charities in 2022.

Social Media

The HAI's presence on social media was further enhanced during the year.

Death of Brian McClinton

It is with great sorrow that the HAI learnt of the death of Brian McClinton, Editor of *Irish Freethinker and Humanist*, with whom the HAI has had a long association. Brian was heavily involved with the all-island Summer Schools that were organised by the HAI in conjunction with our Northern colleagues, and ran very successfully in Carlingford for many years.

Brian had strong and idiosyncratic opinions, but no-one could doubt the fierceness of his intellect and his passionate commitment to humanism. He will be greatly missed.

Director Dara Hogan represented the Board at Brian's humanist funeral, which was held in Belfast.

Looking Ahead 2023

A number of initiatives are planned for 2023, including:

- Recruiting and training HAI volunteers to roll out a programme of schools talks on humanism
- Campaigns on Education Equality for the Non-Religious and Assisted Dying
- Local groups: a review of the relationship between the HAI and local groups will be undertaken, with a view to constructive and positive engagement and understanding.
- Ceremonies service: recruitment of "funeral only" trainee celebrants, and a further intake of trainee celebrants for all ceremony types