



Religion & Belief in Public Life – 29-31 May 2015

HEADLINE NOTES:

Dialogue

- There is an established interfaith sector in Scotland, see www.interfaithscotland.org
- Interfaith Scotland and its associated bodies do not formally admit humanist organizations, although relations are very positive. There is no clear desire from humanists in Scotland to see formal involvement in interfaith work. Part of the issue being the use of 'faith' as a descriptor.
- HSS has for the last two years worked with representatives of Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic Church in Scotland and Interfaith Scotland to co-fund an annual dialogue weekend hosted by the Conforti Institute. There is no formal scope for this, but it is valued by all partners and there is a shared enthusiasm to see this develop further. You can see a blog post by one of our members reflecting on the experience here: <https://www.humanism.scot/what-we-do/news/reflections-from-communities-of-faith-and-belief-dialogue-conference/>

Funding

- The Scottish Government funds various religious dialogue projects, with a total value of over £300,000.
- Funding for 'interfaith' work is not open to non-religious groups, this presents a strategic question for both humanist organisations and funders.
- Whilst HSS is not actively seeking funding for interfaith/belief work, but there is a sense that the current exclusion from funding is unfair.

Purpose of Dialogue

- One of the key issues facing the involvement of humanist groups in interfaith/belief work is the question of purpose.
- There is a sense of frustration by some involved in dialogue work that it can be too agreeable, and not challenging enough.
- A recent Scottish Government funded report highlighted that there is a divide between people of religion and belief, and warned about the dangers of a 'new sectarianism' developing. Details at <http://faithandbelief.div.ed.ac.uk/>
- Could it be envisaged that dialogue is a useful process to avoid this?

Representation

- One of the key challenges facing the success of dialogue work is the question of representation. To what extent can people who engage in dialogue work be truly representative?
- This can present major challenges to dialogue work if decisions are taken outwith the knowledge of the leaders or members of organisations.
- This also presents a greater question around the extent to which organisations represent the views of their members.