

What is the Humanists And Non-religious in Defence network?



HAND exists to promote the non-religious worldview as being equal to and respected in the same manner as those of major world faiths. HAND is a formally recognised MOD network to support non-religious beliefs under Defence diversity & inclusion “Faith **and Belief**” policy.

Who are the non-religious?

Often the non-religious don't wish to be labelled but many call themselves atheists, agnostics, free-thinkers, sceptics and/or humanists. Common beliefs are that our world is a natural place that has evolved to its current form over the last 4.6 billion years (roughly) and that life has come into being through evolution of natural species that exist for only one lifetime. The non-religious look to science and reason to answer the many existential and philosophical questions that exist in our Universe.

Why specify Humanists?

Rather than be defined by a lack of something, humanism builds on atheist beliefs and considers that humans have evolved to the point where we can make conscious decisions that impact others. Humanists therefore have a responsibility to ensure those decisions are based on sound moral and ethical judgements and are intended to have positive outcomes. These views pair closely with Defence values of respect, integrity and service. Many Defence personnel who do not have any religious beliefs exhibit humanist values and probably aren't even aware of them. One of HAND's aims is to

increase awareness of humanism as a non-religious worldview to provide some commonality in terminology and approach to the challenges and opportunities faced by Defence personnel in a Faith and Belief context. This positive approach is put to good use to ensure non-religious views are considered equal in the MOD and with the same respect as religious worldviews.

History

The HAND network originated as the UK Armed Forces Humanist Association (UKAFHA) and later became the Defence Humanist Network (DHN) to include MOD civil servants and become a whole force network. Focussing on humanism meant that the large population of non-religious personnel in the MOD (more than 35% in 2022), with whom the humanists share common values, did not have an established support network that could advocate their beliefs. There are many and varied non-religious worldviews including atheists, many - but not all – agnostics, sceptics, free-thinkers, unlabelled and more and there has been much discussion as to how they can be captured in an acronym for the network. Eventually it was agreed to keep the humanist origins, but otherwise to advocate for all non-religious beliefs hence the Humanist and Non-religious in Defence (HAND) network came into being in the early 2020s. The network is recognised at the highest levels of the MOD and has a 2* Champion.

What does it do?

HAND exists primarily to articulate the non-religious view in Defence in support of both non-religious and humanist Service personnel and Defence Civil Servants. By ensuring their voice is heard and their belief needs are met, our work directly contributes towards the moral component of fighting power, which in turn underpins our combat effectiveness.

HAND is keen that people in need of support should be able to choose to speak to someone who authentically and genuinely shares their worldview. They have a growing network of pastoral support providers, available for confidential and empathetic conversations.

Pastoral Support

The HAND network provides members of the MOD community with high-quality, personal, non-religious ceremonies. Their celebrants can help couples celebrate a [marriage](#) in a way that is warm and genuine, that's about the two of them and their relationship, and is full of laughter – and perhaps a few tears too. Or a [funeral](#) or memorial ceremony that focuses on the person who had died and the life they led – not on the idea of an afterlife – and provides a dignified and sincere way of saying goodbye.

Ceremonial events (specifically Remembrance)

HAND also seeks to ensure inclusivity for all military personnel and their civilian colleagues at ceremonies and events that have a traditionally religious theme, such as Remembrance. HAND (and its earlier incarnations) have fought hard to ensure that Queens Regulations were changed to ensure that the non-religious are not forced to go to church or placed on menial tasks if they didn't feel comfortable attending a religious event and instead have an inclusive, secular event that ensures everyone can conduct Remembrance without any religious input.

Contacts

If that sounds like something you might be interested in joining, or require the assistance of, then have a look for the Humanist And Non-religious in Defence (HAND) network on [Teams](#), [Sharepoint](#) or [Defence Connect](#).

There is also a Twitter and Facebook presence for events, interesting articles and discussions.