

'Advancement of Humanism' accepted as a charitable purpose

01 NOVEMBER 2011

CATEGORY:
ARTICLE

The Charity Commission has approved the new objects of the British Humanist Association ('**BHA**'), which include the advancement of Humanism.

The Charity has been campaigning since 2005 for the advancement of non-religious beliefs to be recognised as a charitable purpose under English charity law. The advancement of religion is of course an established charitable purpose. The BHA argued that under the Human Rights Act and equality law, the advancement of non-religious beliefs should not be treated differently.

For an object to be charitable it must be certain both what it means and that that meaning is necessarily and exclusively confined to a purpose or purposes which the law recognises as charitable. 'Humanism' is a general term with a wide range of meanings. Its precise meaning would have to be ascertained.

The BHA was previously registered as a charity but claimed its charitable status under other traditional charitable purposes, such as the advancement of education. The new objects are as follows:

- *The advancement of Humanism, namely a non-religious ethical life stance, the essential elements of which are a commitment to human well-being and a reliance on reason, experience and a naturalistic view of the world;*
- *The advancement of education and in particular the study of and the dissemination of knowledge about Humanism and about the arts and science as they relate to Humanism;*
- *The promotion of equality and non-discrimination and the protection of human rights as defined in international instruments to which the United Kingdom is party, in each case in particular as relates to religion and belief; and*
- *The promotion of understanding between people holding religious and non – religious beliefs so as to advance harmonious co-operation in society.*

BHA has said that it is *'delighted with its new Objects, which represent a considerable legal advance for fair treatment of religious and non – religious organisations'*.