

## James Purnell's standard response to letters supporting the SELHuG Thought For the Day campaign

Dear ...

Thank you for your email dated ...

"As part of the BBC's review of its religion and ethics programming last year, we carried out extensive audience research. This shows, amongst other things, a wide interest in moral questions in the UK context of a fluid environment around beliefs, with one in four people saying that they have significantly changed their mind about their faith over their lifetime.

"Across the whole of the BBC's output, from entertainment programmes such as *Eastenders* to specialist factual programmes such as *Beyond Belief*, we concluded in the review that the BBC faces a challenge not only to meet the more fluid and individual needs of our audience but also to make our programming relevant and engaging for a wider audience. We are therefore making some significant changes which include using contributors from a wider range of belief backgrounds in our religious programming.

"A recent example of this is the contributors on BBC Two's *The Pilgrimage*, which showed people of a variety of faiths and beliefs, including Christian, atheist and humanist (Ed Byrne, a patron of Humanists UK) walking to Santiago and discussing questions of morality and faith over 3 hours of programming. We are talking with Humanists UK and other groups about ideas to bring to life a wider range of perspectives about different beliefs in our programmes.

"*Thought for the Day* features speakers from the world's major faith traditions to reflect on topical events and issues from the perspective of their faith. As part of the review we considered the remit of the slot and concluded that in the context of the BBC's overall output it serves a distinct purpose and do not plan to change the slot itself but are planning to change the way it fits in with the *Today* programme by:

- Including a wider range of religious topics within the *Today* programme, for example Frank Gardiner reporting on Coptic Christians in Egypt.
- Where relevant, linking the issues raised in *Thought for the Day* with the *Today* programme's agenda. For example:
  - Follow up *Thought for the Day* with an interview with a major figure on the *Today* programme.
  - Run a separate story on *Today* that fits closely with *Thought for the Day* that day."

Yours sincerely,

James Purnell