

Religion Media Centre
Accounts for the year ended - 31 March 2023

Registered Charity Number

1169562

Address

Collaboration House
77-79 Charlotte Street
London
W1T 4PW

Trustees

	<u>Date appointed</u>
Mr Benedict Samuel Rich	10 th October 2016
Rev Christopher Landau	10 th October 2016
Mr Michael Wakelin (chair)	10 th October 2016
Mr Kevin Jaquiss	29 th March 2017
Roger Bolton	27 th June 2019
Alison Gow	26 th November 2020 (resigned 23 March 2023)
Dr Lois Lee	26 th November 2020
Hussein Kesvani	26 th November 2020 (resigned 23 March 2023)
Dr Jasjit Singh	7 th July 2021
Dr Hassan Abdein	27 th March 2023

Accountant

Andrew Jennings MA FCA

Independent Examiner

Mr Keith Halstead MA (Oxon) FCA

Bank

Cooperative Bank, PO Box 101, 1 Balloon Street, Manchester M60 4EP

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Trustees Report

The trustees are pleased to present the annual report of the Religion Media Centre from 1st April 2022 – 31st March 2023.

1. Governance

The Religion Media Centre is a Charitable Incorporated Organization, charity number 1169562, registered on 10th October 2016.

Its constitution states its objects are: 'To advance education of the public in world religion, including the Baha'i faith; Buddhism; Christianity; Hinduism; Islam; Jainism; Judaism; Sikhism and Zoroastrianism by: the dissemination of accurate, authoritative, independent and impartial information and research about religious faiths to the media; and the provision of media training to religious organisations.'

It is an impartial and independent organization aiming to help the media report and understand religion and beliefs. It has no editorial line, nor does it promote any one religion, or religious belief in general. Instead, it exists to provide accurate, timely and relevant information to the media, enabling the public to be better informed.

The trustees have met six times during the year. Hussein Kesvani and Alison Gow stepped down on 23rd March 2023. Dr Hassan Abdein joined as a trustee on 27th March 2023.

Our Trustees are responsible for compliance with charity law and with the RMC's charitable objectives. They set the RMC's strategic direction, oversee its work, monitor progress and prioritise the RMC's activities. They support the team of consultants and freelancers who work on projects and content; monitor and supervise fund raising initiatives and advise on marketing.

Our advisory board are invited frequently to contribute to our thinking and activities.

We review our safeguarding and data management policies annually. We are registered with the Independent Commissioners Office for data protection. We are a member of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations.

We evaluate our success against KPIs measuring engagement on all social media platforms and keep our strategic objectives under review, responding to changing demands and ability to respond.

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Advisory Board members

Dr Azim Ahmed	Deputy Director at the Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK
Remona Aly	Director of Communications of Exploring Islam Foundation
Dr Kate Christopher	Director Teach:RE at Culham St Gabriel
Andrew Copson	CEO of Humanists UK
Prof Adam Dinham	Professor of Faith & Public Policy, Goldsmiths
Caroline Donne	Freelance radio producer
Rabbi Alex Goldberg	Barrister and rabbi, Dean of the College of Chaplains Surrey University
Katie Harrison	Social & Public Affairs Adviser to the Archbishop of Canterbury
Dr Sarah Harvey	Senior Research Officer, Inform
Dr Tim Hutchings	Assistant Professor of Religious Ethics, University of Nottingham
James Irving	St Bride's Fleet Street Head of Finance and Fundraising
Andrew Jennings	Accountant and finance adviser
Rev Tony Miles	Superintendent Minister Methodist Central Hall, Westminster
Prof Jolyon Mitchell	Professor of Communications, Arts and Religion, Edinburgh University
Dr Suzanne Newcombe	Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies, Open University; Director Inform.
Canon Ed Newell	Principal and Chief Executive of Cumberland Lodge
Prof Stephen Pattison	Former Professor of Religion Ethics and Practice Birmingham University
Rev George Pitcher	Journalist, author and an Anglican priest
Eleanor Puttock	Digital chaplain, Methodist Homes for the Aged
Rabbi Jonathan Romain	Rabbi at Maidenhead Synagogue
Jasvir Singh	Barrister, Chair of City Sikhs, Honorary Fellow, Edward Cadbury Centre
Dr Jasjit Singh	Associate Professor, University of Leeds
Nick Spencer	Senior Fellow Theos think tank
Judy Trotter	Head of Adult Education & Learning, JW3 Centre
Karl Wightman	UK Baha'i Office of Public Affairs

2. Activities, achievements and performance:

Editorial

We continued to provide daily news bulletins of news about religion, delivered by email to an audience which increased by 67 per cent over the year. The bulletins are delivered into people's inboxes at 0700 every weekday morning. Journalists find them useful tipping them off about stories in the news, but academics and RE teachers and faith leaders are also frequent users, as the stories spark discussions among students. We know that journalists specialising in the reporting of religion and producers of programmes in this field, read these bulletins on a daily basis.

Our established team of experienced freelance journalists - Rosie Dawson, Tim Wyatt, Christopher Lamb, Andrew Brown, Catherine Pepinster, Amardeep Bassey and Lianne Kolirin - continued to produce news stories, analysis and features. Academics also joined in the production of fact sheets.

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This year we experimented with explainers and timelines, providing research and context for running news stories.

This was a momentous year for news:

- The war in Ukraine which began in February 2022 continued through this year and we covered stories about the impact on the Orthodox church, the efforts by religious groups to help millions of displaced people and peace efforts.
- We covered the Queen's platinum jubilee in June, her death in September and the accession of King Charles III. We reviewed the influence and impact of the Queen's deeply committed faith, spoke to people from various faith groups on her legacy and reported on the immediate moves made by King Charles to work alongside faith groups in their work
- We attended the Lambeth conference of global Anglican bishops, reporting on their disagreement over same sex relationships and remarkable moment of the acceptance of difference. We also reported the stories of bishops dealing with catastrophic floods, political turmoil and poverty
- The UK hosted the International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief in July 2022 and we reported on the stories of persecution and inter governmental response
- The World Cup in Qatar at the end of 2022 gave rise to stories on values and ethics, as well as the inclusion of Muslims in the beautiful game
- In the autumn of 2022 the UK saw the demise of two Prime Ministers, Boris Johnson and Liz Truss, and the rise of the UK's first Hindu Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak. We reported on values and ethics in public life and the new PM's tradition
- The 2021 census results showing a fall in Christian affiliation and a rise in "non religion" were published and pored over in November 2022
- In March 2023, the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury marked ten years in office and we reported on their achievements and challenges

Among the other stories we covered this year:

- Religion in public life – political debates and faith perspectives on the cost of living crisis, poverty and the government's plans to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, contested by bishops in the Lords. Then in February SNP leadership contender and "wee free" church member, Kate Forbes, was put under the spotlight for her opposition to same sex marriage on religious grounds
- The "Our Lady of Heaven" film protests and the subsequent demise of Imam Qari Asim as a government adviser
- 100 year anniversary of the BBC and how religious broadcasting has changed over that time
- The Church of England came into the headlines again over safeguarding, same sex blessings in church, the drawn out dispute with Dean Martyn Percy, church closures and new evangelical movements
- Pope Francis continued his moves to create a voice for all members through the synod process, despite his failing health. This year also saw the death of Pope Benedict XVI
- The year ended with extraordinary scenes at Asbury College in the USA, which witnessed a two week long prayer and worship service, known as a revival

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3. Events

- BRIEFINGS

We continued our regular media briefings, held on zoom, where guest speakers join a panel to explain a story in the news. We started this during the Covid lockdown and it has become an important regular part of our work. This year we increased our number of briefings and our attendees grew by 40 per cent. Our audience includes journalists, broadcasters, teachers, academics and RMC supporters who wish to be better informed.

All the sessions are recorded for our YouTube channel, produced by Oliver Bowring from Musicarta Ltd. 221 speakers took part in our zooms, drawn from universities, faith groups and publications in the UK and abroad.

The highlight was the success of the briefing on the 2021 census, showing a rise in non-religion, with more than 100 people joining the call.

We continued to produce some zooms in collaboration with external organisations such as book publishers and report authors. We collaborated with the think tank Theos for a three part series on Artificial Intelligence and the idea of immortality, the notion of the soul and impact on human relationships.

- FESTIVAL:

Our fourth Religion Media Festival was held on 12th May 2022 at the JW3 centre in north London. Our keynote speaker was Cardinal Vincent Nichols and our key interview was with Aleem Maqbool, the newly appointed BBC Religion Editor. Panel discussions included “science, religion and the future”, reporting communities, and women and religion. This was our first in person festival since the pandemic.

- LECTURE

Our second annual lecture was held in September 2022 at St Bride’s, Fleet Street, where Professor Linda Woodhead, from King’s College London, delivered an address on “Considering the future of religion in Britain”, in advance of the 2021 census results which showed a rise in non-religion. The lecture was well attended and is the first of we hope a long association with St Bride’s.

- EVENTS

We put on an event with the UN Faith for Rights programme at the UKTV centre in November 2022, with guest speaker Professor Nazila Ghanea, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, and an audience of journalists, press officers and other media professionals. This was organised with Rabbi Alex Goldberg, a member of our advisory board.

4. The Creating Connections Project

We have been fortunate in being given a further grant from Culham St Gabriel’s Trust to put on another series of “Creating Connections” events in five cities in England, bringing together faith and media groups to aid understanding and create new networks. This is in addition to our being granted a “Rank Foundation Golden Award” which also helps towards this worthwhile project. We are planning this second series in the autumn of 2023 in Liverpool, Bristol, Newcastle, Bradford and Norwich. A sixth city – Coventry - has been added with a generous grant from the Saltley Trust.

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These events are aimed at addressing the disconnect between the media and religious communities in local areas, with both sides complaining about the lack of coverage and lack of communication. Our events bring together people engaged in religion in the public square, often for the first time, including local media, faith leaders, RE teachers and academics. Plans are advancing, engaging leaders of media organisations and journalists reporting their local communities.

5. The Religion Media Centre Podcast

We have introduced a podcast platform for discussions on religious topics and “big interviews” with people making the news. Our funding from the Sir Halley Stewart Trust was for one year only and we are continuing the work as our budget allows. Key well known broadcasters are involved in our output, including Roger Bolton, presenter Hannah Scott Joynt, former senior BBC editor Leo Devine, and journalist and broadcaster Rosie Dawson. Our podcasts are produced by Oliver Bowring at Musicarta Ltd.

6. Impact and communications

Through the hard work of our social media and marketing team, our following has steadily increased during the year on Twitter, LinkedIn, through our website, by newsletters and via our You Tube channel.

Our Twitter following grew by 25 per cent, with many new followers arriving from live tweeting our briefings, and impressions doubled. Linked In grew by 50 per cent and is a key vehicle for keeping in touch with our specialist writers and academics.

Our new website has done very well this year, with the number of views and users doubling in number. The website is consistently reviewed and updated as required. Our new tab listing commentators and their areas of expertise is a unique and well regarded offering.

Our news letters on mailchimp continued to grow in popularity and are widely used and actively anticipated, as noted above. These are used for daily news bulletins, weekly newsletters and weekly media briefings, and their circulation increased by a remarkable 52 per cent this year.

We were sorry to lose our social media and business development consultant Sorcha Connell, who left us for Lambeth Palace at the end of 2022. She was an integral part of the team which has built up the charity into an ambitious and lovely organisation and is much missed. Much of her work has been taken over by Oliver Bowring at Musicarta Ltd, who adds it to his already impressive list of contributions to the organisation.

7. Training

We ran two bespoke zoom training courses this year. One was on reporting the world cup in Qatar, understanding the religious nature of society and the context of the event. This was led by journalist Amardeep Bassey. The other was on avoiding stereotypes when choosing pictures to go with a news story and was led by academic Dr Keith Kahn Harris and photographer Rob Stothard. In addition, our briefings offered insight and information on stories which journalists were covering in the news.

8. Funding

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In this financial year, we received generous donations from four foundations – Rank, Porticus, Halley Stewart and Culham St Gabriel’s Trust; we also received a Rank Golden Award and donations from the Church of England, the Bible Society, Michael Sternberg, the UN Faith for Rights programme and Unitas.

The RMC accepts funds from those who support our vision, values and aims and who have a clear governance structure and transparent accountability. The RMC has an appropriate anti bribery policy.

9. Business Development

Our executive chair, Michael Wakelin, is responsible for business development and seeks individuals and organisations who support our aims and are willing to support our work. He was aided by our social media consultant Sorcha Connell, generous advice for our advisory panel and trustees and help from Musicarta Ltd.

Our audience

We believe we reached over 2.5 million people this year through all our varied forms of work and social media including via events, briefings, newsletters, website and social media. Our aim is to help the media report religion but we have found that many people outside the media have become loyal supporters. We are the only place where news about all major religious traditions and none are found in one site. We appeal to religious education teachers, academics, interfaith groups and people from within the traditions curious about other faiths and keen to forge links. Academics and faith leaders are keen to support us to offer their knowledge and expertise to the media. The top age group accessing our website is 25-34

TRS-UK

We continue to be associated with Theology and Religious Studies UK, which represents academics in higher education throughout the UK. Through a Memorandum of Understanding, we attend each other’s annual meetings and include a representative on our advisory group, who helps point us towards academics whose area of study crosses a news story. This year, our new representative continues to be Dr Tim Hutchings, from the University of Nottingham.

10. Statement of public benefit

The Trustees have complied with their duty to have due regard to the guidance on public benefit published by the Charity Commission in exercising their powers and duties.

Benefit has been demonstrated to journalists and media professionals who have used material for programmes and articles and built their knowledge through training. Academics and RE teachers have been able to spread their knowledge and expertise through providing insight in articles and contributions to discussions with the media. Faith leaders and media organizations have engaged with the media and each other through events, training and discussions.

Results

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The Charity saw a loss of £21,711 in the year on its general fund. However, this represented the utilisation of cash reserves brought forward from previous years, so that the net cash reserves at the end of the year were £114,150 in liquid funds.

Reserves Policy

The Charity is keeping future obligations low and currently has no future commitments or overheads as contributors are freelance. The current policy is to retain enough cash reserves to cover costs and to build up resources to fulfil the Charity's activities at the same level in the ensuing year.

Responsibilities of Trustees regarding the accounts

Charity law requires the Trustees to prepare a receipts and payments account and a statement of assets and liabilities for each financial year. In addition, they are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which are sufficient to show and explain the Charity transactions and to disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the Charity. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the Charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Michael Wakelin

Signed on behalf of the Trustees

Michael Wakelin

18 July 2023

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RELIGION MEDIA CENTRE - ACCOUNTS 2022-2023

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT 2022-23

	<u>2023</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2022</u>
	<u>Unrestricted</u>	<u>Restricted</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Unrestricted</u>	<u>Restricted</u>	<u>Total</u>
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Receipts						
Grants	72,500	-	72,500	100,000	-	100,000
Training - 5 Cities Project	-	45,000	45,000	-	10,000	10,000
Podcasts	-	10,560	10,560	-	10,560	10,560
Other	-	5,300	5,300	-	-	-
TOTAL	72,500	60,860	133,360	100,000	20,560	120,560
Expenditure						
Project consultancy	24,008	-	24,008	19,500	-	19,500
Communications costs	16,529	-	16,529	21,451	-	21,451
Social media and marketing	21,622	-	21,622	24,994	-	24,994
Computers / equipment	5,062	-	5,062	6,571	-	6,571
Business development	13,000	-	13,000	12,000	-	12,000
Events	7,124	4,125	11,249	5,887	-	5,887
Travel	159	-	159	-	-	-
Insurance	430	-	430	417	-	417
Professional fees	1,337	-	1,337	574	-	574
Podcasts	-	17,135	17,135	-	4,935	4,935
Training & RPL	48	300	348	336	18,058	18,394
Festival 2022	4,892	-	4,892	-	-	-
5 Cities Project 2023	-	4,940	4,940	-	-	-
TOTAL	94,211	26,500	120,711	91,730	22,993	114,723
Surplus/(Deficit) for the Year	-	21,711	34,360	8,270	-	2,433
Transfer between funds	-	1,075	1,075	-	1,558	1,558
Cash funds at the beginning of year	95,876	5,625	101,501	89,164	6,500	95,664
Cash Funds at the end of year	73,090	41,060	114,150	95,876	5,625	101,501

STATEMENT OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES as at 31st MARCH 2023

	Note	2023	2022
		£	£
ASSETS			
Bank and cash balances		<u>114,150</u>	<u>101,501</u>
Represented by :			
ACCUMULATED FUNDS			
Unrestricted funds		73,090	95,876
Restricted funds	4	41,060	5,625
Total funds at 31 March 2022		<u>114,150</u>	<u>101,501</u>

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NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS

1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES

Basis of accounting

The accounts have been prepared on the receipts and payments basis. The receipts and payments account is a record of monies received and paid during the financial year. The accounts comply with the appropriate legal requirements.

2. FUNDS

Unrestricted funds comprise those funds which the Trustees are free to use for any purpose in furtherance of the charitable objects.

Restricted funds are funds which are to be used in accordance with specific restrictions imposed by the donor.

3. TRANSACTIONS INVOLVING RELATED PARTIES

Included in the accounts is £13,000 paid to the chairman relating to business development.

4. RESTRICTED FUNDS

The restricted income in 2022-23 was £45,000 from Culham St Gabriel's Trust and the Rank Golden Award for the Five Cities project and £10,560 from the Sir Halley Stewart Trust for the podcasts, plus additional smaller grants amounting to £5,300 in respect of grants for specific events organised by the Religion Media Centre. Of these grants £41,060 has not yet been spent, most of which relates to the Five Cities project which is scheduled to take place in the autumn of 2023.

These accounts were approved by the board of Trustees on 18 July 2023 and signed on its behalf by Michael Wakelin, chair

Michael Wakelin

18 July 2023

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Independent Examiner's Report to the Trustees of Religion Media Centre

I report to the Trustees on my examination of the accounts of Religion Media Centre (the Charity) for the year ended 31 March 2023.

Responsibilities and basis of report

The Charity's Trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").


I report in respect of my examination of the Charity's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent Examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the Charity as required by section 130 of the Act;
or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed:- 

Date 29th July 2023

Keith Halstead MA(Oxon) FCA,
60 Woodcote Hurst
Epsom
Surrey
KT18 7DT