

Religion Media Centre
Accounts for the year ended - 31 March 2024

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
Dr Lois Lee	26 th November 2020
Dr Jasjit Singh	7 th July 2021 (resigned 12 th March 2024)
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 2023 – 31st March 2024.

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 organisation 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 four times during the year. Jasjit Singh stepped down as a trustee on 12th March 2024.

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 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, a weekly roundup of news, factsheets, explainers, timelines, weekly zoom media briefings and original journalism from our team of freelance journalists - Rosie Dawson, Tim Wyatt, Christopher Lamb, Andrew Brown, Catherine Pepinster, Amardeep Bassey and Lianne Kolirin.

Among the headline stories covered this year:

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- Liberal Judaism and The Movement for Reform Judaism announce the creation of a new movement merging with each other to represent all Britain's Progressive Jews
- The coronation of King Charles III, defender of the faith, who emphasised the idea of service and interfaith dialogue.
- Mike Pilavachi, founder of the evangelical charismatic movement Soul Survivor, resigned and suspended over inappropriate relationships with young men, involving massaging and wrestling them to the floor.
- Faith leaders opposed the government's Rwanda bill to remove asylum seekers
- The Church of England's general synod descended into chaos at its meeting in York, as the two sacked members of the Independent Safeguard Board told their side of the story. Two independent reports suggested new processes.
- The number of students who sat A-level Religious Studies this summer fell by 3.5 percent in England and 24 percent in Wales. Reported shortage of trained Religious Education specialist teachers. Calls for a national plan for RE, replacing numerous local agreements.
- Rishi Sunak told a Hindu gathering at the University of Cambridge that his Hindu faith influences every aspect of his life and gives him the courage to do his best as Prime Minister.
- 6,500 people from 95 countries, representing 212 spiritual traditions, attended the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago.
- The National Zakat Foundation has reported the highest income in its 11-year history, distributing over £5.5 million in 2022, up from £3.8m in 2021.
- Half a million Catholic young people greeted Pope Francis for the 37th World Youth Day in Lisbon
- Sinead O'Connor, the Irish singer who rose to fame with the ballad "Nothing Compares To You", was buried in a Muslim ceremony in Bray, Co Wicklow. She converted to Islam five years ago.
- The Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, accused the Indian government of being behind the killing of a Canadian Sikh, shot dead outside a gurdwara in British Columbia. Another Sikh activist died suddenly in Birmingham and his family want an investigation.
- META (formerly Facebook) withdrew a multi-million pound scheme providing community reporters. The BBC cut local radio Sunday morning religious shows from 39 to 13
- The Rome Synod of Bishops met in October following a global consultation, opening the prospect of wider involvement of women and lay people
- War in the Middle East broke out on 7 October, when Hamas killed 1200 Israelis and kidnapped 252 in a shocking incursion. Subsequently, Israeli attacks on Gaza have killed 30,000 people. Antisemitism and Islamophobia has risen to record levels. Faith leaders made repeated calls for a ceasefire.
- The Sunday programme on BBC Radio 4 celebrated its 50th anniversary.
- The Church of England agreed to introduce standalone services for blessing same sex couples, for a trial period. Bishops decided prayers of blessing could take place from 17 December. Evangelicals moved to select their own bishops, preparing for a split
- A Faith Pavilion at Cop28 in Dubai provided a platform for faith leaders to appeal for more action from world leaders on global warming.
- Paula Vennells, ex CEO of the Post Office, "shortlisted to be Bishop of London".
- The Media Bill came under scrutiny for omitting an obligation for public service broadcasters to include programmes on religion.
- The government withdrew funding to the Inter Faith Network, leading to its closure

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3. Events

- BRIEFINGS

We continued holding weekly media zoom briefings, where a panel explains a story in the news providing context and background. Our briefings reached more than double the number of people compared to the previous year. Our speakers include university academics, authors, faith leaders and teachers. We collaborated with other organisations such as the National Churches Trust, to provide these events. We record the briefings for our YouTube channel and they are made into podcasts, with our audience more than doubling. All the sessions are produced by Oliver Bowring from Musicarta Ltd.

- FESTIVAL:

Our fifth Religion Media Festival was held on 15th June 2023 at the JW3 centre in north London. Our keynote speaker was the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, interviewed by ITV's Julie Etchingham, a wide-ranging discussion on the many challenges within and outside the church. Our panels included a consideration of the influence of religion on world affairs, a panel chaired by BBC religion editor Aleem Maqbool, and our other speakers included Daisy Scalchi, BBC Commissioning Editor - Specialist Factual.

4. The Creating Connections Project

Our second series of Creating Connections events, bringing together local faith groups and the media, took place in Liverpool, Bristol, Newcastle, Bradford and Norwich. These were funded by Culham St Gabriel Trust, and a sixth event in Coventry was made possible by a grant from the Saltley Trust. In each city, representatives from the BBC, ITV and local newspapers took questions from the floor to explain how they take decisions.

On average, 60 people attended each event, with 82 per cent saying it had improved their view of the media and 90 per cent saying it improved their view of religion. The audience included local media, faith leaders, local councillors, RE teachers, academics and those interested in religion in the public square.

Our events took place as BBC local radio religion programme presenters were being made redundant and Reach PLC announced cutbacks across the UK. But the journalists who joined our events made contacts with faith representatives and there were many opportunities for people to share their news stories, which have since been followed up.

There were discussions about the importance of a social media presence for all faith groups, enabling better communication within and outside their organisations. There was also a shared fear of a backlash when speaking out, which came out in small group discussions.

There were many great stories which emerged for the first time and an acknowledgment that more media training would be beneficial for people to identify their stories, learn how to contact the media to get their story across, develop social media skills and grow in confidence when telling their story.

Young people were invited to speak at each event, sharing their views on religion in the media and revealing they consumed news more on social media platforms, but not radio, TV or papers. The

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panels included sixth formers brought by RE teachers and university students brought by their tutors. In one event, media students presented TikTok films on religion, provoking a lively discussion on how the story of religion can be told on all platforms.

Once more we found that people engaged in faith communities wanted to tell journalists of their stories and the journalists wanted to hear about them. These events acted as catalysts to kick start conversations and develop good relations. They also provided a unique space for all those engaged in religion in the public square to meet, discuss, share and learn.

6. Impact and communications

Our audience has continued to grow through all our social media channels, achieving a one million reach in this year. We engaged Musicarta Ltd to increase our presence on all social media channels, versioning our material on each platform, enabling a steady increase in support.

Our YouTube views increased by 60 per cent. Our new website has done very well this year, with the number of monthly page views and monthly users doubling in number. Our newsletters on mailchimp with the daily news bulletin and weekly roundup continued to grow by around a third, with a high engagement. We have increased our presence on Linked In where impressions have more than doubled and Facebook, where impressions rose four fold.

Journalists have engaged with us through all our activities and we aim to strengthen these ties next year with more events targeted at the media in particular.

7. Training

Our weekly briefings offer background information and context on stories about religion in the news aimed at journalists writing the story. Our events also offer basic media knowledge and greater understanding to faith representatives, which we build on with bespoke media training events for faith leaders. We have offered targeted training sessions on TikTok, with Sophia Smith Galer and Matt Batten; how to move from traditional to digital media, with Ruth Gledhill and John McManus; and understanding legal systems in religious traditions which operate in Britain, with lawyers and academics from different faith traditions. We have offered training to all-comers and by arrangement with different organisations during the year.

8. Funding

In this financial year, we received generous donations from Rank, Porticus, Culham St Gabriel's Trust, the Church of England, the Saltley Trust, UNITAS and Open Society. We also received individual donations from generous supporters and others.

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, has helped to create a vibrant network of supporters among the media but also people outside who value our work. We are the only place where news about all

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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. We are grateful to academics and faith leaders who support us by offering their knowledge and expertise to the media.

TRS-UK

We have a Memorandum of Understanding with Theology and Religious Studies UK, which represents academics in higher education throughout the UK. Their representative who continues to be involved in our work is 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.

We have advanced the education of the public in religion through our work with key groups. Journalists and media professionals have used our 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 organisations have engaged with the media and each other through events, training and discussions.

Results

The Charity saw a loss of £25,849 (2023 – 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 £41,148 (2023 £73,090) 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, taking into account donations promised, 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



1 July 2024

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RELIGION MEDIA CENTRE - DRAFT ACCOUNTS 2023-2024

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT 2023-24

	2024			2023		2023
	Unrestricted	Restricted	Total	Unrestricted	Restricted	Total
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Receipts						
Grants	72,587	-	72,587	72,500	-	72,500
Training - 5 Cities Project	-	10,000	10,000	-	45,000	45,000
Podcasts	-	-	-	-	10,560	10,560
Other	-	2,000	2,000	-	5,300	5,300
TOTAL	72,587	12,000	84,587	72,500	60,860	133,360
Expenditure						
Project consultancy	17,800	-	17,800	24,008	-	24,008
Communications costs	17,914	-	17,914	16,529	-	16,529
Social media and marketing	20,624	-	20,624	21,622	-	21,622
Computers / equipment	7,053	-	7,053	5,062	-	5,062
Business development	9,000	-	9,000	13,000	-	13,000
Events	10,314	2,000	12,314	7,124	4,125	11,249
Travel	-	-	-	159	-	159
Insurance	501	-	501	430	-	430
Professional fees	370	-	370	1,337	-	1,337
Podcasts	-	1,350	1,350	-	17,135	17,135
Training & RPL	1,861	-	1,861	48	300	348
Festival 2023	6,999	-	6,999	4,892	-	4,892
5 Cities Project 2023	-	55,803	55,803	-	4,940	4,940
Evaluation of effectiveness	6,000	-	6,000	-	-	-
TOTAL	98,436	59,153	157,589	94,211	26,500	120,711
Surplus/(Deficit) for the Year	-	25,849	-	47,153	-	73,002
Transfer between funds	-	6,093	6,093	-	1,075	1,075
Cash funds at the beginning of year	73,090	41,060	114,150	95,876	5,625	101,501
Cash Funds at the end of year	41,148	-	41,148	73,090	41,060	114,150

STATEMENT OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES as at 31st MARCH 2024

	Note	2024 £	2023 £
ASSETS			
Bank and cash balances		<u>41,148</u>	<u>114,150</u>
Represented by :			
ACCUMULATED FUNDS			
Unrestricted funds		41,148	73,090
Restricted funds	4	-	41,060
Total funds at 31 March 2024		<u>41,148</u>	<u>114,150</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 £9,000 (2023 - £13,000) paid to the chairman relating to business development. The Chairman also received repayment of £2369.44 expenses incurred in supporting the Creating Connections project.

4. RESTRICTED FUNDS

The restricted income received in 2023-24 was £12,000 predominately from the Saltley Trust given towards the Creating Connections project which combined with restricted funds of £41,060 brought forward from 2022-23 enabled the Religion Media Centre to complete this ambitious project. As at 31 March 2024 all restricted funds have been spent on the projects for which they were donated.

These accounts were approved by the board of Trustees on 1 July 2024 and signed on its behalf by Michael Wakelin, chair



1 July 2024

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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 2024.

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..... 31/07/2024

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