

Religion Media Centre
Accounts for the year ended - 31 March 2022

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
Dr Lois Lee	26 th November 2020
Hussein Kesvani	26 th November 2020
Dr Jasjit Singh	7 th July 2021

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 2021 – 31st March 2022.

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 four times during the year. Dr Jasjit Singh, Associate Professor in the School of Philosophy, Religion and the History of Science at the University of Leeds, joined the trustees on 7th July 2021.

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.

The advisory board are invited frequently to contribute to our thinking and activities. One new member was added this year, Dr Tim Hutchings, Assistant Professor of Religious Ethics in the Faculty of Arts, University of Nottingham.

We have taken advice and created a policy on copyrighting our work. 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 build strategic objectives each year.

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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

The daily bulletins of news about religion continued this year, attracting loyal daily audiences which doubled in a 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.

A team of experienced freelance journalists and sub editors continued to produce news stories, analysis and features. The established team of Rosie Dawson, Tim Wyatt, Christopher Lamb, Andrew Brown, Catherine Pepinster and Lianne Kolirin continued this year. Ruth Peacock has continued her engagement as editorial consultant.

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Among the top foreign stories covered this year were:

- The split in the Orthodox church after Russia's invasion of Ukraine
- Faith response to the fall of Afghanistan and rehoming refugees
- Unmarked graves found in church run residential schools in Canada and the USA
- Tributes to Archbishop Desmond Tutu who died in December 2021
- Violence in the middle east leading to a rise in antisemitism in the UK

And top home stories:

- Tributes to Prince Philip as a man who listened and engaged with religious dialogue
- Cop26 and climate change - a shared concern across faiths
- Faith leaders' verdict on morals and ethics in public life and response to deprivation
- Restructuring and financial pressures on religious organisations after Covid19 lockdowns
- Sex abuse cases in churches in England, France and Australia
- Same sex marriage allowed by Church in Wales and the Methodist church in Britain

Factsheets continued to be prepared with background to running stories, for example a timeline of the Martyn Percy dispute at Christ Church College Oxford, backgrounders on the Orthodox church in Ukraine; and the importance of Zakat for Muslims in need. These are prepared by our journalists and academics.

3. Events

- BRIEFINGS:

Our media briefings continued to be held on zoom, where guest speakers are invited to share their knowledge and give an opinion, contributing to a discussion on a story behind the headlines. 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. 158 speakers took part in our zooms, reaching an audience in person and via YouTube of 21,000. The highest audience was a zoom about the war in Ukraine, featuring guest Lord Rowan Williams, explaining the religious significance of Russia's claim on the territory and the tension within the Orthodox church with allegiance to Moscow. Our guests have included the Archbishop of York, bishops, faith leaders, community leaders, speakers from America, Rome and all nations and regions in the UK.

Our topics are wide ranging and global. Reports were prepared on all our media briefings which included stories such as the opening of the "House of One", a space for Muslims, Christians and Jews to gather and worship in Berlin; the activities of faith groups at Cop26 in Glasgow; shared concern across faith groups on poverty and the cut to universal credit and an explanation of the different branches of Islam found in Britain.

Our hosts have included broadcasters Rosie Dawson, Roger Bolton, Trevor Barnes, William Crawley and our chair Michael Wakelin.

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We continued to produce some zooms in collaboration with external organisations such as book publishers and report authors. Our most notable was a session with the Football Association on the way Christianity is intertwined with the sport.

- **FESTIVAL:**

Our third Religion Media Festival "Exploring Belief", postponed from 2020 due to Covid, was held on Monday 12th April 2021, featuring guest speaker Lord Rowan Williams. Sessions were held on British Islam, the influence of white evangelicals in America and the comparison to evangelicals in this country, how young people engaged with religion during lockdowns and reporting communities in Britain. Ticket sales were lower, but our presence was maintained.

We started planning for the Religion Media Festival in 2022 and this was held in May 2022, again in collaboration with the JW3 Centre in north London.

- **LECTURE**

Our first annual lecture was held in 2019 and plans for the next two years were postponed because of Covid. But we have planned for our second lecture to be held at St Bride's church, Fleet Street, in September 2022.

4. The Five Cities Project

For many years the RMC has observed a disconnect between the media and religious communities especially in local areas, both sides complaining about the lack of coverage and lack of communication. In response to this, in the autumn of 2021, we organised events in five cities in the UK with the aim of Creating Connections between local media, faith leaders, RE teachers and academics. This was made possible through generous funding from Culham St Gabriel's Trust, whose vision of aiding understanding of religion in society we share.

We gathered a production group from within our supporters and freelancers and chose cities where we knew people and saw a need. The list was Plymouth, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Nottingham. We created steering groups in each city, working through people we knew and forging links with others, eg interfaith networks, regional publications, regional BBC news and teachers via the Association of RE Inspectors. Dates were set which meant most fell in interfaith week in November.

Each event followed a similar pattern, suggested and honed by each group. Individual faith leaders were invited to attend and tell their stories of their activities on the front line in Covid and financial fall out for vulnerable people. The journalists were invited to explain how they work, the stories they were interested in and share their contacts. There were presentations from, mainly, RE advisers and teachers on the religious landscape of the areas and much support from local councils keen to progress their programmes for diversity and inclusion.

These were unique occasions, bringing together people and organisations who share a common vision but who have never met together.

There were around 70 people at each event. Our evaluation showed that trust was developed between faith groups and the media, with the meetings providing a valuable training ground for both local media and faith groups.

- 97% said it improved their confidence in approaching the media
- 92% said it improved their view of the media

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- 87% said it improved their view of religion.
- 80% said 'yes' to a future event in their city
- 70% said more willing to engage with the media post-event

We learned that in each location, faith groups didn't know the media and vice versa. Journalists in every city told the audience they had an open door and wanted their stories. Faith groups have since asked for media training to build their skills. The events were a catalyst bringing together teachers, the media, faith representatives, civic leaders, all in a common cause. RE teachers have great local knowledge and are great explainers, worthy of a wider audience. Young people like stories of hope and consume their news almost exclusively on social media.

The project is needed in many other cities and several have asked is to visit them. Our main learning was that as well as expanding into other cities, we need to facilitate follow up meetings including media training to continue the work among those we have already met.

5. The Religion Media Centre Podcast

We have wanted for some time to start our own podcast, offering a way to listen to the work that currently we provide on zoom or the written word. Halley Stewart has generously funded us to provide a monthly podcast over an initial 12 months. Our first was published in January. We have a team of the presenter Hannah Scott Joynt, with guests introducing segments of the show – Roger Bolton does the main interview on a top news story; Leo Devine rounds up news about religion from around the UK; Rosie Dawson discusses key news stories with journalists specialising in religion; Dr Azim Ahmed interviews an academic on a key piece of research; and Paul Kerensa joins us with his friends from the world of showbiz to see where religion and popular culture intersect. The podcasts are available on all major platforms and via our website and we are building a loyal audience.

6. Impact

Through the hard work of SORCHA Connell and Oliver Bowring, our following has steadily increased during the year on Twitter, LinkedIn, through our website, by newsletters and via our YouTube channel.

Our Twitter following grew by 20 per cent. We post on average five stories per day and live tweet our zoom briefings. We achieved 608,000 twitter impressions and the number of visitors to our twitter feed trebled.

Followers to our LinkedIn page have grown four-fold in this year, with 32 per cent based in London

Our new website went live on 15 March 2021 and enables us to better advertise our briefings and other events, as well as showcasing our original editorial content, which can now be searched by for faith category and author. We have an innovative feature with contact details of commentators who have contributed to our work, listing their areas of interest and expertise. The website enables us to attract and sign up new newsletter followers and points to our YouTube channel and social media feeds. The bounce rate of the home page on our new website is down 64 per cent as compared to the old website home page and has continued to decline during the year, which is a sign that the re-design was needed and achieved the objective.

Our mailchimp newsletter following for daily news bulletins, weekly newsletters and weekly media briefings, doubled.

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Stories that we have opened up through our daily bulletins are regularly picked up by journalists and broadcasters. Subsequent reports have appeared in the Tablet, Church Times, Guardian, Mail, the Times and through Reach PLC, many regional media platforms throughout the UK.

Anecdotally we know that RE teachers are also amongst our most loyal audience, especially for our daily news bulletins, using current news stories to introduce discussions in their classrooms.

7. Training

We ran a course on reporting religion in Britain, for journalists at Reach PLC through their diversity network group. Our consultants run one to one and group media training for faith groups and this year have engaged with bishops and senior staff in the Church of England; and with senior leaders in the Methodist and United Reformed churches.

In addition, our Creating Connections events in five cities were training events, offering insights into how the media works and giving information about faith groups.

8. Funding

In this financial year, we received generous donations from three foundations – Rank, Porticus and Culham St Gabriel's Trust; we also received grants from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Church of England. The RMC's ambition is to seek donations from a wide variety of organisations which share our aims

We have a long term strategy which started with a review of possibilities if funding were no object, and then decided on priorities. We judged the most important activities were to continue to reach journalists with daily news bulletins, factsheets, weekly briefings, events and training, within our financial constraints.

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. Our social media consultant SORCHA CONNELL, also looks after marketing. We created our first brochure this year and this will be an annual ambition.

Our audience

We believe we reached over 75,000 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

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Religion in Public Life:

During this year we embarked on a collaboration with an American based website, Religion in Public Life. Its aim is to draw together organisations that seek to report on religion in the public square including media groups, academics and charitable organisations. We are the only UK group to be invited to take part and it will give us the opportunity to introduce an American audience to our editorial content, weekly zoom briefings and events that can be joined via zoom. The deal with RPL means that they will give us \$20,000 dollars worth of help and support to help us upload material onto their website.

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 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.

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

The Charity saw a surplus of £5,837 in the year. Net assets at the end of the year were £101,501 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 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

 13.8.22

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RELIGION MEDIA CENTRE - DRAFT ACCOUNTS 2021-2022

RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT 2021-22

	2022 Unrestricted £	2022 Restricted £	2022 Total £	2021 Unrestricted £	2021 Restricted £	2021 Total £
Receipts						
Grants	100,000	-	100,000	111,000	-	111,000
Website	-	-	-	-	10,000	10,000
Training - 5 Cities Project	-	10,000	10,000	-	7,500	7,500
Podcasts	-	10,560	10,560	-	-	-
TOTAL	100,000	20,560	120,560	111,000	17,500	128,500
Expenditure						
Project consultancy	19,500	-	19,500	17,500	1,000	18,500
Communications costs	21,451	-	21,451	49,591	-	49,591
Social media and marketing	24,994	-	24,994	20,167	-	20,167
Computers / equipment	6,571	-	6,571	15,244	-	15,244
New website and development	-	-	-	1,053	11,950	13,003
Business development	12,000	-	12,000	13,075	-	13,075
Events	5,887	-	5,887	4,579	-	4,579
Travel	-	-	-	128	-	128
Insurance	417	-	417	409	-	409
Professional fees	574	-	574	1,550	-	1,550
Podcasts	-	4,935	4,935	-	-	-
Training & 5 Cities Project	336	18,058	18,394	-	-	-
TOTAL	91,730	22,993	114,723	123,296	12,950	136,246
Surplus/(Deficit) for the Year	8,270	(2,433)	5,837	-12,296	4,550	-7,746
Transfer between funds	-1,558	1,558	-	-1,950	1,950	-
Cash funds at the beginning of year	89,164	6,500	95,664	103,410	0	103,410
Cash Funds at the end of year	95,876	5,625	101,501	89,164	6,500	95,664

STATEMENT OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES as at 31st MARCH 2022

	Note	2022 £	2021 £
ASSETS			
Bank and cash balances		101,501	95,664
Represented by :			
ACCUMULATED FUNDS			
Unrestricted funds		95,876	89,164
Restricted funds	4	5,625	6,500
Total funds at 31 March 2022		101,501	95,664

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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 statement of assets and liabilities is a list of significant possessions and outstanding financial obligations at the end of the financial years. 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 £12,000 paid to the chairman relating to business development.

4. RESTRICTED FUNDS

The restricted income in 2021-22 was £10,000 from Culham St Gabriel's Trust for the Five Cities project and £10,560 from Halley Stewart for the podcasts. Note: £7,500 had already been received from Culham St Gabriel's Trust in the previous year. The £418 from JW3 is netted against the festival costs so is not shown in the accounts.

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



13.8.22

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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 2022.

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..... 16/08/2022

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