




## **Working with Faith Groups**

The Charity Commission Faith Groups Programme 2004-07





The Charity Commission is the independent regulator for charitable activity. This is one of a series of reports that present our case-working experience, supplemented by additional research. Their purpose is to help increase understanding of an issue. They are part of our mission to help charities maximise their impact, comply with their legal obligations, encourage innovation and enhance effectiveness.

This report presents our findings from the 'Working with Faith Groups' programme, conducted between 2004 and 2007 in which the Commission consulted with a broad range of faiths throughout England and Wales.

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# 1. Introduction

With well in excess of 25,500 faith-based charities operating in England and Wales, faith-based charities form a significant part of the charitable sector<sup>1</sup>. The beneficiaries of these charities can be counted in their millions, so it is clear that what they say and do has a real impact on society as a whole.

A few years ago, a number of factors made the Commission aware of the benefits of deepening our understanding of faith-based charities and the context in which they operate. We were convinced that developing our insight of their issues would provide us with important information to help us plan services that balanced our dual roles of regulation and support.

In 2004, therefore, the Charity Commission began a programme of work aimed at extending the Commission's work with faith-based charities. We wanted to build our knowledge of issues within a broad range of faiths in England and Wales, and to extend our knowledge about the faiths themselves. The work involved designing and delivering a comprehensive two-year programme of national outreach events.

We hoped this close contact with charity delegates across the faith spectrum would provide invaluable insight on a scale we had not previously experienced. We wanted to optimise our support to faith-based charities, and to build a framework to enable them to develop their capacity and to maximise their performance and impact. At the same time, we expected to gather crucial knowledge to help us develop our regulatory approach to faith-based charities.

This initial programme of events has now been completed. The events were hugely successful - through them the Commission met with representatives from over 800 charities across 11 different faiths who provided us with a wealth of information. We gained valuable insight into the main issues, concerns and tensions faced by faith-based charities, and the benefits they bring to modern society. In so doing, we have begun to build strong links with people who deliver the work on the ground as well as those who are planning future strategies for faith and social cohesion within government and charities themselves.

This report provides a full description of this work and explores some of the key themes that emerged. Our findings confirm the importance and breadth of the faith-based charity sector, and the emerging lessons will be carefully considered. The Commission's newly established Faith and Social Cohesion Unit, working with staff from across the Commission, together with representatives from faith-based charities, will determine how the Commission might deal with these issues.

The role of the Faith and Social Cohesion Unit is to help shape the Commission's work with and support for the faith sector in promoting the valuable contribution it makes to society, enhancing and promoting high standards of governance and accountability and creating an environment in which moderation, cultural understanding and community cohesion can flourish. It will be co-ordinating the Commission's work in providing advice and capacity-building support to faith-based charities in those areas which it regards as key. Amongst others, these key areas include trustee duties and responsibilities, governance and finance. The Unit's initial focus will be on mosques and other Muslim charities.

The Commission is also establishing a wider Faith Advisory Group with broad representation from a range of different faiths. This Group will play an important role in assisting in the Commission's consideration of the issues raised in this report.

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<sup>1</sup> Until recently, because many faith-based charities were not required to register with the Charity Commission, it has not been possible to estimate a precise figure. However, recent research undertaken by the Commission has led us to estimate that there are well in excess of 25,500 faith-based charities operating in England and Wales.

## 2. Working with Faith Groups

### 2.1 Origins of the programme

The Commission's awareness of the need for this programme grew from many roots and in 2004 led us to conclude that, to be a successful modern regulator, applying resources effectively for the maximum benefit, we should better understand what the issues and tensions were within faith-based charities and how we could improve our services to this group of charities.

We were particularly interested in governance issues: a number of these had arisen through our case work and we considered that there could be some issues that were distinct from those in non faith-based charities. However, we felt that there were broader issues where we needed to develop our understanding of this aspect of the charity sector.

The Commission's engagement with faith-based charities suggested that, as with other elements of the charitable sector, there was a potential lack of clarity about the role and purpose of the Commission, and the services it provides. Following the Commission's strategic review and more recently the passage of the Charities Act 2006, the Commission is now delivering a wider range of services, helping to reinforce this message to faith-based charities so that they could better understand how we could work with them.

In addition, work around this time with Muslim and independent evangelical Christian charities informed our decision to create a strategy for building our knowledge of faith-based charities. However, we soon realised that the range of faiths operating in England and Wales meant that we needed to cast our net wider. We identified some immediate actions for working with the independent Christian churches, that targeted the specific issues we had encountered within that part of sector, and we also decided to target our outreach work to the broad range of faiths for which there were registered charities.



Delegates at the Muslim event in Bolton

As well as the involvement of a large number of Commission

Board members and staff from across the organisation, the programme benefited considerably from the advice and support given by Maqsood Ahmed, Minority Faiths Advisor at the Faith and Cohesion Unit within the Department of Communities and Local Government.

“ *I think this was a useful start for the Commission and charities to learn about each other.* ”

## Working with Faith Groups

### 2.2 Participants and objectives

The faiths included in the programme were:

**Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Baha'i, Jain, Ravidassi, Zoroastrian, Ahmadiyya and Valmiki.**

Although these faiths are classed as a minority in the UK, we were sensitive to the fact that they include the main worldwide religions, with many of them having a long-standing presence and major influence in our society.

Involving customers in this process was extremely important, and we were clear that any successful solutions for building the quality and range of our services should take into account the needs and aspirations of the charities themselves. We considered it vital to hear first-hand what charities thought of us and how they felt we could support and regulate them.

As the Muslim population and faith are the fastest growing in the UK,<sup>2</sup> we decided to commence our work with Muslim charities and then progress through the other faiths. Consultation with the Faith and Cohesion Unit of the Home Office (now part of the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)) both endorsed and supported our intentions. We set the following objectives for the programme:

**Through a consultation process lasting until March 2007:**

- (a) to develop a better understanding of faith-based charities and their particular governance issues;**
- (b) to discover what issues and problems are faced by faith-based organisations when dealing with the Commission; and**
- (c) to consider possible solutions to the problems and issues raised and ways to:**
  - (i) improve service delivery to faith-based charities;**
  - (ii) enable them to improve their effectiveness; and**
  - (iii) work collaboratively to achieve well-regulated faith-based charities.**

For the purposes of this work, our definition of the term faith-based charities included not only those charities established specifically to advance a particular faith, but also those where faith is the driving force behind the charitable activity and whose charitable purposes are informed and underpinned by their faith. For example, we included not only Gurdwaras (ie Sikh places of worship), but also Sikh charities established to relieve poverty and those which promote education or other community activities.

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<sup>2</sup> "Review of the Evidence Base on Faith Communities" report of the Mercia Group to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, April 2006.

## 3. The programme - an overview

### 3.1 Impact

By any standards this has been a significant piece of work by the Commission. Between October 2005 and June 2007, 15 events took place in towns and cities throughout England and Wales with venues in London, Essex, Birmingham, Bradford, Bolton, Leicester, Manchester and Cardiff. These locations represented, as far as was practicable, places where the various faith-based charity communities are most concentrated.

Over 600 delegates representing more than 800 faith-based charities attended consultation events, with as many as 100 attending the larger events. Delegates represented the broad range of charities, from those with income below £5,000 a year, to those with incomes in the tens of millions; those which operate as grant makers, to those which provide benefit to large numbers of beneficiaries within their communities.

It has already had a positive impact on the thinking of both the Commission and the charities themselves - for example, the establishment of the Faith and Social Cohesion Unit and the development of a closer working relationship with various faith-based umbrella bodies.

### 3.2 Attendance

Charities invited and represented, by faith:

| Faith        | Number of organisations invited | Number of organisations represented | Number of delegates attended |
|--------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Muslim       | 821                             | 128                                 | 212                          |
| Jewish       | 562                             | 541                                 | 136                          |
| Hindu        | 259                             | 63                                  | 129                          |
| Sikh         | 249                             | 43                                  | 77                           |
| Buddhist     | 234                             | 39                                  | 60                           |
| Baha'i       | 88                              | 2                                   | 2                            |
| Jain         | 31                              | 2                                   | 3                            |
| Ravidassi    | 18                              | 0                                   | 0                            |
| Zoroastrian  | 12                              | 4                                   | 6                            |
| Ahmaddiya    | 8                               | 1                                   | 2                            |
| Valmiki      | 7                               | 1                                   | 1                            |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>2289</b>                     | <b>824</b>                          | <b>628</b>                   |

### 3.3 Representation of women

During the conduct of the consultation events it became clear that women were, generally speaking, poorly represented. Although women were better represented at some faith group events than at others, overall less than 10% of those who attended were women. Whatever the reasons for this under-representation, it left us feeling that there were important views still to be heard.

Knowing that women play a hugely important role in their faith communities, an additional event was held to which exclusively women were invited. Invitations were sent to women-only faith groups, or to women who are members of those faith-based charities which had already sent male representatives to one of our previous 14 events.

## The programme - an overview

### 3.4 Event format

We wanted to hear from delegates about their views on the work of the Commission, their own perspective of their roles as representatives of faith-based charities and suggestions as to how the Commission's service to faith-based charities could be strengthened. The events were also used to provide information about the work of the Commission, its strategic direction and the structure of its services as well as, with later events, the impact of the Charities Act 2006.

Events began with either a prayer, or a few words from a local spiritual or community leader. This was followed by an introduction from either a Commission Board member or Director, after which Commission staff gave a presentation which detailed the role, vision and values of the Commission, together with details of the purpose of the day.

The most vital part of each event was the focused group consultation sessions, where delegates were split into smaller groups for workshops sessions. Each group was given a series of specific, open questions for them to discuss and record their responses.

This was followed by a plenary feedback session when participants' comments were recorded. This incorporated the opportunity to discuss the issues raised within the smaller groups and to ask further questions and answers.

Each event closed with lunch. This provided an opportunity for continuing discussion in an informal setting. Delegates counted this as an invaluable part of the day, not only because it gave Commission staff the opportunity to discuss issues more informally than during the event itself, but it provided an excellent opportunity for networking between the delegates themselves. Many delegates said that this was the first opportunity they had had to discuss their work with representatives of other charities.

### 3.5 Gathering information

Generally, data was collected from four sources:

- information and comments noted down by the delegates themselves, in response to the specific consultation questions;
- information which was collected during the post-workshop feedback sessions;
- comments from the Question and Answer sessions; and
- information and comments taken from event feedback/evaluation forms.

In addition, many informal comments were collected in the networking sessions, and written comments and suggestions were received from charities that could not attend but who wanted their views to be considered. Comments provided by participants reflecting after the events were also taken into account.

The information from all of these sources was collated and analysed and the emerging issues and themes form the main source of the findings and topics for further consideration contained in this report.

Individual reports have been produced specifically to cover each of the faith groups. Draft copies of these reports were sent to 'critical friends' for their comment before the final reports were sent to those organisations which sent delegates to any of the 15 events.

## 4. Working with Faith Groups - the findings and key issues

### 4.1 Common issues expressed across all faiths

A number of issues, concerns, needs and aspirations were expressed by charities across different faiths, and the principal ones are:

- Overall, delegates think the Commission is doing a good job and, for the most part, find staff supportive and its guidance helpful.
- Faith-based charities would like more support for trustees from the Commission. This includes everything from basic responsibilities of trustees through to trustee recruitment, help in applying for grant funding, accounts preparation and guidance on understanding the contents of governing documents.
- There is a strong feeling that there should be more face-to-face events with more opportunities, not only for advice and guidance from the Commission, but also built-in networking opportunities. The programme of events conducted as part of this work was often the first opportunity that many charities had had to meet with and discuss the work of their charity with fellow faith members.
- Delegates do not believe that the Commission understands the cultural context within which their faiths operate and does not, therefore, always offer appropriate advice and guidance. As a result they believe that Commission staff should be given cultural, faith and diversity training.
- Because of this perceived lack of understanding of the cultural context within which faith-based charities operate, strong representations from delegates at each event were made for members of Commission staff to be appointed from within their particular faith and to be a specific contact point. This is because they believe that there is a need for specialist, rather than generic, resources within the Commission to help with the work of their faith-based charities.
- Delegates also think that someone from their faith, or someone who understands their faith and the needs of their community should be on the Commission's Board.
- Delegates would like Commission publications to be in a much broader range of languages, and asked for the same for the Commission's website.
- Delegates asked that the Commission offer more guidance and advice on both fundraising and grant funding applications.
- Delegates believe that the Commission should work more closely and more creatively with HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) to better understand the conflicts between Gift Aid requirements and religious constraints. They believe that the Commission should take the lead on this.
- Delegates said that each faith has its own spiritual system of giving which they feel the Commission does not always understand. They feel that the Commission's guidance, particularly around accounting, fails to understand, acknowledge or address this.
- Delegates expressed major concerns about the extent to which faith-based charities would be affected by the public benefit requirement. Delegates asked for Commission reassurance that this new requirement is unlikely to affect their status as faith-based charities.
- Delegates want the Commission to offer more and better advice and guidance in connection with the funding of charitable activities overseas.

## Working with Faith Groups - the findings and key issues

- Delegates doubted whether the Commission fully understands the work that faith-based charities do in trying to meet the needs of their respective communities.
- Participants believe that local government authorities discriminate against them because they are faith-based charities and feel that there is a role for the Commission to play in challenging misperceptions.

Although all the above issues were regarded as important by those who attended the events, it became clear that the issue which gives most faith-based charities the greatest concern is their desire for the Commission to provide face-to-face advice, guidance and training in connection with both the appointment of trustees and improving the understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

### 4.2 Issues expressed by specific faiths

Those issues which were specific to particular faiths and which were mentioned on a number of occasions, or by a number of delegates, are listed below.

Not included in this report are those issues which were raised only once by an individual delegate, those that were specific to the circumstances of an individual charity and also those which fell outside the Commission's remit. These were dealt with by Commission staff at the events themselves. One example of this latter type of issue was a request that the Commission should give "more financial assistance" to faith-based charities – in other words that the Commission should be giving more money to charities. Comments like this made it clear that a number of delegates across the faiths believe that the Commission is involved in influencing government about charitable giving or actually distributing funds.

#### Buddhist charities

- Delegates expressed their concern that the public benefit test will be seen by the Commission in purely secular terms and no account will be given to spiritual public benefit that is so important to Buddhists.
- More broadly, delegates feel that the secular values being imposed on charities across the board, clash with the Buddhist view of benefit through spiritual enlightenment rather than material benefit.
- Delegates said that because Buddhism is 'Dana' centred, Buddhists tend not to go outside their own communities for financial or other support. ('Dana' or generosity is a basic Buddhist virtue, with the emphasis on wanting to give, being as important as the act of giving itself. Giving time, knowledge, energy, or thought are regarded as having equal value to giving money or goods.)



A delegate at the Buddhist event in Birmingham

- Delegates said that it is difficult to quantify or account for donations given in time, knowledge, services, goods etc, and in trying to do so this quantification undermines the concept of Dana. Delegates want the Commission to develop a better understanding of the problems this brings Buddhist charities in meeting accounting and reporting requirements.
- Delegates stated that the Commission should deliver better-tailored advice about volunteers who are also residents of retreats – as this is quite a common occurrence amongst Buddhist charities.
- A number of delegates made a very specific request that there should be no more changes to SORP<sup>3</sup> which they already find difficult to apply within their spiritual framework.
- Delegates expressed concern about the Commission’s emphasis on financial targets which they believe is not appropriate to faith-based charities.
- Many delegates believe that the Commission should better understand that, because the income of Buddhist charities is often irregular, accounting for it on a regular basis is often very difficult.
- Concerns were raised about the great difficulty there is in obtaining visas for Buddhist teachers to enter this country. Delegates said that such teachers are a primary source of learning for Buddhists. They would like a better understanding of this issue by the Commission in particular, and Government in general.
- Concerns were raised that some Buddhist groups might be put under pressure to merge with others.
- Delegates believe that, because of their relatively low profile, Buddhist charities are too often overlooked.

## Hindu charities

- Delegates said that they believe Hindu charities are overlooked and neglected by the Commission because they are a 'law abiding' community.
- Delegates expressed disappointment that there is not a single Commission publication in Hindi, nor are any Hindus pictured in any of the Commission’s 'multi-ethnic' publications. They do not believe that this is the case with any other BME community in the UK.
- Delegates felt that the Commission should produce more information and guidance which responds to the concerns of the Hindu community.



<sup>3</sup> Statement of Recommended Practice

## Working with Faith Groups - the findings and key issues

- Delegates believe that the appointment of a Hindu mediator would be of great value in settling differences within Hindu charities.
- Delegates believe that the Commission should provide more guidance on fundraising regulations and more information relating to Gift Aid.
- Delegates expressed serious concern about the difficulties they had experienced in accessing grants due to their faith-based nature. They believe the Commission could and should make grant-funders more aware of the broader community-based activities undertaken by their charities.
- Delegates expressed frustration about the amount of time they need to spend on the administration of their charities rather than those activities which fulfil their charitable purposes.

### Jewish charities

- Many delegates believe that the Commission does not appreciate or understand the broad spectrum of Jewish practice from the liberal to the strictly orthodox and that this means that the Commission is not able to provide effective regulation, guidance or support to Jewish charities.
- Delegates expressed concern that charities are too often undertaking work which they think should more properly be the responsibility of government.
- Delegates want the Commission to provide clearer guidance with regard to political activities by charities. This arose because delegates took the view that Jewish charities are too often the victims of anti-Semitic or anti-Israeli campaigning by individuals and other charities.
- Delegates consider that the Charity Commission is too restrictive in how it regards what delegates believe is legitimate assistance given by UK based Jewish charities in support of Israel.
- Many Jewish charities are unclear about the dividing line between the ways in which support for Israel might be charitable and those ways which might not.
- Many delegates believe that Commission staff should be more commercially-minded and should understand broader financial practices better.
- Many delegates consider the Commission's reporting and accounting requirements to be excessive.
- Delegates say that the Commission should appreciate that some of the more strictly orthodox Jews will not use the modern media - for example, the internet - as a source of information, guidance and advice in connection with charities. This means that those groups are much harder for the Commission to reach.



## Muslim charities

- Muslim delegates believe that the current concentration by the government (including the Commission) and the media on the terrorist activities of a very few members of the Muslim community has had a disproportionately negative effect on all Muslims. Delegates regard this as unfair and highly counter-productive.



Delegates in discussion at the Muslim event in Ilford

- Many delegates view the Commission with some suspicion, as yet another arm of government there to 'spy' on their community.
  - They expressed a continuing fear that, by asking them questions at events like this, or when they wrote to us for advice, the Commission would 'drill down' and use information gained from these questions, "as a weapon" against them. This often discouraged them from contacting the Commission even when they felt they needed to.
  - Delegates believed that the over-emphasis on terrorist activities by government and the media, has created a distorted view of Muslim charities and the Muslim community as a whole, having a detrimental impact on Muslim charities when applying for grant funding.
- Delegates believe that the Commission sees them as a single Muslim community, rather than as a range of different communities with different cultural backgrounds, and that it does not understand their various lifestyles and cultures. This, they believe, had led to a serious misunderstanding by the Commission of the work Muslim charities are trying to do.
  - There is a strongly expressed belief that the Commission has an important role to play in convincing local government departments and other central government departments that Muslim charities are not run by terrorists.
  - Delegates say that the requirements of Sharia law creates issues with regard to donations by individuals, obtaining grant funding and general fundraising which both the Commission and HMRC should make an effort to understand better.
  - Delegates want the Commission to help draw up a list of appropriate mediators to help with disputes.

## Working with Faith Groups - the findings and key issues

### Sikh charities

- Delegates believe that the Commission is 'too remote' from the day-to-day needs of the Sikh community. They said that the commission should, therefore, employ someone of their faith to better understand their concerns.
- They believe the Commission is still too 'colonial' in its thinking and that this affects its attitude towards Sikh charities.
- Delegates feel that there is a conflict between Gift Aid requirements and the anonymity required by the Sikh concept of 'golak' (charitable giving).
- Many delegates suggested that being able to do their accounts on-line would be mutually beneficial to charities and the Commission.
- Delegates suggested that the Commission should better educate the general public in the work of faith-based charities such as Sikh charities as well as charities more generally.
- Delegates said that it can be too difficult to navigate the Commission website as it is too complicated.
- Delegates believed that the Commission could be better at helping Sikh charities to feel more 'included' in the broader charitable sector.



A delegate asking a question at the Sikh event in Birmingham

Finally, delegates, regardless of faith, saw these events as just the first in what they hoped was a series, in which the relationship between the Commission and faith-based charities could grow.

Staff were often asked by delegates:

*“When will we be having the next one?”*

## 5. Next steps - emerging issues for consideration

From the wealth of comments and feedback from the consultation events, the following emerged as key issues that are important to faith-based charities or suggestions from them for wider consideration.

### Issues to consider:

- publicly communicating the findings of this extensive project, linking it in to the newly established Faith and Social Cohesion Unit;
- building the expertise and understanding of faiths within the Commission, including the cultural and social contexts within which they operate;
- designing programmes for improving service delivery to our customers from faith-based charities;
- developing a range of programmes to assist faith-based charities in building governance and management, and finance skills;
- exploring the options for training and capacity building amongst faith-based charities themselves;
- the relative merits of deploying specialist or generic services to faith-based charities;
- developing lead individuals, within key frontline teams, who have in-depth knowledge (perhaps first-hand) of specific faiths and related cultural issues;
- setting-up corporate programmes to brief staff on all faiths including the kinds of special technical issues which are prevalent amongst them;
- how links with various bodies such as HMRC can be developed in connection with developing guidance about fundraising;
- entering into dialogue with representatives of the various faith communities, with a view to developing a cohesive faith-based charity policy within the Commission, and reviewing existing policies to see if additional policies are needed for faith-based charities;
- reviewing and monitoring specific processes to see if they are equally fit for purpose within faith and non-faith-based charities;
- setting-up recruitment programmes targeted at recruiting staff from within a range of faiths;
- using the Commission's website to develop multi-language channels of communication;
- developing tailored financial guidance and advice relevant to specific faiths and setting up a 'hot-line' to deal with these issues (eg Gift Aid, fundraising etc);
- the utility of establishing a rolling annual programme of consultation events;
- enhancing guidance on political campaigning;
- developing mechanisms for capturing and reporting progress against faith-based objectives and achievement at a corporate level, then feeding this into strategic and operational planning;
- developing enhanced guidance and advice on mediation, alongside promoting the need for charities themselves to produce clear guidance on dispute issues and complaint processes within their charities; and
- using frontline registration processes to build knowledge, capacity and good practice within faith-based charities.

## Next steps - emerging issues for consideration

Clearly these wide-ranging comments and suggestions demonstrate both the serious and thoughtful engagement from faith-based charities in this process of consultation and review, and the commitment and enthusiasm from the faith-based charity sector to enhancing the regulatory framework in which they operate and increasing the public awareness of the work and impact of their organisations. Some of these suggestions relate directly to the Commission in our regulatory role, and we will be considering these as part of our developing work to better support the faith-based charity sector.

Some issues raised are clearly wider points for government or the charity sector to consider, and we hope that in publishing this report and developing our strategy for engagement with faith-based charities, we can also prompt a wider debate.



*“ It was very educative. Such events should be held once a year. ”*

## 6. Benefits of working with Faith Groups

There have already been an enormous number of benefits for both the Commission and faith-based charities. It is clear that “Working with Faith Groups” has served to raise the Commission’s profile and build its credibility. Delegates frequently expressed the view that their perception of a stuffy and bureaucratic regulator, reluctant to listen, had been changed. Suspicions that it would try to “catch them out” if they approached the Commission for information, were also allayed.

Faith-based charities have told the Commission that they already have a clearer picture of both its role and its attitude towards faith-based charities within the sector as a whole. Whilst they still have some reservations about the commitment of the Commission towards them, this programme of events has been recognised as a highly positive (if first) step forward. Knowledge about their own responsibilities has been enhanced, leading to the prospect of strengthened governance.

Comments were consistently raised about the high standard and quality of service the Commission had provided, and the important role it plays was recognised, providing welcome confirmation that the Commission is having a positive impact through its service delivery. The events were also regarded by many delegates as an excellent (and sometimes the first) networking opportunity to meet with other charities within their own faith. For example, as a result of the Sikh event, the Nishkam Civic Association, which was our host, is already in the process of establishing its own network with a view to arranging further events.

The initiative has had wide-ranging media coverage (radio, newspapers and the sector press) which showed this aspect of the Commission’s work in a very positive light and has helped to change perceptions of the Commission as a body willing to listen, engage and act.

However, it is also clear that the Commission has much to do in enhancing and tailoring its services to, and understanding of, faith-based charities. To this extent it has begun to develop extensive working relationships with a number of key faith-based charities, other non-charitable bodies which represent them and with other agencies and government bodies involved in this area of work. These include the Foreign Office Outreach Team and the Faith and Cohesion Unit of the DCLG. Maqsood Ahmed of this latter body attended and was key to the success of many of the events and in helping the Commission staff increase their opportunities to build knowledge and develop useful contacts.

The events have also helped create a much clearer picture of what faith-based charities would like from us and we can draw on this feedback in developing our work.

In addition the programme of events has had the benefit of giving Commission staff the opportunity to be involved directly in developing relationships with faith-based charities and of building their own knowledge and links with their colleagues.

Finally, the fact that the majority of events were attended by one or more Commissioners, including the Chair, and the Executive Director for Legal and Charity Services, helped enhance both the Commission’s reputation and the public perception that it was taking the views of faith-based charities seriously at the highest level.



Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh, spiritual leader of the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewa Jatha, Birmingham

## 7. Conclusion

This report summarises the extensive and detailed programme designed to connect with and understand more about faith-based charities in today's society. The consultations have elicited intensely valuable information for the Commission about:

- the profile of faiths which make up modern Britain;
- their share of charitable activity within England and Wales;
- the tenets and cultural impacts of each faith;
- the issues and tensions they face merely in existing, as well as delivering charitable services;
- their financial, management and governance issues;
- their needs and aspirations;
- ways in which they feel the Commission can support them to maximise their own successes and apply its regulation where it counts; and
- gaps in their understanding of the Commission's role.

Our findings have confirmed the Commission's belief that faith-based charities are such an important part of the sector for the Commission that we engage proactively with them and work constructively with them going forward. Their work enriches the lives of people in their millions, both within their faiths as well as those in the wider community. The Commission is committed to building services appropriate to their specific needs and to support them in building their expertise and self governance. In itself, this will make a considerable impact on the broader community and will build confidence in charity generally. We will consider carefully the suggestions made for carrying forward the Commission's work.

This effective outreach programme has shown that the work of the Commission is greatly valued within the faith sector and that perceptions of the Commission and its modern role are changing favourably. Our activities in this area provide a platform for the Commission to demonstrate that it is a modern regulator, willing to listen to the charitable sector and to build sector views into its strategic direction and the delivery of its services.

The work of the newly established Faith and Social Cohesion Unit, whose purpose is detailed in the introduction to this report, will be the key means by which the Commission can ensure it remains focussed on this element of its overall vision of charity working at the heart of society.

*“ We now have a better understanding of what the Commission's aims are. ”*

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If you would like more detailed information on the range of faith-based charities with whom the Commission has consulted as part of this programme, please call 0845 300 0218 and ask for Jim Melton Bradley.

This publication can also be accessed at the Charity Commission's website: [www.charitycommission.gov.uk](http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk)

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