

Information Network on Religious Movements



inform

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Annual Report

April 2023 – March 2024

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Inform is a registered charity (No. 801729) and is
incorporated in England as a company limited by
guarantee under the Companies Act (No. 2346855).

Introduction

Inform has continued to fulfil its charitable objective of collecting, assessing and disseminating reliable information about minority religions. As usual, its staff were able to help a wide range of enquirers and service users, largely through email, but also through meetings in the Inform office. Enquirers included government departments; the media; students and academics; members and former members of religious, spiritual and other ideological movements, and their relatives; and members of the public. Staff have continued to update the Inform database of religions and our bibliographic records, as well as working on commissioned research projects, including for government departments.

Experiences of harm and abuse in religious contexts continued to be a focus of research and engagement for Inform staff through the year. Dr Sarah Harvey and Dr Suzanne Newcombe attended a number of events in relation to abuse, continued to attend meetings of the National Working Group on Accusations Linked to Witchcraft and Spirit Possession, as well as meetings with police and other organisations.

In July 2023, Inform held its first in-person seminar in three and a half years. The topic was 'Harm in New and Minority Religions: Sources of Support' and the seminar received financial support from the Religion and Sexual Abuse Project. A 'sources of support' leaflet was prepared in connection with the seminar. Whilst numbers were slightly lower than pre-Covid, the day was generally successful.

On 13th January 2024 a 35 Year Anniversary Celebration of Inform took place. This was a very successful event with around 70 attendees. There were panels of participants who had collaborated with Inform in different ways over its history including members/ex-members; academics; and other professionals.

Among other activities during this period, Inform staff produced blog posts, articles and fact sheets.

Some Significant Developments within Religious Movements

Abuse claims have been levelled against various religious leaders and organisations in this period. In the UK, Mike Pilavachi, founder of Soul Survivor, was found to have used his spiritual authority to control people and to engage in inappropriate relationships by the National Safeguarding Team of the Church of England. Pilavachi had resigned from his leadership position when the internal investigation began in summer 2023. In January 2024, Chris Brain, who had led the Anglican off-shoot, the Nine O Clock Service, in Sheffield in the 1990s, was charged on multiple counts of non-recent sexual offences against women who had joined the movement in the period 1981-1995. Brain has pled not guilty and his trial will take place in 2025. In December 2023, the BBC aired a Panorama documentary about the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God focusing on former-member grievances. These include pressures to donate money and forms of deliverance ministry practised on young and LGBT members and those suffering with mental health issues.

Further afield, in January 2024, the BBC published the findings of a two-year investigation into T.B. Joshua, founder of the Nigerian-based mega-church, Synagogue Church of all Nations, who died in 2021. The investigation focused on former-member stories of abuse at the hands of Joshua. In this period, it was also reported by various news outlets that the FBI have begun an investigation into the movement sometimes known as the Two by Twos for cases of historic child sexual abuse. In November 2023, French police raided properties in which members of the international yoga movement, MISA (Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute), were staying. Romanian leader, Gregorian Bivolaru, was arrested on charges of human trafficking and sexual abuse – charges which various countries have levelled at him since the 1990s and which he denies.

In the 2022-2023 Inform Annual Report, we reported on the Kenyan new religious movement ‘Good News International Church’ founded by Pastor Paul Mackenzie Nthenge which made headlines after the discovery of mass graves in the Shakahola forest in April 2023. It was reported that Nthenge had encouraged his followers to starve themselves to death in order to meet Jesus. In early 2024, when the trial of Nthenge and 94 of his associates began, the death toll was 429 people, including nearly 200 children, with over 600 followers still missing. Nthenge and others were charged with murder, manslaughter, child cruelty, terrorism and other charges. The trial is ongoing.

In the USA, there were a number of trials concerning the leaders of new religious movements. In summer 2023, Lori Vallow was convicted of the murder of her two children and conspiracy to murder her husband’s ex-wife. In May 2024, her husband, Chad Daybell, was also convicted of the three murders. The couple held idiosyncratic apocalyptic beliefs, inspired in part by their interpretations of the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in which they thought people could be classified as ‘light’ or dark’. In February 2024, vlogger Ruby Franke and Jodi Hilderbrandt, a counsellor and member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, were convicted of the child abuse of Franke’s children. Franke had a parenting YouTube channel and Hilderbrandt a counselling practice called Connexions Classroom. In May 2023, Danny Masterson, a US actor and member of the Church of Scientology was convicted of two rapes of female members of the Church.

In Japan, following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in summer 2022 by a man whose mother was a member of the Unification Church (now called the Family Federation of World Peace and Unification), the Church continues to experience difficulties. In October 2023, following a widespread campaign against the Church, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology filed a request to dissolve the Church’s corporate body - the case remains ongoing.

As in previous years, streaming services such as Netflix increased their ‘cult’ programming, often placed within the ‘true crime’ genre. These series always focus on former-member testimonies. Popular series in this period include: ‘Escaping Twin Flames’; ‘Desperately Seeking Soulmate: Escaping Twin Flames Universe’; ‘Love Has Won: The Cult of Mother God’; ‘In the Name of God: A Holy Betrayal’ (about the Korean Christian movement, Providence); ‘Shiny Happy People: Duggar Family Secrets’ (about the homeschooling Christian family, the Duggars); ‘The Darkness within La Luz del Mundo’; ‘Stolen Youth: Inside the Cult at Sarah Lawrence’.

Beyond the world of new religious movements, there were significant developments within traditional religions, and in issues connected to them. The Hamas attack on Israel on 7th October 2023 and the subsequent war in Gaza has had serious ramifications around the world. In the UK, there has been an increase in hate crimes against both Muslim and Jewish people. Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) – a service that allows people from across England to report any form of Anti-Muslim abuse - recorded over 2,000 anti-Muslim cases in the four months that followed Hamas's attacks on October 7. This is the largest recorded number of cases in four months since Tell MAMA was founded in 2011. Community Security Trust - a charity that protects British Jews from antisemitism and related threats – recorded 2,699 antisemitic crimes from 7 October to the end of 2023. In London, the Metropolitan Police recorded 1,729 hate crimes recorded as antisemitic in 2023 and 1,405 hate crimes recorded as Islamophobic. London has seen pro-Palestinian marches on most weekends since the attacks, as well as numerous pro-Israel events. Students have established pro-Palestinian camps at many universities across England and Scotland, with a focus on calling for disinvestment from Israel.

In January 2024, the UK Home Office banned the political Muslim movement, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, as a terrorist organisation claiming it praised the Hamas attack on Israel on 7th October 2023 and that it is antisemitic.

In February 2024, Inform was saddened to hear of the closure of the Inter Faith Network due to a lack of funding. It was reported that the Government decided to withdraw its offer of funding due to the presence of a member of the Muslim Council of Britain on the Network's Board of Trustees – an organisation with which the UK Government has had a policy of non-engagement since 2009.

Inform's Governors

Management Committee

Professor Kim Knott (Chair)
The Reverend Andrew Maguire (Treasurer)
Dr George Chryssides (Chair of Management Committee)
Dr Suzanne Newcombe (Honorary Director)

Other Governors

Amma Anane-Agyei (Co-ordinator, African Families Service, London Borough of Tower Hamlets)
Rabbi Charley Baginsky (Chief Executive Officer, Liberal Judaism UK)
Professor Emeritus Graham Harvey (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Open University)
Mark Hill KC (FTB Chambers, specialist in Ecclesiastical Law and Religious Liberty)
The Reverend Stephen Hollinghurst (Mission Enabler (Environment), Anglican Diocese of Hereford)
Professor Humeira Iqtidar (Professor of Politics and Political Economy, King's College London)

Father Toby Lees, OP (Roman Catholic Chaplain, King's College London, Director of Radio Maria England)

Dr Marat Shterin (Professor of the Sociology of Religion, Theology and Religious Studies, King's College London)

Dr Jasjit Singh (Associate Professor of Philosophy, Religion and the History of Science, University of Leeds)

The Reverend Alan Walker (former Vicar of Saint-Jude-on-the-Hill, Hampstead)

From October 2023: Dr Susannah Crockford (Lecturer in Anthropology, Department of Sociology, Philosophy and Anthropology, University of Exeter)

Observers

Professor Eileen Barker (Emerita Professor of the Sociology of Religion, London School of Economics; Founder and former Director of Inform)

Dr Anne-Rhiannon Richards (National Public Policy Adviser, the Church of England)

Inform's Staff

Dr Suzanne Newcombe continued as Honorary Director of Inform throughout the year.

In September 2023 Dr Sarah Harvey, Inform's Senior Researcher, returned to working three days a week, after a year of working one day a week whilst she focused on the Abuse in Religious Contexts project.

Ruby Forrester, MA worked four days per week for Inform – one day a week on administrative and social media tasks and three days on project work.

Warwick Hawkins continued as Office Manager, working in particular with the Treasurer, the Rev Andrew Maguire.

Silke Steidinger continued as Research Officer, with a focus on supporting online events.

Dr Shanon Shah and Jane Cooper, MSc worked as Research Officers on Inform projects as and when needed, and were employed on fixed-term contracts related to projects.

Student Placements

Ruth Westoby, a PhD student at SOAS, held a placement with Inform in the period April-October 2023. She worked two and a half days a week; her projects included updating our 'Sources of Support' leaflet in connection with the July seminar, and updating database files on Buddhist, Hindu and Yoga groups.

Jo Banks, a PhD student in TRS at King's, assisted with background research for a report on Cults and Online Extremism. Anna Kira Hippert, from the Center for Religious Studies (CERES) in Bochum, Germany, has been conducting her PhD field work in America in this period but remains an intern with us and will visit again in Summer 2024.

At the end of 2023, Inform advertised for new interns amongst King's College Theology and Religious Studies students. Ten students expressed an interest; three were selected for the spring semester, with others to take their place in summer 2024 and autumn 2024. The first three interns were:

Rojeni Ramanathan, a Masters student, who has a particular interest in the Tamil community in London.

Heeju (Erica) Kim, a third-year undergraduate, who has an interest in Korean new religions.

Charles Dennis, a third-year undergraduate, who has an interest in American political movements.

The interns worked on the Inform database of movements, combining their own interests with updating groups which Dr Harvey had marked as in need of research.

Enquiries

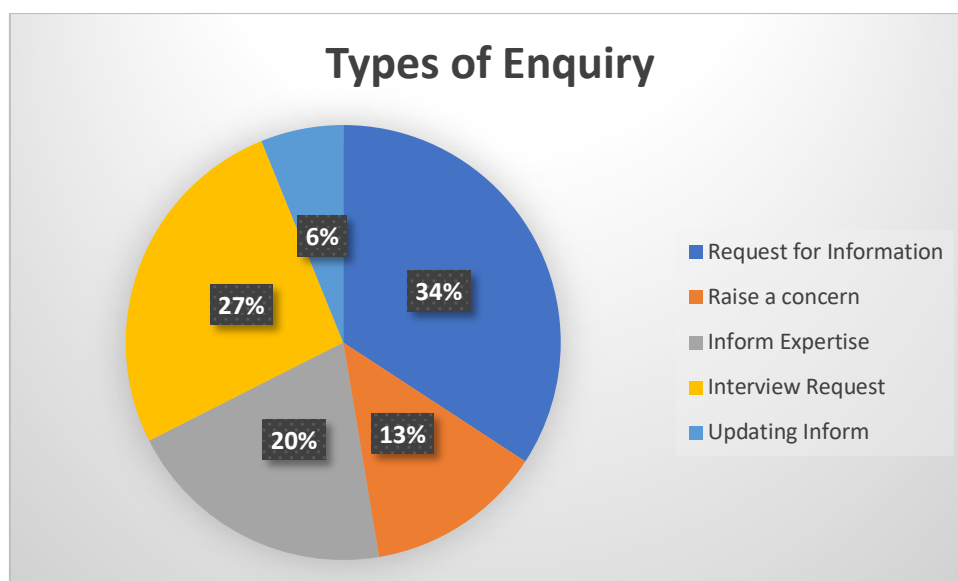
114 enquiries were received in the year April 2023 to March 2024, about ten different general themes and 26 different groups. We only received one enquiry about most groups throughout the year, so it is difficult to track patterns, areas of public concern or media stories which might have generated enquiries. The groups about which we did receive more than one enquiry are as follows:

Name of Group	Number of Enquiries
Unification Church	7
Church of Scientology	4
New Kadampa Tradition	4
Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light	3
International Churches of Christ	3
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints	3
Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute	2
Order of Nine Angles	2

Note that the high number of Unification Church enquiries reflect the media seeking to interview Professor Barker.

The enquiries about general themes account for around half of the enquiries (55) with the majority (36) being about the work of Inform, including requests for meetings, to interview Inform staff or Professor Barker, or requests for help in finding others to interview (such as current or former members).

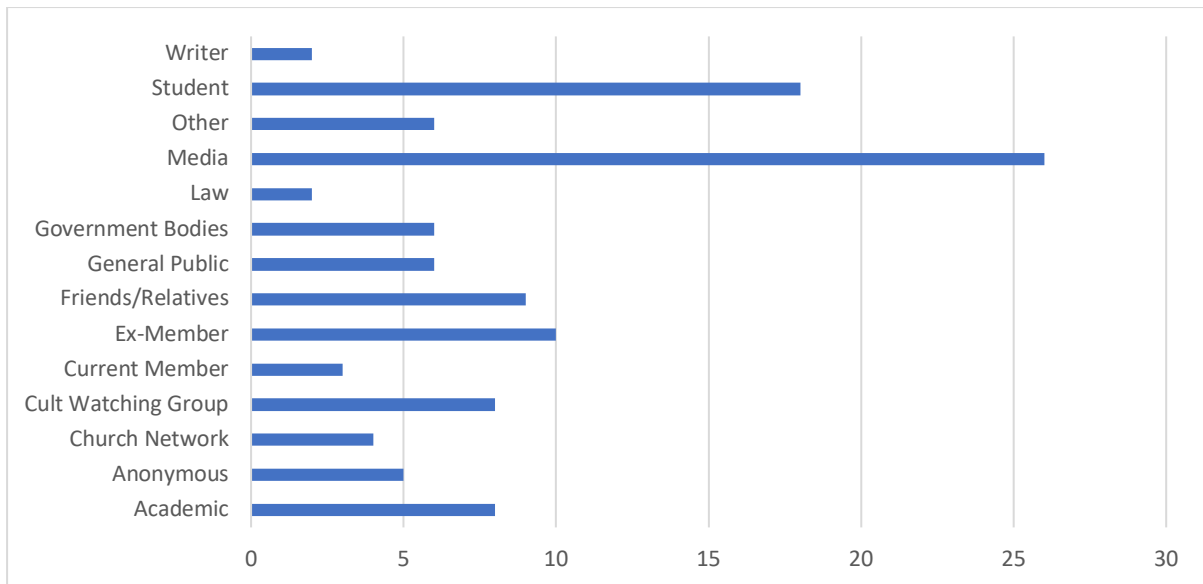
The content of the 114 enquiries covers a number of themes: requests for information (39); discussing a concern (15); asking for Inform's expertise on a group or situation (23); requests to interview staff or arrange a speaking engagement or meeting (30); and updating Inform on a group, situation, book, event etc (7).



Consistent with previous years, the greatest number of enquiries were received from the media, followed by students. Enquiries from government bodies were lower than in previous years, as were enquiries from the relatives and friends of members.

Types of enquirer were as follows:

Enquirer	Number of Enquiries
Media	26
Students	18
Former members	10
Relatives and friends of members	9
Academics	8
Cult watching groups	8
General public	6
Government bodies	6
'Other' enquirers	6
Anonymous	5
Chaplains and church network	4
Current members	3
Law	2
Writers	2



22 international enquiries were received: six from the USA, five from Switzerland, three from Brazil, two from Canada and one each from Algeria, Australia, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia and South Africa.

As with previous years, around one-third of our enquirers (35) had previously enquired with us; two-thirds (79) were new enquirers. The majority of enquiries (88) were received via email. 18 enquiries went to Professor Barker initially. She either answered these directly or asked Inform to respond.

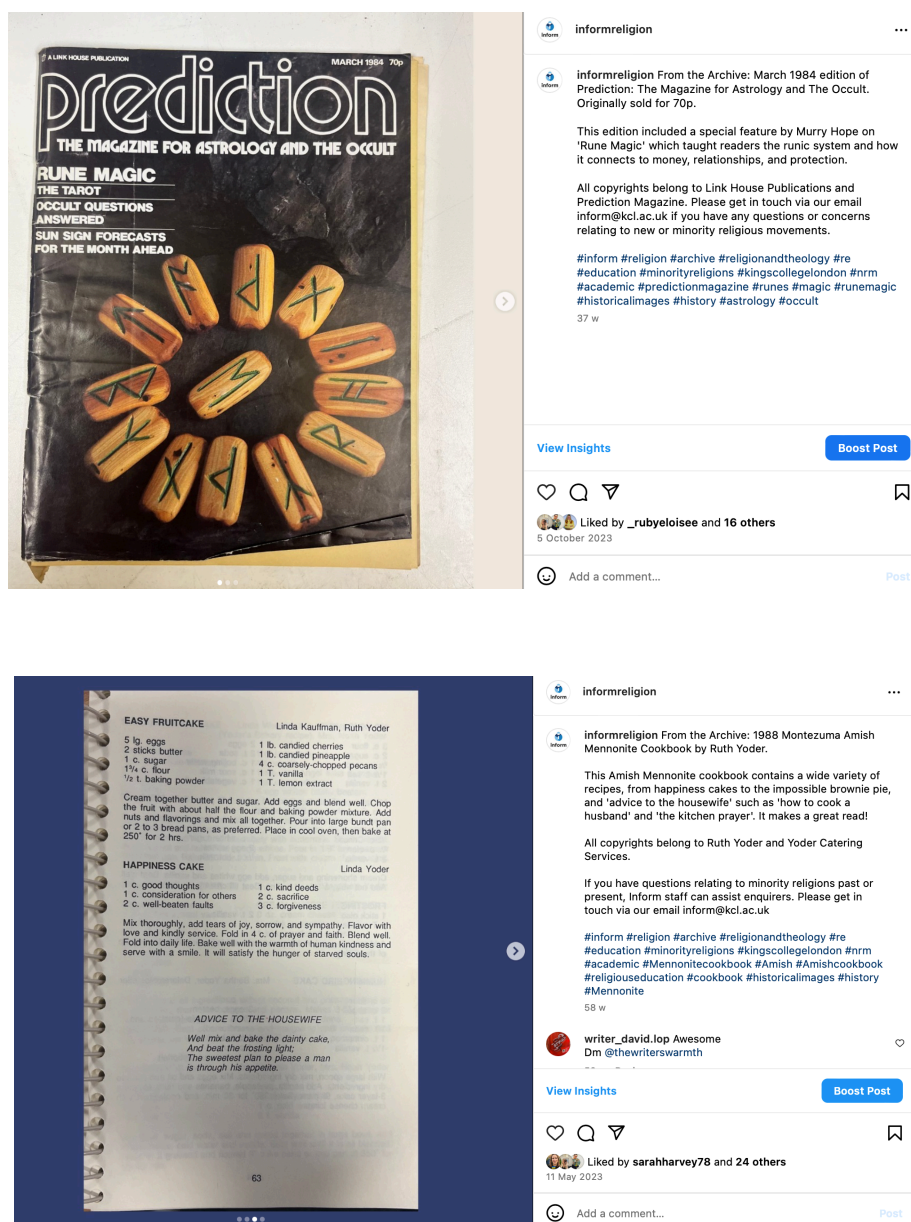
Social Media

In last year's annual report, we recorded a growth in followers and engagement across our primary social media accounts – Twitter/X, Instagram, and Facebook. Social media growth for both providing and gaining information on new religiosity continues to grown in importance. Social media has allowed us to be more aware of internet trends that involve new religious movements. We hope that our social media platforms will continue to grow over the next year.

Our current followers numbers are: Twitter/X – 949; Instagram – 606; Facebook – 170. We do not have premium accounts, so Twitter/X analytics do not reveal follower demographics and the Insight pages for Instagram were not available this year.

However, Facebook provides details on the demographics of our followers, with followers' genders also being split to 60% women and 40% men. Here there is a slightly older age demographic (in line with Facebook users more generally) with the most popular age categories being as follows: age 45-54 (35%), age 35-44 (26%), age 25-34 (10%) and age 18-24 (2.6%). The most popular countries, based on followers, are the UK followed by the USA. However, we have a small number of followers in Australia, Canada, Israel, South Africa, Brazil, France, Germany and Italy.

On Instagram and Facebook, we have been featuring a 'From the archive' with good engagement:



We have 184 followers on LinkedIn, although we have not been posting on this platform regularly. Followers are 29% involved with Higher Education, but beyond this there is a wide variety of professional affiliation. Profile viewers are also overwhelmingly in higher education, with 67% in higher education. This is a more education-focused demographic than in previous years and may reflect the shifting landscape and activity on social media. There is potential for a wider audience engagement on this platform and posts highlighting other areas of new religiosity's engagement with wider society might attract more diverse audiences.

As of last year, there have been limited interactions on social media with NRMs or related accounts. We direct enquirers with questions or complaints to send an email for a response and emails are logged as enquiries.

Project Work and Partnerships

Much of the focus of Inform's work during the year was on commissioned research projects.

GNET

In July 2023 Inform staff completed a report on 'Cults and Online Extremism' for the Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET). GNET is a special project delivered by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, an academic research centre based within the Department of War Studies at King's College London. The report focused on three ideal-typical groupings of the online 'cultic' activity that can glorify and inspire violent extremism: 'Cultic' Religious Groups, 'Cultic Milieus' and 'Cultic Fandoms'. The case studies used in this report were all drawn from previous research on the Order of the Nine Angles, QAnon and Anti-Vaxx, Dark Fandoms and Environmentalism. GNET organised an online launch event at which Dr Harvey and Dr Newcombe presented.

Religion and Sexual Abuse Project

Experiences of harm and abuse in religious contexts continued to be a focus of research throughout the year. The collaboration with Prof Amanda Lucia's Luce-funded Religion and Sexual Abuse Project continued. This project provided funding towards our seminar, 'Harm in New and Minority Religions: Sources of Support' in July 2023 (see below). Prof Lucia's sabbatical at Inform/KCL concluded in September 2023 but we remain part of the project: Sarah and Suzanne will contribute an article to a special issue of the journal, *Religion*, which Prof Lucia is editing in Summer 2024.

Abuse in Religious Contexts

Sarah remains a part of this AHRC-funded project, led by Professor Gordon Lynch at the University of Kent, until June 2024. Sarah has submitted her short monograph, *Abuse in New Religious Movements: How Does it Happen*, to the Routledge Focus series, 'Rape Culture, Religion and the Bible'. She is working on revisions. The project concludes at the end of 2024 and will see numerous events and publications.

Jehovah's Witnesses: A Cross-Cultural and Multi-Country Study of Motivations, Attitudes, and Practices

In September 2023, Dr Harvey began work on a new research project led by Prof Silvio Ferrari - 'Jehovah's Witnesses: A Cross-Cultural and Multi-Country Study of Motivations, Attitudes, and Practices'. This project, funded by the Reibling Family Foundation, focuses on Jehovah's Witnesses in six countries: Argentina, Canada, France, Japan, Nigeria and the UK. Sarah is writing the report for the UK which will focus on a number of issues including history, 'controversial issues' and coverage in the media, including social media. The report will be submitted in Summer 2024.

Partnerships

Inform continues a number of other partnerships, including the **Religion Media Centre** (<https://religionmediacentre.org.uk>), where Sarah and Suzanne are both advisors. We are in regular contact with RMC's Director and assist with its media enquiries whenever we can, as well as with writing factsheets for their website.

Inform is also part of the **National Working Group for Abuse Linked to Witchcraft and Spirit Possession (NWG ALWSP)**, which, in March 2024, changed its name to the **National Working Group for Spiritual and Ritual Abuse (SARA)**. Suzanne and Sarah attend their meetings.

Inform continues its partnership with the **Regional Regulation of Religious Plurality in Comparison (Regionale Regulierung religiöser Pluralität im Vergleich, (RePliv))** project largely through continuing association with one of the affiliated PhD students at the Center for Religious Studies (CERES) at the Ruhr University Bochum, Germany who is also an Inform intern, Anna Kira Hippert.

Suzanne sits on the Scientific Advisory Board for the **Dekk Institute** (<https://dekk.sk/en/>), an independent social stability research centre based in Bratislava, Slovak Republic.

Annual statement on research integrity

Inform has affirmed its commitment to the principles of the UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity and has registered with the Information Commissioners Office.

We primarily refer to the ethical frameworks provided by the British Association for the Study of Religion as guidance on best practice for research. All staff and interns conducting research on behalf of Inform discuss best practice for research integrity with either the Honorary Director of Inform and/or Inform's Senior Research Officer. Ongoing dialogue on emerging issues regarding research integrity while conducting and writing-up research is proactively supported by Inform's Management Committee.

Processes for dealing with allegations of misconduct in research

This can be found within our statement on Data Protection and Research Ethics on our website: https://inform.ac/gpdr_and_ethics/.

The first point of contact for concerns about research integrity is Inform's Office Manager, Warwick Hawkins (Warwick.Hawkins@kcl.ac.uk). Concerns about any research misconduct can be raised with the Chair of Inform's Management Committee in the first instance, Dr. George Chryssides (GDChryssides@religion21.com).

Allegations of research misconduct

There have been no allegations of research misconduct in the reporting period.

Funding ethics

Since its inception, Inform has been committed to avoid taking any funding from sources which might seek to influence the nature of the information it provides on minority religious movements. Inform will not knowingly accept funding from any religious, spiritual or other group about which it may be asked to give a report.

We accept small non-anonymous donations from individuals as ‘friends’ who offer a monthly commitment in support of Inform and who receive regular updates and invitations to our online and offline events. We also accept anonymous donations (which *can* be gift-aided) through Stewardship.org; the identities of donors are not revealed to Inform.

Most of Inform’s work is supported by grants and funded research projects from various UK government departments and academic funding bodies. Details of funding sources and spending year-on-year can be found in our accounts and annual returns which are available on the Charity Commission website.

Speaking and other Engagements

Inform Governors

Professor Emerita Kim Knott

15-17 May 2023: “The case for ‘unlearning’ in the study of religions: Pros and cons, interconnections and added value” – keynote lecture given at the conference ‘Religion and Spirituality as Sites of Learning’, organised by the Donner Institute and the LeNeRe-project (Learning from new religion and spirituality), Åbo/Turku, Finland

Dr George Chryssides

Lectures and conferences

11-13 September 2023: “Personhood and Jehovah’s Witnesses”, given at the roundtable ‘The ‘Sectarian’ is Not the Person You Think’, British Association for the Study of Religions Annual Conference, Clare College, Cambridge

11-13 September 2023: “Paradise in Fiction: Exploring Jehovah’s Witnesses through the novels of E. K. Jonathan”, given at the British Association for the Study of Religions Annual Conference, Clare College, Cambridge

13 January 2024: contribution to “35 Years of Inform” event, King’s College London

13 March 2024: “Cult Rhetoric – Past, Present and Future”, lecture given at the University of Leeds conference, “Exploring ‘Cults’ and ‘Cult’ Rhetoric

14 March 2024: ‘Vernacular Christianity’, lecture given at York St John University

Interviews

14 May 2023: “Multifaith Matters – George Chryssides on Contested Concepts in the Study of Religion” (with John Morehead), <https://johnwmorehead.podbean.com/e/george-chryssides-on-contested-concepts-in-the-study-of-religion/>

3 January 2024: Interviewed by Chuong Nguyen as author of ‘Jehovah's Witnesses: A New Introduction’, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnmClwIX7IQ>

Dr Marat Shterin

13, 16 October 2023: invited speaker and seminar leader at conference ‘Engaging with Postcolonial Perspectives in the Study of Religion in Russia (and beyond)’, University of Helsinki

Dr Susannah Crockford

14 February 14 2024: “The Facts Speak for Themselves: Climate Science as Contested Knowledge,” Durham University

Inform Honorary Research Fellow

Professor Emerita Eileen Barker (Inform Founder)

8 April 2023: concluding remarks: “Global and Local Perspectives: Dilemmas and Prospects of Religious Human Rights”, Aletheia University, Taipei (via Zoom)

9 April 2023: “Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Global Issue”, National Taiwan University (via Zoom)

26 May 2023: welcome and introduction, Inform seminar: “Public Health after Covid: Beliefs, Religion and Competing Epistemologies”

20 June 2023: keynote lecture, “To Do or To Die—But What To Do? And Why and How? – An Exploration of New and Minority Religions’ Reactions to Challenges from Within”, CESNUR, Lithuania (via Zoom)

26 July 2023: “Does It Matter Where We Are? A Comparative Contemplation on the Relevance of Country for Religions of Korea”, Daesoon Thought & the Religions of East Asia on the Global Stage, Seoul, South Korea (via Zoom)

2 September 2023: talk for Times Radio, “Cults”

5 September 2023: “Media Settler: minority Churches in times of deep mediation”, European Association for the Study of Religion, Vilnius University, Lithuania

11 September 2023: “Identity and the Unification Church”, BASR with CenSAMM, Claire College, Cambridge

4 October 2023: “For Better or for Worse? Potencies of Religions in Directing the Global Scene”, third World SangSaeng Forum International Conference, Daesoon University, South Korea

24 October 2023: “New Religious Movement and Brainwashing”, Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven, Belgium (via Zoom)

2 November 2023: interview for BBC CrowdScience on “Brainwashing”

4 November 2023: Ukraine broadcasting interview (via Zoom)

23 November 2023: “New Religions”. lecture to students at Kaunas University, Lithuania (via Zoom)

2 January 2024: “New Religious Movements’ Diverse Perceptions of the Body, Health, and Healing”, Weixin University, Taiwan

13 January 2023: “Memories”, 35 Years of Inform event, King’s College London

2 February 2024: “Problems with the Proposed French Law”, interview with UK Freedom of Religion and Belief Forum's Europe Working Group (via Zoom)

22 February 2024: discussion about 35 years of Inform with Dr Suzanne Newcombe and Dr Sarah Harvey for the Religion Media Centre (via Zoom)

29 March 2024: “SGI in Britain”, Soka University, Tokyo, Japan

Inform Staff

Dr Newcombe and Dr Harvey

April 2023: presented a paper at the conference ‘Teaching and Research in Religion and Worldviews’ at the University of Nottingham, organised by Prof Tim Hutchings and Dr Celine Benoit as the conclusion of their ‘Foregrounding Teacher’s Voices’ project

April 2023: presented an online paper, “Empowerment and Abuse: Gender and Sexuality in Two Syncretistic NRMs” at the Harvard Divinity School’s Program for the Evolution of Spirituality ‘Uses and Abuses of Power in Alternative Spiritualities’ conference

November 2023: presented a paper on “Men’s experiences in two abusive new religions” at the online symposium ‘Gender and Religious Exit: Moving Away From Faith’, organised by Coventry University, Turku University and Aston University

March 2024: contributed to an online conference on ‘Exploring Cults and Cult Rhetoric in the 21st Century’, organised by Dr Aled Thomas and his students at the University of Leeds. Dr Harvey and Dr Newcombe gave an informal presentation about the work of Inform and were part of a roundtable discussion in which the students asked questions.

Ms Ruby Forrester

June 2023: talk to sixth-form students at Bentley Wood High School on the topic “Fundamentalist Latter-day Saints”

Dr Shanon Shah and Ms Ruby Forrester

September 2023: presented a paper on the topic “Will the real radical environmentalists please stand up? Spirituality, political ideology, and (non)violent ecological activism” at the annual British Association for the Study of Religion conference, University of Cambridge.



Ruby, Shanon and Suzanne at the BASR conference

Resources

Throughout the year Inform staff updated and added to the charity’s resources. By the end of March 2024, its electronic database held information on 5190 organisations. 28 new groups were added to the database during the period covered by this report and countless other files were updated.

Work remains ongoing to secure the archives a permanent home at King’s College London. Although Inform has the use of two storerooms in the basement of Kings College’s Norfolk Building, these are too small for materials to be displayed or easily accessed. King’s Archives has offered to integrate Inform’s archives into its own, provided that they are professionally catalogued. Sources of funding are being sought to pay an archivist to catalogue the materials.

Publications by Inform Governors and Staff

One final book in the Inform Routledge series remains to be completed: 'Health and Healing in Minority Religions' edited by Eileen Barker and Sarah Harvey.

Work is progressing well on Inform's new Bloomsbury book series, 'Religion at the Boundaries'. Two edited collections are in the final stages of production:

- Aled Thomas and Edward Graham-Hyde (eds): *Cult Rhetoric in the 21st Century: Deconstructing the Study of New Religious Movements*, to be published July 2024
- Kaarina Aitamurto and Ross Downing (eds): *Germanic and Slavic Paganisms - Security Threats and Resiliency*, to be published December 2024.

Six other volumes are at various stages from initial review to revisions.

Inform Governors

Dr George Chryssides

Books

2023: Chryssides, George D and Dan Cohn-Sherbok (eds): 'The Covid Pandemic and the World's Religions', London: Bloomsbury (ISBN 978-1-3503-4965-0_

2024: Chryssides, George D: 'Fieldwork in New Religious Movements', Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Articles

2023: Chryssides, G. D: "Engaged Research in the Study of Religions", Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions. JBASR 24 (2023): 71-85
(<https://www.jbasr.com/ojs/index.php/jbasr/article/view/71>)

2023: Thomas, Aled, George D Chryssides, Edward Graham-Hyde, Sarah Harvey, Suzanne Newcombe, and Donald Westbrook: "Perspectives on 'Cult' Rhetoric (And Its Future)", Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religions. JBASR 24 (2023): 42-51
(<https://www.jbasr.com/ojs/index.php/jbasr/article/view/73>)

Book chapters

2023: Chryssides, George D: "Jehovah's Witnesses" in Stausberg, Michael, Alexander Van Der Haven and Erica Baffelli: 'Religious Minorities Online'. Berlin: De Gruyter
(<https://doi.org/10.1515/rmo.18837687>)

2024: Chryssides, George D: "Descending from the Ivory Tower: Engaged Scholarship in the Study of Religion" in Coltri, Marzia A. and Enea Franza (2024): 'The Importance of the Humanities in Higher Education'. Rome: UniversItalia: 53-72

Other

2023: Chryssides, George D: volume 21 of 'Encyclopaedia of the Bible and Its Reception', Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter – entries on: "Negative Theology" (IV.E); "Nest" (IV.B); "New Age Movement; New Heaven and New Earth" (III.D); "New Jerusalem" (IV.D); "Nimrod" (III.C); "Noah's Ark" (IV.E); "Notovitch, Nicolas", "Nudism", "Numbers" and "Numerology" (IV.D); "Oaths and Vows" (V.E); "Obedience, Disobedience" (IV.E), pp21-23; 168; 270-271; 296-297; 499-501; 569-560; 884; 918; 979-980; 1066-1067; 1126-1128

Dr Marat Shterin

March 2024: "Religious Minorities in Russia", in Religious Minorities Online, DeGruyter, <https://www.degruyter.com/database/RMO/entry/rmo.18838634/html>

Inform Honorary Research Fellow

Professor Emerita Eileen Barker (Inform Founder)

2023: Barker, Eileen: "In the Shadow of Russia: Jehovah's Witnesses and Religious Freedom in Central Asia, Some Introductory Considerations", The Journal of CESNUR, 7(1): pp3-11

2023: Barker, Eileen: "В тени России: Свидетели Иеговы и религиозная свобода в Центральной Азии, Некоторые вводные соображения", Supplement to The Journal of CESNUR, 7(1)

2023: Barker, Eileen: "For Better or for Worse? Potencies of Religions in Directing the Global Scene" in 'How Can Religions Help the World Solve its Civilizational Crises?', ed. Daesoon Academy of Sciences, pp23-31, Seoul, South Korea: Third World SangSaeng Forum

May 2023: Barker, Eileen: "ВОСХИЩАЮСЬ УКРАИНСКОЙ НАУКОЙ (I am Proud of Ukrainian Science)" Гранит науки (Granite of Science), No.11; pp 10-11 (& 77) (https://un-sci.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/granit-11-razvorotami-szhat_s.pdf)

February 2024: Barker, Eileen: "Discussion on the Proposed French Legislation on 'Reinforcing the Fight Against Cultic Deviances', All Faiths Network Working Group on religious discrimination, France

February 2024: Barker, Eileen: "Why the New French Law on "Cults" is Wrong" in Bitter Winter (<https://bitterwinter.org/why-the-new-french-law-on-cults-is-wrong/>)

Inform Staff and Interns

July 2023: Suzanne Newcombe, Sarah Harvey, Jane Cooper, Ruby Forrester, Jo Banks and Shanon Shah: "Cults and Online Extremism", report for the Global Network on Extremism and Technology (a special project delivered by the International Centre for the Study of

Radicalisation), King's College London (https://gnet-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/GNET-39-Cults-Online-Violent-Extremism_web.pdf)

August 2023: associated blog post: "Cults and Online Violent Extremism: Individual Risk Assessments" (<https://gnet-research.org/2023/08/11/cults-and-online-violent-extremism-individual-risk-assessments/>)

September 2023: Aled Thomas, Edward Graham-Hyde, George D. Chryssides, Suzanne Newcombe, Sarah Harvey and Donald A. Westbrook: "Perspectives on 'Cult' Rhetoric (and its Future)", *Journal of the British Association for the Study of Religion*, v.25. ISSN 2516-6379 (<https://www.jbasr.com/ojs/index.php/jbasr/article/view/73>). This publication brought together contributions from multiple Inform authors, reflecting on the term 'cult', first discussed in the roundtable discussion at the 2022 British Association for the Study of Religion conference.

Dr Sarah Harvey

(Forthcoming): "Abuse in New Religious Movements: How Does it Happen?", Routledge Focus

Dr Suzanne Newcombe and Dr Sarah Harvey

(Forthcoming): "Balancing pragmatism and precision: Inform's approach to cult rhetoric in 'Cult' Rhetoric in the 21st Century: Deconstructing the Study of New Religious Movements, Aled Thomas and Edward Graham-Hyde (eds), pp. 21-39. DOI: 10.5040/9781350333246.0009

(Forthcoming) "From Tradwives to Red Rebels – a preliminary exploration of the dynamics of gender in contemporary millennialist movements", in the *Bloomsbury Handbook of Millennialism and Apocalypticism*, ed. Tristan Sturm and Andrew Crome

Dr Sarah Harvey and Dr Amanda van Eck Duymaer van Twist

(Forthcoming): "The Challenges of Researching and Providing Information on 'Cults' and 'Extremism'" in *Messy Methods*, ed. Linda Woodhead, Nicole Graham and Louisa Cadman

Dr Suzanne Newcombe, Dr Jane Cooper and Dr Shanon Shah

April 2023: "Occult Beliefs and the Far Right: The Case of the Order of Nine Angles" in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (Early access).
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2023.2195065>

Inform Events

In May 2023, Inform was a partner organisation in organising the BA-Wellcome funded conference "Public Health after Covid: religion, beliefs and competing epistemologies" at King's College London, with Suzanne Newcombe and Karen O'Brien-Kop (TRS at KCL) as co-PIs. There was a very productive discussion and an application has been submitted for an edited volume in the Oxford University Press edited book series *Proceedings of the British*

Academy. The event had a high turn-out and included a film screening. More information can be found at <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/events/british-academy-conferences/public-health-after-covid/>.



Abel Ugba (Leeds) Speaks at the Public Health After Covid conference at KCL with Heather Munro (KCL) and Hormoz Ebrahimnejad (Southampton) in the audience in May 2023.



Public Health After Covid conference at KCL in May 2023.

Seminars

On 15 July 2023, Inform held its first in-person seminar in three and a half years. The topic was 'Harm in New and Minority Religions: Sources of Support' and we are grateful to have received financial support from Dr Amanda Lucia through the Luce-funded Religion and Sexual Abuse Project. We drafted a 'sources of support' leaflet in connection with the seminar and asked participants to provide feedback during small group sessions towards the end of the day. Whilst numbers were slightly lower than pre-Covid, we felt that the day was

successful with good dialogue and attendee engagement. The 'sources of support' leaflet should be finalised in Summer 2024.

On 13th January 2024 a 35 Year Anniversary Celebration of Inform took place. This was a very successful event with around 70 attendees. There were panels of participants who had collaborated with Inform in different ways over its history including members/ex-members; academics; and other professionals. Professor Linda Woodhead gave the keynote address and a video was played including an interview with Inform's Founder, Professor Emerita Eileen Barker, and testimonials from colleagues and those who had worked with Inform.

See Inform's website for a page dedicated to this event, including the celebration video made by Inform staff featuring interviews with Professor Barker and her colleagues, and two of the panels from the day, along with lots of other information, videos and photographs: <https://inform.ac/35-years-of-inform-celebration-page/>.



George Chryssides, Marat Shterin, Eileen Barker, Amanda van Eck Duymaer van Twist, Linda Woodhead and Suzanne Newcombe, at the 35 Year Celebration of Inform

The Future

Inform remains committed to its charitable objective of helping enquirers, through providing accurate, up-to-date and contextualised information about minority religions to the wide range of enquirers who approach us every year. We shall continue to gather material to add to our unique collection of resources, and to further a greater understanding of minority religions through our publications and events.

In addition, we will continue to work on funded projects, work on government enquiries and seek out new sources of funding and project work. Dr Harvey's work on the Abuse in Religious Contexts project continues until June 2024 and there will be a number of events and publications associated with the wider project in the second half of 2024. In addition, Inform will hold its own winter seminar towards the end of 2024.