

ComRes: leading the way in faith research

The ComRes Faith Research Centre is the first commercial centre of expertise in this country set up to help improve the quality of knowledge about religion and belief by providing robust and impartial evidence of current religious identity, belief, practice and behaviour.



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Katie supports public, private, academic, media and non-profit clients in gathering data and insights which help to understand the connections between beliefs and behaviours. She has a long track record of leading communications and external relations in international development and local government, and of working on faith-specific projects, and is also an Honorary Fellow of the Cadbury Centre at the University of Birmingham.

Katie Harrison, Director of the Faith Research Centre, introduces its work

Religion and belief play a hugely important part in many people's lives, all around the world. Decisions about money, time, family, voting, healthcare, relationships, work and many other important parts of daily life are profoundly affected by deeply held beliefs, often consciously driven by religious affiliation.

But, much of the time, you wouldn't know. Not in Britain, at least.

Travel to the Middle East or Africa – as I did frequently when I worked for Tearfund – and the links between beliefs and behaviours are explicit. They are not always positive, and often result in trauma and conflict, but they are visible and named. People know what they are dealing with.

That knowledge is hugely helpful for voluntary organisations seeking to inspire change. If religious belief is the driver for an action, then listening to the faith tradition can help to understand its effects on opportunities for women, or implications for peacebuilding, for example.

But in Britain, we don't always name in the public sphere the beliefs that drive our behaviours, even though around half of us identify with a religious tradition. Alternatively, we make sweeping statements out of ignorance. We hear people say on national TV, or at the bus stop, things like 'Well, Catholics always do this' or 'Muslims would never do that'.

ComRes set up its Faith Research Centre because we have a long track record of serving clients which are interested in exploring the views of faith communities, or in gathering insights from the general public about religion and belief. Organisations we've worked for include the Church of England, the Office of the Chief Rabbi, Christian Aid, the Bible Society and the BBC.

In the past few months we've delivered focus groups to explore perceptions of sacred texts, surveyed the public about family time and use of phones at mealtimes, gathered evidence of food poverty to

support a charity's public policy development, heard from teenagers about their perceptions of Jesus and of churchgoing, mapped the demography of Britain's practising Christians to inform churches' planning for mission, explored attitudes to generosity at Christmas compared with other seasons, and tested belief propositions relating to prayer and life after death.

In our experience, faith-based charities have an excellent understanding of who their audiences are, but it can be difficult to find ways to reach them, or test messages before disseminating them widely.

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Fundraising

Knowing where to find the people who are likely to want to support your cause, and understanding what motivates them to give, is half the battle. Good audience insight can help you to identify your target audience and to test your messages, brand recognition and fundraising products with the people you want to reach. Putting in the work ahead of time gives you confidence that your appeals for funds will be successful.

Communications

Much of our survey work is used by charities' media relations and corporate communications teams to help raise public awareness. Our work for the Office of the Chief Rabbi helped gain extensive publicity for the Shabbat UK festival, and our evidence of public attitudes to tax avoidance resulted in comprehensive news coverage for Christian Aid.

Advocacy and campaigning

We are often asked to gather evidence of need from communities around the UK, to assist faith-based campaigning organisations to make their case with decision-makers. And we run the largest suite of

Belief at Work



We are delighted that BWB has been nominated for a Belief at Work Award from ComRes recognising our commitment to creating a workplace where belief is acknowledged and understood as a significant aspect of our staff and clients' lives. The nomination recognises BWB's popular faith-related diversity initiatives, including our 'faith at work' lunches. At these events BWB staff and clients provide personal insights into their faith, its key teachings, festivals and practices; and the difference it makes in their life.

This year, we had a fascinating introduction to the Baha'i faith from Natalie Knight-Wickens and Patrick O'Mara, from one of our Baha'i clients, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom, accompanied by some delicious Persian desserts. We benefited from Holly Terry's theology degree and love of church history, exploring different Christian traditions and denominations, with Michael Roche sharing some practical insights from his work for Alpha for Catholics.

Viral Kataria and Roshni Pisavadia were joined by Priyesh Patel from BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, one of our Hindu charity clients, to present an introduction to Hinduism. While enjoying a delicious vegetarian spread from Shayona restaurant, colleagues learnt about the key beliefs and practices of the Hindu faith, including Hinduism's history, and its gods and deities. Priyesh gave a fascinating insight into temples and worship, and their role in the local community. They explained the background and celebrations behind the key Hindu festivals including Diwali, Holi and Navaratri.

legislative panels in the country, regularly measuring the views of hundreds of MPs, peers, members of devolved legislatures and councillors, helping many faith-based charities to assess strategic objectives and brand awareness, as well as testing their campaign messages before running an advocacy campaign.

Strategic planning

Understanding your context is crucial to the strategic development of your organisation. Our research services offer insight and analysis of demographic segments, and of opportunities for outreach, service development and effective delivery.

Find out more

For more information contact faith@comresglobal.com or go to www.comresglobal.com/faith