

# Charity Commission disqualifies trustee of the Rigpa Fellowship

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**CATEGORY:**  
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In the course of an ongoing statutory inquiry into misconduct at the Rigpa Fellowship, the Charity Commission have disqualified one of the charity's trustees from acting as a trustee of any charity for a period of eight years.

The Charity Commission engaged with the Rigpa Fellowship in 2017 over concerns about safeguarding of Rigpa Fellowship students, which was then escalated to a statutory inquiry into the charity in 2018. The Rigpa Fellowship is a charitable trust based in London, which aims to advance the Buddhist religion. In order to carry out this aim, Rigpa provides human resources and facilities for education and religious activities, including training and courses in meditation and compassion.

In the course of its inquiry the Charity Commission has found that one of the charity trustees, 'had knowledge of instances and allegations of improper acts and sexual and physical abuse against students at the charity' and 'failed to take appropriate action in response to this information'. This failure to respond also led to the Charity Commission finding the trustee 'responsible for misconduct and/or mismanagement in the administration of the charity'.

The Charity Commission has therefore exercised its authority to disqualify the individual from acting as a trustee under the Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Act 2016.

The criteria for the use of this power note that a trustee who 'knew of the misconduct or mismanagement and failed to take any reasonable step to oppose it' is one the Charity Commission can take steps to disqualify where they also feel the individual is 'unfit to act' as a trustee and disqualification is desirable in the public interest.

With reference to the final criteria of 'public interest' we note that Amy Spiller, Head of Investigations Team at the Commission, provided assurance that 'the public rightly expect charities to be safe places, where people are free from harm' and confirmed that Mr Gaffney's disqualification stemmed from his failing 'in his duty to protect those who came into contact with the charity'.

The Commission's report on the Rigpa Fellowship has yet to be published but is expected to revealed further details regarding Mr Gaffney's disqualification as trustee.

However what is clear from the Charity Commission's decision is its focus on ensuring charity trustees protect those their charities come into contact with, and with this the possible personal consequences for charity trustees who fail to do so.

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