

Charity Commission concludes compliance case involving The Runnymede Trust

[The Runnymede Trust](#) is a charitable think tank focused on race equality and race relations in the UK.

The regulator opened a case in April 2021 after receiving complaints about the charity's activity, including its response to the report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities ("the CRED report") and whether it was engaging in lawful political activity. As part of this, the Commission also examined whether the trustees acted in line with their duties and responsibilities in the way they made the decision to work with the Good Law Project to challenge certain public appointments.

The regulator's guidance makes clear that charities are permitted in law to campaign and undertake political activity, and to take up positions that not everyone agrees with, but that this must always be done in furtherance of a charity's purposes.

Following careful assessment of the concerns raised, the Commission says that it was within the charity's purposes to engage with and take a position on the CRED report and has found no breach of its guidance. It has welcomed the trustees' decision to strengthen the charity's internal policies and procedures on political activity, in line with the Commission's guidance on campaigning and political activity. It says such a review will help the trustees ensure that the charity demonstrates party political neutrality and actively promotes its independence.

The Commission has also determined that the trustees did not breach their legal duties and responsibilities when they made the decision to work with the Good Law Project.

As part of its case, the Commission examined issues relating to party political neutrality and noted the appearance of a senior executive of the Runnymede Trust at an event organised by a political party, alongside several elected representatives and affiliated speakers. [The Commission's guidance](#) is clear that a charity can work with elected representatives, where doing so furthers its charitable purpose. But the Commission expects trustees to ensure that their charity's engagement with political parties and politicians is balanced so that they are not perceived to be supporting one party over another, in order to protect the Trust's independence and reputation. The trustees have given assurances that they endeavour to engage with a range of parties and political viewpoints.

Helen Earner, Director of Regulatory Services at the Charity Commission, said:

We take all concerns raised with us about charities seriously – whether they come from members of the public, parliamentarians, or the media. We treat all complaints with respect and assess them impartially and expertly against the legal framework. That is what the public expects.

In this case, we have found no breach of our guidance. However, we have told the trustees of the Runnymede Trust that they must ensure the charity's engagement with political parties and politicians is balanced.

It is not for us as regulator to tell trustees how best to further their charity's purposes. Charities are free to take up positions that are controversial, if the trustees come to a reasoned decision that doing so furthers the charity's cause.

But all charities must comply with the rules associated with charitable status. Being a charity comes with privileges, but also with important responsibilities. We expect the trustees and senior leaders of the Runnymede trust to pay heed to these responsibilities, as we expect all charities to.

The Charity Commission's case opened on 9 April 2021 and concluded on 17 August 2021.

[In a blog published in March](#), the Commission's CEO Helen Stephenson noted that "charities must be able to show that they are driven, not by the background, world view or political inclinations and interests of their leaders, but by their mission and purpose, and by the needs of the people or causes they serve."

Ends .

Notes to editors

1. The Charity Commission is the independent, non-ministerial government department that registers and regulates charities in England and Wales. Its purpose is to ensure charity can thrive and inspire trust so that people can improve lives and strengthen society.
2. It is not for the Commission to determine whether a charity's decision is 'right' or 'wrong', but whether the trustees acted in line with the law in making the decision. This includes examining whether the decision was in line with the charity's purposes, and whether the process of decision making by the trustees was in line with the law, [as explained in our guidance](#).