

# Trustees disqualified for serious misconduct and mismanagement at charity misused for terrorism offences involving children

Trustees who ran a charity where terrorism offences took place have been disqualified after a statutory inquiry by the Charity Commission.

The regulator [opened a statutory inquiry](#) into Essex Islamic Academy ([1131755](#)) after an employee at the charity, Umar Ahmed Haque, was arrested and subsequently charged in connection with the attempted radicalisation of children through exposing them to terrorist material. In March 2018, Mr Haque was convicted of a number of offences\* including disseminating terrorist material and the preparation of terrorist acts which related directly to his role at the charity.

Information supplied by the charity in response to these serious criminal allegations was limited, so the Commission took swift action, using its powers to compel the former trustees to provide details about Mr Haque's role, and the wider management of the charity.

## **Serious safeguarding failings**

The inquiry found that the former trustees failed to ensure safeguarding procedures were adequate and being adhered to, leading to children as young as 11 being exposed to serious harm, through attempted radicalisation which included the children being shown extremely graphic and violent propaganda videos produced by the proscribed terrorist organisation, Daesh.

The inquiry established that Mr Haque was originally recruited as an administrative assistant but he had been teaching classes unsupervised in the charity's madrassah, which was attended daily by approximately 80 – 100 children aged 5 – 15 years.

The trustees admitted there was no supervision over Mr Haque's adherence with the madrassah's syllabus and the inquiry found no evidence that the trustees had applied for an enhanced DBS check which would have been required for his teaching role.

Ultimately the inquiry established that no due diligence was carried out prior to Mr Haque taking up employment with the charity.

## **Obstructing the inquiry**

A second individual employed at the charity, Mr Abuthafer Mamun, was later charged and convicted with the preparation of terrorist acts. Mr Mamun assisted Mr Haque in his classes, however the former trustees withheld the

fact that they had been aware of his involvement at the madrassah until the inquiry, using the Commission's legal powers, issued a formal direction requiring them to answer questions and supply documents.

The inquiry also established that a number of responses provided to it by the former trustees turned out to be false or misleading, including in relation to pre-employment checks carried out on Mr Haque.

## **Protective and regulatory action**

The inquiry took protective action to safeguard the charity and its beneficiaries, by issuing an order to prevent the trustees from running any education classes or recreational activities until it was satisfied that a number of actions had been complied with relating to safeguarding. The inquiry also appointed, on 8 June 2018, an interim manager to the charity; they were initially appointed to carry out specific tasks, however their remit was extended to include the management and running of the charity after the inquiry determined it was necessary to suspend the former trustees pending their disqualification. They were discharged on 30 April 2019 after completing the functions of their appointment.

The inquiry has worked closely with multiple agencies – including the Police – to ensure those responsible in the charity are held to account.

The Commission found that the actions of the former trustees amounted to serious misconduct and mismanagement in the administration of the charity. The inquiry considered their competence, honesty and integrity, and concluded that they were unfit to be charity trustees and that it was in the public interest to disqualify them from their positions. All 5 have therefore been disqualified from trusteeship for a period of 10 years. This means that they are prevented from serving as trustees or senior managers of any charity in England and Wales.

Under new powers the Commission secured as part of the Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Act 2016, and by virtue of their convictions, Mr Haque and Mr Mamun are automatically disqualified for life from serving as trustees or senior managers of any charity in England and Wales.

### **Michelle Russell, Director of Investigations, Monitoring and Enforcement at the Charity Commission said:**

I, like the public, am appalled by what happened here to these children who should have been in the safe custody of this charity – quite literally the worst case we have seen, with children, as young as 11, being exposed to harm through attempted radicalisation and terrorist material.

The two individuals have been held to account through criminal proceedings, and it is right that we have, on behalf of the public, held the individuals who were trustees at the time of his actions, responsible for their failures.

The public rightly expect trustees to honour their positions of responsibility, demonstrating unfailing care for the people they are meant to support. In this case, the children who were in their care, and the people that trusted them to do so, were let down. These individuals proved themselves to be wholly unsuitable; what happened on their watch is deeply alarming and troubling, running counter to everything people expect of charity.

Since the Commission's intervention there have been significant improvements in the charity's governance and safeguarding procedures.

The interim manager implemented a series of new policies and procedures, including around protecting people. They have appointed a new board of trustees and ensured that they fully understand their responsibilities as trustees, including safeguarding.

**Michelle Russell added:**

Our inquiry's actions have set important foundations for the good governance of this charity going forward. Clearly, what went on here will not just have affected the children that were abused, but their families and the community as a whole. The charity's new leadership has to continue rebuilding vital trust.

The [full report is available on GOV.UK](#).

**Ends.**

**Notes to editors**

1. \*On 2 March 2018, Mr Haque was convicted of (i) two counts on the preparation of terrorist acts pursuant to section 5 of the Terrorism Act 2006, (ii) four counts of possessing a record of information useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism pursuant to section 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000, (iii) the dissemination of terrorist material pursuant to section 2 of the Terrorism Act 2006. On 27 March 2018, Mr Haque was sentenced to life in prison, with a minimum term of 25 years.
2. The inquiry also uncovered a series of failings in the financial management of the charity. Further details are available in the [full report on GOV.UK](#).
3. The former trustees were disqualified under section 181A of the Charities Act for a period of 10 years. Mr Haque and Mr Mamun are automatically disqualified for life from serving as trustees or senior managers of any charity in England and Wales, by virtue of their convictions, under section 178 of the Charities Act.