

ME Research UK

Trustees' Report

ME Research UK strives to repeat the success of Prof. Julia Newton, Dr Wan Ng and colleagues at Newcastle University who, in 2012, were awarded almost £1 million by the UK's Medical Research Council. Their successful application for funding was under a call for 'Understanding the Mechanisms of CFS/ME' and resulted in funding for two biomedical projects. At the time, Prof. Newton acknowledged ME Research UK for providing "the pilot/seed corn funding for four distinct projects from 2006 to 2011, which have allowed us to accumulate the data on which these successful applications to the MRC were based".

What has become apparent from those researchers presenting their findings to the Board is how pivotal a grant from ME Research UK has been in their efforts to leverage increased funding from other bodies - both charities and governmental. In short, the charity's funding has been a fulcrum, multiplying the impact of research funding and being a catalyst for greater success.

The Trustees monitor closely the feedback from Breakthrough and the data on uptake and use of Facebook and Breakthrough. It would appear that there is a strong demand for impartial, informed scientific comment in the sphere of ME/CFS.

Future Plans

The past 5 years have seen a period of rapid evolution in the charity sector. It is gratifying to note the upswing in income received during this year especially as this has been driven by active fundraisers choosing to support ME Research UK and for the level of donations they garner despite the 'cost of living crisis' remaining a major feature in people's lives.

In previous years, income rises have been attributable to legacy income but to 31st October 2025 voluntary donations have made a major impact to the funds available for the charity to invest in its work.

Due to the faith placed in us, ME Research UK has invested funds in the highest quality research available and the fruits of this will be seen over the next few years. It is clear to Trustees that ME Research UK must and will continue its mission but recognising that competition for available funds grows. The charity will not lower its rigorous standards but rather invest strategically to support ME research from PhD level through postdoctoral research and up to full grant status. The charity is uniquely placed to dedicate its funds to create this progression of success and this will be built upon as additional income is available.

Over the past year, ME Research UK's website has been re-organised with focus on 'What is ME', Fundraising and Research areas but it is acknowledged that the current website has reached the end of its productive life and so website renewal is a priority. This will be coupled with content creation to aid ME Research UK's funded Fellow and those undertaking PhD-level research in their careers through opportunities to supply written and acknowledged content. In addition, fundraisers' stories will be featured as the charity brings its work closer to the needs of its supporters. Fundraisers will be asked why they chose to support ME Research UK and why research is important to them.

Building on the success of ME Awareness Week and Dysautonomia Month, the charity will plan a number of themed weeks or months with a progression of asks - to follow us on Facebook, sign up to Breakthrough, donate. This will allow the charity to move away from 'as is published' approach to research coverage to more thoughtful and planned postings to appeal not only to the ME audience but also those who may have other conditions and to highlight the overlaps. This also uses momentum of others' Awareness Weeks to the advantage of charity.

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Prior to the end of the reporting year the Trustees took the difficult decision in light of increased risk and uncertainty over the sub-leasing arrangements at The Gateway to move the registered office in the forthcoming charity year to the charity's accountant and to undertake an office relocation. It is envisaged that this will facilitate more modern working arrangements and increase staff flexibility in the future. The move will involve a manageable degree of upheaval but the Trustees are confident that it will not materially affect supporters.

Accounting Matters

Donated Facilities and Services

It is estimated that approximately 971 voluntary hours were donated by members i.e. the Trustees of ME Research UK, and 55.5 voluntary hours were donated by others (most notably by peer-reviewers and members of our Science Committee to whom ME Research UK owes a great debt for their insightful input).

The charity continued to take advantage of donation facilities from Microsoft (winding-down), Google Ads, Virgin Money, Canva, DocuSign, and the SAGE Foundation. The value of these donations in kind was approximately £32,100 and has been recognised in the accounts - the calculated 'cost' of the advertising of \$37,924.81 (£29,133.48) is included in expenditure on raising funds.

Key Management Personnel Remuneration

The Trustees consider key management to be the Board of Charity Trustees, in terms of setting strategy and policy and in assessing risk and responsibility for these matters rests with the Board.

No Trustee received any remuneration directly from the charity: other than approved expenses. Details of remuneration and expenses are disclosed in note 10 to the financial statements.

Financial Review

The total funds held at the year-end were £717,324 (2023/24: £912,505), including £43,537 of restricted funds (2023/24: £105,591). These funds are further explained at note 21.

The charity continues to rely on the generous donations of its supporters - as detailed in Note 3 to the accounts. The amount of charitable activity funded during the period is set out in Note 7 to the accounts, and the charities assets and liabilities are detailed in the Balance Sheet presented in page 44.

Given OSCR's recommendations for limitation of Trustees' liability insurance, our financial policy remains as it has always been, namely that no new projects be initiated until the necessary funds to complete them are secure and in place in the charity's bank accounts. This ensures that, for research project purposes, the charity assets will always be in excess of its liabilities. In this regard, the charity aims to be regarded as a sound partner in any project award and therefore to ensure a high level of trust between funding agencies. For non-restricted funds, the Trustees remain prudent in their outlook.

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Risk Management

The Board of Charity Trustees has considered the major risks to which the charity is exposed and has reviewed those risks and established procedures to manage them. ME Research UK's Risk Register is reviewed on an annual basis and presented to Trustees for discussion and approval.

The principle risks faced by the charity lie in continued reliance on the generosity of individual donors for income and, in the case of operational risks, from ineffective grant making and the ability of the charity to make grants, which fulfil its objectives.

2025/2026 is embarked upon by the charity with an expanded portfolio of projects but in the knowledge that research is expensive and that the research and charity landscape is shifting. In this context the new Donor Relations Officer has been tasked with exploring new sources of finance. Given the charity's increased profile and exposure; there will be (and is) increased competition between charities for donations and trust funders will see income squeezed due to anticipated challenges caused by the current economic situation. The employment of a Donor Relations Officer has added capacity to the charity to enable it to more effectively deepen and broaden our supporter base and opportunities to maximise the funds available for biomedical research.

The financial risks of increased employee numbers and slow recovery of donation income are containable given the financial strength of the charity both in terms of assets and in terms of relatively low running costs.

As scientific research is largely ineligible for funding support from certain bodies, e.g. the National Lottery, and as other bodies, notably companies, prefer to support 'community based projects', ME Research UK must rely mainly on voluntary donations. The charity strives to encourage active fundraising by facilitating giving through multiple online platforms; supporting individual and group projects (such as Walk for ME); and by forging strong links with fundraisers. The Trustees will bolster the current fundraising model by expanding marketing activities to ensure the work of the charity and fundraising opportunities are projected as widely as possible.

The operational risk from ineffective research is managed by retaining staff, peer reviewers and Science Committee members who understand the science and research methodologies behind research. The Trustees are aware that biomedical research is expensive and that the grants provided will be insufficient for large-scale research, which is why pilot studies and seed-corn projects concerned with novel aspects of research into ME/CFS are the focus of our work. ME Research UK is open to working cooperatively with other bodies to promote high-quality research into ME/CFS.

Through collaboration and skilful targeting of resources, the Trustees ensure that maximum benefit flows from funds invested and that the aims of the charity are fulfilled.

Charity Test

The Trustees are mindful of the continuing legal duty to fulfil the charity test under the 2005 Act.

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It is considered that the charity fulfils the 'public benefit' test both directly, by the provision of research grants to institutions, and also indirectly, through the dissemination of research outcomes, news and analysis to the general public and by the provision of information via our website, Facebook and meetings. Our staff are also available to answer queries from members of the public by both telephone and e-mail. There are no identifiable disbenefits in the acts of the charity or any concerns relating to private benefit.

There are considered to be no restrictive elements in the provision of information in that the Charity's website and Facebook page are freely accessible to the general public without registration and the biannual magazine 'Breakthrough' is provided completely free of charge to any individual or group which requests copies.

Access to grants is via an open grant application system where the merits of the application are judged in a peer-reviewed system based on scientific merit. The results of ME Research UK funded projects are published, enabling the wider scientific community to enjoy the benefits of the results.

Due to the nature of biomedical scientific research, there is necessarily a limited pool of potential recipient institutions; scientific research requires trained staff, appropriate facilities and administrative support. ME Research UK, however, is committed to stimulating new research into ME/CFS; encouraging scientists to enter the field; and increasing the published research base on the disease.

The Trustees keep under review the level of still to be utilised funds, and it ought to be noted that the charity does not undertake to fund research until the funds have been raised and that payment of successful grants is made to the recipient Institution in instalments. In addition, grant requests are impossible to predict, and so funds may accumulate unavoidably until suitable applications come to the charity. The Trustees continue to monitor the situation and have, and will continue to, take all opportunities to source new project opportunities.

Reserves Policy

Transfers are made from unrestricted funds to ensure that sufficient is held in restricted funds to cover the charity's grant making obligations, and to effect minor adjustments.

The Trustees have also reviewed their Reserves Policy by examining income, expenditure and risk factors prior to implementing the results.

The charity's Reserves Policy is reviewed annually in parallel with the Risk Register. Reserves consist of 2 tiers - tier 1 being tied dynamically to the charities operating costs with an adjustment for unforeseen events. 3 month's operating costs are seen as a fair amount for reserves held in cash. Tier 2 reserves contemplate closure costs with investments held by M&G held to off-set these liabilities. With Tiers 1 and 2, the financial position of the charity is secured as far as reasonable given income and expenditure fluctuations. Within Unrestricted Funds, three months' operating expenses are identified as a financial reserve. Surplus funds beyond this level are available for immediate utilisation to fund research. In addition, as the Trustees do not commit to funding research projects until the full costs have been raised, the Trustees minimise financial risk.

In recent years, surplus revenues have accumulated as the Trustees seek relevant research projects worldwide and the level of funds held has been augmented by inflow of larger donations from trusts/charities and executry income. This profile will alter as projects progress towards completion and grant funding drawn down.

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There are no significant doubts as to the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

Investment Policy

The Trustees adopted an Investment Policy at their meeting in January 2025. This policy is reviewable on an annual basis and this will include a report on investment returns.

Funds arising from investments are insufficient to make a material contribution to charity assets and are incidental to the charity's operation.

ME Research UK is a small charity with limited resources, the majority of which are dedicated to funding research commitments. The timing of payments to settle commitments is outwith the control of the charity.

As the timing of payments to settle research commitments is not within the control of the charity, our policy is to hold the vast majority of charity funds in cash on short-term deposit to be readily available but to seek to maximise the return. Thus, the vast majority of funds held is invested in UK banks and building societies to a) earn a competitive rate of interest on funds until they are required for use and b) to maximise deposit protection under the Financial Services Compensation Scheme. During the charity year, a scheme of fund rationalization was carried out to maximise the protection of assets via an investment aggregator platform - Flagstone. Not only did this enable access to a wider range of deposit takers (and thus FSCS protection) but better rates of interest.

On cash deposits, interest rates are such that growth in excess of inflation (RPI) has been possible and without excessive risk or overly lengthy notice periods. The Trustees aim for a competitive rate given market conditions and need for liquidity.

As charity reserves are held on a longer basis (albeit that the investments can be traded on a daily basis), the Trustees mandated a balanced approach between income and capital growth be adopted. The Trustees wished to maintain the capital value of invested funds (with M&G) at least in line with inflation.

Ideally, the charity's investment objective is for capital growth in excess of inflation (RPI) and a stable, growing income stream. The charity seeks to produce the best financial return within an acceptable level of risk - namely low to medium level of risk. This balances the need to generate income from investments in the short term with the requirement for longer-term growth in the value of the portfolio.

The charity's reserves are held in a Charifund investment managed actively by M&G and in an instant access bank account via the Flagstone platform.

The annual report was approved by the trustees of the charity on 13 April 2026 and signed on its behalf by:



Jonathan P J Davies
Chair/Trustee

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Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities

The Trustees are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Annual Report and the financial statements in accordance with the United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice) and applicable law and regulations.

The law applicable to charities in Scotland requires the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards, comprising FRS 102 have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the charity's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005, regulation 8 of the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (as amended) and the provisions of the Constitution. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

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Independent Auditor's Report to the Members of ME Research UK

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of ME Research UK (the 'charity') for the year ended 31 October 2025, which comprise the Statement of Financial Activities, Balance Sheet, Statement of Cash Flows, and Notes to the Financial Statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is United Kingdom Accounting Standards, comprising Charities SORP - FRS 102 'The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland' and applicable law (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the charity's affairs as at 31 October 2025 and of its results for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice; and
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and regulation 8 of the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (as amended).

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the auditor responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report. We are independent of the charity in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, we have concluded that the trustees use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the original financial statements were authorised for issue.

Our responsibilities and the responsibilities of the trustees with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

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Other information

The trustees are responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information included in the annual report, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Matters on which we are required to report by exception

In the light of our knowledge and understanding of the charity and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the Trustees' Report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters where the Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulation 2006 (as amended) requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept, or returns adequate for our audit have not been received from branches not visited by us; or
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- certain disclosures of trustees remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit.

Responsibilities of trustees

As explained more fully in the Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities [set out on page 28], the trustees are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the trustees determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the charity's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the charity or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

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Auditor responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decision of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Extent to which the audit was considered capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud

We identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, and then design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, including obtaining audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Identifying and assessing potential risks related to irregularities

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud is detailed below:

- the nature of the regulated sector, control environment and understanding of the entity including, but not restricted to, the understanding that the trustees are not remunerated, and the prevalence of fraud in the sector especially in the current uncertain economic environment;
- results of our enquiries of trustees about their own identification and assessment of the risks of irregularities;
- any matters we identified having obtained and reviewed the Charity's documentation of their policies and procedures relating to:
 - identifying, evaluating and complying with laws and regulations and whether they were aware of any instances of non-compliance;
 - detecting and responding to the risks of fraud and whether they have knowledge of any actual, suspected or alleged fraud;
 - the internal controls established to mitigate risks of fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations;
- the matters discussed among the audit engagement team regarding how and where fraud might occur in the financial statements and any potential indicators of fraud.

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As a result of these procedures, we considered the opportunities that may exist within the organisation for fraud and identified the greatest potential for fraud in relation to revenue recognition. In common with all audits under ISAs (UK), we are also required to perform specific procedures to respond to the risk of management override.

We also obtained an understanding of the legal and regulatory frameworks that the Charity operates in, focusing on provisions of those laws and regulations that had a direct effect on the determination of material amounts and disclosures in the financial statements. The key laws and regulations we considered in this context included the charity's own constitution, and various charity-specific legislation, including The Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005.

Our procedures to respond to risks identified included the following:

- reviewing the financial statement disclosures and testing to supporting documentation to assess compliance with provisions of relevant laws and regulations described as having a direct effect on the financial statements;
- enquiring of Trustees concerning actual and potential litigation and claims;
- performing analytical procedures to identify any unusual or unexpected relationships that may indicate risks of material misstatement due to fraud;
- reading minutes of meetings of those charged with governance;
- tested a sample of income for understatement and other relevant audit procedures while consideration was given to revenue recognition;
- tested a sample of expenditure for overstatement and other relevant procedures;
- in addressing the risk of fraud through management override of controls, testing the appropriateness of journal entries and other adjustments; assessing whether the judgements made in making accounting estimates are indicative of a potential bias; and evaluating the business rationale of any significant transactions that are unusual or outside the normal course of business.

We also communicated relevant identified laws and regulations and potential fraud risks to all engagement team members and remained alert to any indications of fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations throughout the audit.

Due to the inherent limitations of an audit, there is an unavoidable risk that we may not have detected some material misstatements in the financial statements, even though we have properly planned and performed our audit in accordance with auditing standards. For example, as with any audit, there remained a higher risk of non-detection of irregularities, as these may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal controls. We are not responsible for preventing fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations and cannot be expected to detect all fraud and non-compliance with laws and regulations.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website at www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities. This description forms part of our auditor's report.