



# REPORTING ISLAM

## INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE FOR JOURNALISTS

### PROJECT UPDATE - MARCH 2016

#### **About the Project**

The overall aim of the Reporting Islam Project is to improve the quality of mainstream news media reporting on matters relating to Islam. The focus is to develop user-friendly and readily accessible resources underpinned by research-based evidence to help journalists more mindfully report stories about Islam and Muslims. It is believed that fair, ethical and accurate reporting on matters involving Islam and Muslim communities will help promote social cohesion and may assist in the reduction of community tensions.

The Project is national in its ambit and has been funded under a competitive grants scheme facilitated by the Commonwealth's Attorney-General's Department. Associate Professor Jacqui Ewart and Professor Mark Pearson based at Griffith University in Queensland are undertaking this independent research project. They are supported by a full-time Muslim Project Manager and part-time Muslim researchers and/or trainers.

Stage 1 of the Project was completed in June 2015. Stage 1 of the Project involved a review of the literature about the news media coverage of Islam and Muslim people, an assessment of case studies of media reportage across media types at national and community levels, interviews with journalists and other experts in the field, distillation of international studies to develop a schema for assessing reportage against world best practice in the area, and a compilation of a report on these findings with recommendations for the development of a suite of curricula, training and resources to better equip the news media for more mindful reporting in this space.

Successful completion of stage 1 informed the decision to continue with the Project and progress to stage 2 which has focused on developing and trialling a suite of researched-based training and education resources for Australian media practitioners to encourage more mindful reporting of Muslims and the Islamic faith.

Stage 2 of the Project started in mid-2015 and is due to be completed in mid-2016. If the Project proceeds past stage 2, a proposed further stage 3 (2016-17) would finalise and roll out those resources nationally.

## **What resources are being developed?**

Stage 2 of the Project is focused on developing key training and education resources for journalists, journalism educators and journalism students. They are:

1. A database-supported app for Mac and Android as an easy access tool for information, reporting tips and suggestions for journalists and journalism students;
2. A Website to host digital copies of training and education materials and to provide an interface with identified stakeholders and collaborators via comment streams and social media engagement;
3. Case studies and print materials for the initial trial of resources including copies of existing news reports in various formats with an analysis of the issues that arose in the course of their coverage;
4. Audio-visual material focusing on scenarios/role playing in relation to possible issues that might arise in the research and reporting of stories about Islam and Muslims;
5. A Handbook of Reportage for journalism, focusing on tips and suggestions for covering stories involving Islam and Muslims, as well as suggestions for considering legal issues that might arise in the course of covering such stories.

## **How are Journalists having input into the resources being developed?**

Open communication and meaningful collaborative relationships with a broad range of key stakeholders including media practitioners underpin this Project. The Project's success is also equally dependent on input from Muslim leaders and Muslim academics.

In 2015 an Expert Advisory Panel was formed to provide input into the Project, shape its direction and influence its outcomes. Members of this Panel include media industry personnel, journalism educators, key Muslim community members, and international academic experts. There has also been considerable outreach nationally and internationally to journalists.

The resources are all being trialled by a broad range of media practitioners including editors and news directors, sub-editors and producers, social media editors, digital media professionals, journalists, journalism educators and journalism students at selected locations across Australia.

The training for journalists that forms a key part of the Project (including using the resources) simulates real-life newsroom pressures and focuses on covering one of two different news stories: a Mosque proposal; and a terrorism-related arrest. The training covers the cultural, ethical and legal dimensions of covering stories relating to Islam and Muslims. Risks and impacts of poor journalistic practice are also highlighted as are examples of good practice.

## **Where can I get more information and contribute?**

More information is progressively being made available on the Project's website. Go to [www.reportingislam.org](http://www.reportingislam.org).

You can also contact the Project Team at [reportingislam@gmail.com](mailto:reportingislam@gmail.com).