

Setting the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's new strategic agenda

Seeking your views on the Commission's strategic agenda for 2026-29.

Do you agree with this updated vision? Yes,

Agree with including the words 'positive' and 'improving' as laid out in consultation document.

Do you agree with this updated mission? Yes, the mission is basically the same as before with the addition of the word 'providing'

Do you agree with these updated values and enabling behaviours? No, Currently, the Commission has "Integrity: Honest, open, supportive, fair, trustworthy, respectful, valuing diversity, accountable." as a value. The Commission expects charity trustees to act with Integrity in running the charity, the Commission should therefore require its own staff and Commissioners to do the same.

Do you agree with these five aims? Yes

Do you agree with what the Commission plans to do to help charities follow the rules and be well run?

Yes, all sounds like an enabling regulator. Good to see that Helper Groups have been included as they carry out such an important role in helping charities with understanding charity regulations.

Do you have any other ideas or suggestions to help us improve this area?

Charities need more advice and guidance in certain areas. There has been a tendency sometimes to signpost to guidance from CCEW eg trading. The Commission should prioritise producing new guidance that is needed by charities using CCEW as a benchmark.

With regard to (b) We appreciate that the commission does not have the resources to investigate every concern raised and so needs to use the risk assessment framework. It can be extremely frustrating however for whistleblowers if concerns are not investigated. They may feel despondent and think there is no point of reporting concerns in the future if the Commission is not going to look into it.

Also when Concerns or SIR are raised it is important that the Commission goes back to the charity and lets them know the outcome...even if a charity is waiting 3 years, they still want to hear back from the Commission. The Commission should commit more resources to the compliance team so that charities get the expert advice that they need to resolve the issues.

Do you agree with what the Commission plans to do to build more public trust and confidence in charities? Yes

Do you have any other ideas or suggestions?

Promoting the use of the register....the register isn't great, it could be vastly improved by including previous names and trustees of charities in the way companies house register does. Appreciate that the Commission knows it needs a new Register but it should consult with key stakeholders before it invests in a new framework to ensure that it will be fit for purpose for the future in terms of having this valuable information available to the public.

Do you agree with the main priorities and outcomes the Commission has set out to enable charities through better systems and support?

Yes, Plain English accessible guidance is necessary so that trustees can easily see what is expected of them.

What does an enabling regulator look like to you?

Gets the right balance between enforcement and guiding....an enabling regulator will in the first instance give the charity the guidance it needs to make the required changes. In a lot of instances, the Commission is very good at this. An enabling regulator should be concerned about the negative consequences on the charity sector of publishing negative reports about charities. The Commission should build into its risk framework the potential for vexatious claims being made about charities and plan for how it would manage these. Unfortunately, sometimes politically motivated people may use the complaints procedures of a regulator to stifle or halt the work of a good charity. An enabling regulator should not take years to investigate concerns submitted.

How can we work better with charities, funders, and supporters?

Engage and consult better with the Helper Groups who work first hand advising and helping charities. Continue to bring them together annually to discuss any issues with charity regulation or guidance.

Do you have any other ideas or suggestions to help the Commission improve in this area?

With the implementation of a charity registration threshold, the Commission needs to explain to Funders that being a registered charity does not necessarily mean that the Commission verifies the accounts and reports on the charity registration. There is a misconception that 100% of reports and accounts on the register are checked by Commission staff when it may not be even a quarter of all those submitted.

Do you agree with the main priorities and outcomes the Commission has set out to provide a more efficient and updated registration process?

Yes, the implementation of a registration threshold will perhaps require complex systems so it important that it is planned for properly.

Do you have any other ideas or suggestions to help the Commission improve in this area?

The wait time for charities to get called forward to register with the Commission has greatly improved with some charities being called forward to register as

quick as within a month. This is so helpful for charities in the first instance, but there is still a long enough wait to get officially registered, usually 5 months wait time. It would be good to see this wait time for registration reduced.

Do you agree with the main goals the Commission has set out in terms of being an excellent and expert organisation? Yes

Do you have any other ideas or suggestions to help the Commission improve in this area?

There isn't a Combined list anymore so we can't see that charities haven't yet submitted their charity application, we can only see the ones that are progressing via the Applications in progress which is very hard to locate! would be good to see who has submitted the Expression of Intent also.

What should we stop doing if we have limited resources?

Paying NI Direct! People find this service very frustrating. Having a voicemail service may be better where people could leave a message in a way that is meaningful to them and then Commission admin could field the enquiries to relevant staff.

How could this plan help improve equality for everyone?

Looking forward to the new website.

Are there any final comments you would like to make?

If the Commission is not going to look into certain Concerns it should tell the charity that a concern has been received about it. If it's not serious enough for the Commission to look into however improvements could be made, it could signpost to its guidance and a helper group in its area or sub-sector could advise further. The commission should consult with the helper groups on any development of an API as they will know if this is going to be workable for those that have issues with digital.

Are you providing this response as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation

How would you describe your role?

If Other, please specify::

Helper Group and Umbrella body with 1500 members groups.

Are you happy to be listed as having provided input to the Commission's strategic plan?

Yes

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Yes

If Yes, can you provide: Your Name, or Name of your organisation:

NICVA

Are you happy to have your comments attributed?

Yes

If you would like to be added to our stakeholder data base for use in updates and future research, please provide your details below:

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Any accessibility requirements **n/a**