

Annual Report 2011-2012

A summary



Foreword

The past year has been one of significant and tangible progress for the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. Change has been a theme of the year, both in an external context and for the Commission as our powers and responsibilities increase.

What has not changed, however, is the importance of maintaining and enhancing public trust and confidence in charities, particularly in straitened times. The Northern Ireland public can be satisfied that meaningful charity oversight and support now exists, with good governance promoted alongside good intention.

The public is the driving force behind charitable work in terms of giving of their time and money. Furthermore, many charities are funded by the public purse. It is justified, therefore, that charities are expected to maintain good governance, accountability and transparency in their work.

The Commission has conducted a sizeable number of investigations during the year, involving issues concerning a broad cross-section of charities. We have been keen to share learning from our first year of this regulatory work, hence the publication of a report highlighting lessons for all charities.

Investigating concerns, however, is only one facet of the work of the Charity Commission. We have been engaging in a meaningful way with charities across the year. We have worked alongside them to promote

good governance and contribute to an environment in which charities can flourish.

This engagement has demonstrated to us that charity registration remains a priority issue for Northern Ireland charities as well as for members of the public. Clarity around a definitive list of Northern Ireland charities is still needed.

The Charities Act (NI) 2008 set out the registration of charities as a key task of the Charity Commission. The Charity Commissioners are frustrated that rolling out this aspect of our work has been hampered by a series of legislative hold-ups and problems. We look forward to finally putting in place the policies and procedures that we have developed in order to implement charity registration.

The year did, however, see progress in the relocation to a permanent office in Lurgan. This has been a crucial move for the organisation as we make our regulatory impact felt.

The recruitment of key members of staff has been similarly important for us as we progress with the development and operation of our policies and procedures. Creating a new team of people from different backgrounds and with different levels of experience has been a novel and enriching experience. Indeed the year as a whole has been marked by its unique challenges and opportunities and, of course, by change. We thank the staff and

Commissioners for their continuing work and look forward to the future.



Frances McCandless
Chief Executive
Charity Commission for
Northern Ireland

Tom McGrath CBE
Chief Commissioner
Charity Commission for
Northern Ireland

The full copy of the 2011-2012 Charity Commission Annual Report and Accounts can be accessed through our website at www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/Library/pdf_documents/annualreport1112.pdf

The year in numbers

106 concerns about charities received

74 charity investigations progressed to conclusion

35,037 unique visits to our website

526 general enquiries received and answered

6500 plus “deemed list” local charities coming under our regulatory scope

44 speaking engagements with charity umbrella groups and individual charities

Vision

“ a dynamic and well governed charities sector in which the public has confidence, underpinned by the Commission’s effective delivery of its regulatory and advisory role ”

Delivering our vision

Continuing engagement

It is important that charities understand the role and remit of the Charity Commission. Interacting and working with charities therefore, is an important aspect of our role as a new regulator. We have met with a host of charity representatives across the year and region, including speaking at 44 seminars and workshops with a combined attendance of around 1,400 charity representatives.



As a new regulator and with charity regulation evolving at a pace, we fielded many general enquiries from charities and members of the public. In the past year there have been 526 general enquiries received and answered.

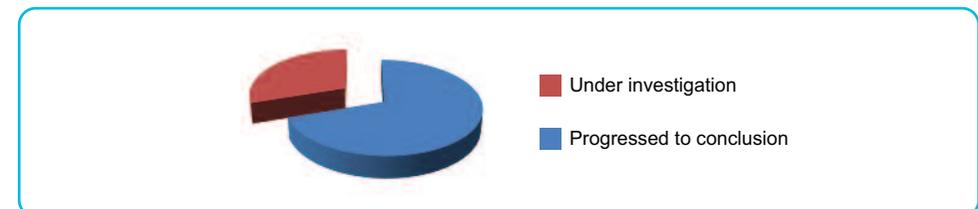
The graph below breaks down the nature of these enquiries:



The website is our primary method of communication and we update content to deal with frequently asked questions. In the past year there have been 35,037 unique visits to our website.

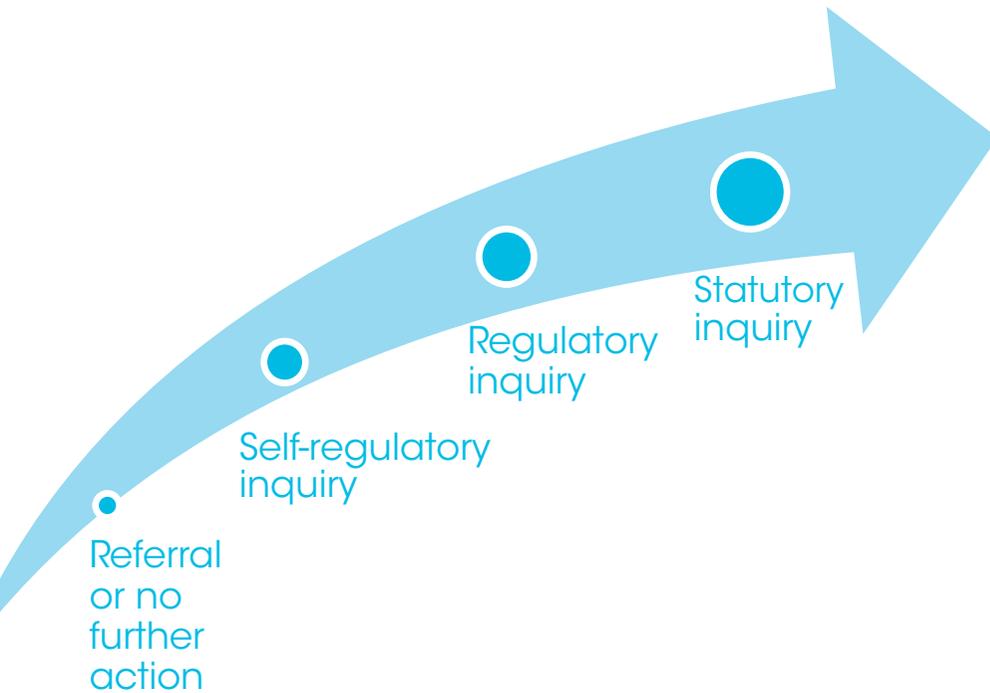
Investigatory work

The year has been marked by the Commission's investigatory and regulatory work. We received 106 concerns about charities in the twelve months between April 2011 and April 2012. In response, 74 investigations were progressed to conclusion with 32 remaining under investigation at year end.



The 74 investigations were successfully progressed in a range of ways. The diagram below illustrates how the Commission deals with concerns received. We use the most stringent of our powers during a statutory inquiry, while at the other end of the scale there may be a referral or no further action taken if the concern is not credible, evidence based or within our remit.

Members of the public can raise a concern about a charity at any stage through our website at www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/Our_regulatory_activity/Reporting_issues/General_public/default.aspx



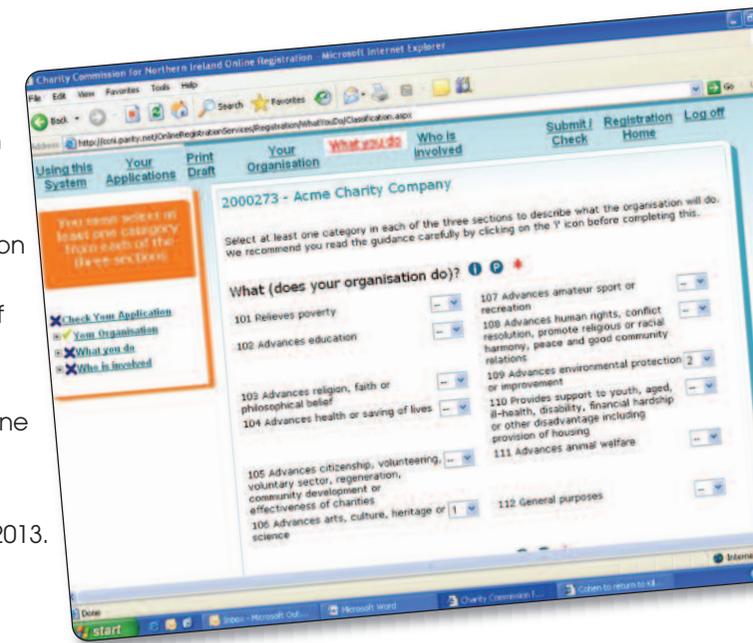
The Commission published a thematic report on concerns about charities in February 2012, providing further details on our investigations. The report was produced as a piece of learning for charities, highlighting common but problematic governance flaws and helping them to get the basics right. The report is published on our website www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/Library/pdf_documents/20120120100concernreportfinalvesion.pdf

The public register of charities

The production of a publically accessible register of charities features heavily as a means by which to reinforce public trust and confidence in charities. During the year, the NI Executive has advanced the amendment to the Charities Act (NI) 2008, "the Act", that will allow the Commission to begin to register local charities and populate this register.

While the law makers have been working on the amendment, the Commission has been implementing the commenced sections of the Act and refining the registration systems and procedures in readiness for the beginning of the registration process.

We are confident that the online system will be ready for the commencement of charity registration, expected in late 2013.



Organisational development

Substantial internal focus has resulted in the development and implementation of a list of core policies and procedures which are essential for any public body.

The development of our Equality Scheme and Action Plan has been a significant piece of organisational development. The scheme and action plan set out how we will embed equality into all aspects of our work.

We have completed recruitment of the full permanent staff complement. This has been followed by a programme of training for staff and Commissioners as the new team has been moulded.

Permanent office premises were also secured in Lurgan, Co. Armagh and these were officially opened in March 2012 by DSD Minister Nelson McCausland MLA.

Future focus

The Commission is hopeful that the forthcoming year will be one of progress. Advancing charity registration is a priority and we look forward to the Department of Social Development and the NI Assembly furthering the necessary legislative amendment.

We also understand the various challenges facing the charity sector. The Charity Commission remains committed to fostering vibrant and resilient Northern Ireland charities through the effective delivery of our regulatory and advisory role.



Frances McCandless, Charity Commission Chief Executive, drops into Lurgan YMCA, to get a sense of some of the good work being done.



Nelson McCausland MLA, Minister for Social Development, cuts the ribbon during the opening of the new Charity Commission Lurgan office alongside Craigavon Borough Council Mayor, Councillor Alan Carson, Commission Chair Tom McGrath and pupils from Rowandale Integrated Primary School.



Minister for Social Development Nelson McCausland MLA chats with Rowandale Integrated PS pupils during the office opening, while Commissioner Rosemary Connolly looks on.

The Commission aims to

- Develop a regulatory framework in which the public have confidence and in which charities can grow and flourish, clear in the knowledge of their rights and responsibilities; and
- Manage the organisation as a statutory non-departmental public body following the full implementation of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.



For up to date information on our work and progress please see the Charity Commission for NI website on www.charitycommissionni.org.uk or contact:

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