

The **Charity**  
**Commission**  
for Northern Ireland



**2013–2014**  
**A SUMMARY**



## Introduction

From opening the new *register of charities* to receiving the 250th concern about a charity and preparing to introduce an annual reporting programme for registered charities for the first time, 2013-14 has been a year of progress for the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

A particular highlight has been the beginning of charity registration in December 2013, which also marked the opening of the public *register of charities*. Under charity law, it is compulsory for all charities in Northern Ireland to apply to register with the Commission with each charity successfully registered listed on the *register of charities*. This register, which will continue to grow as more charities are registered over coming months and years, is now live and available to view on [www.charitycommissionni.org.uk](http://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk).

Alongside registration, the Commission works to protect charities where there has been serious misconduct or mismanagement in their administration. Over the past year, we have continued to investigate the concerns we receive and take appropriate action to resolve issues. As the year end approached, we were also on target to embark on the next chapter in charity regulation – the interim reporting programme for registered charities.

This summary report highlights some of those, and other, achievements over the past year, giving a flavour of the diverse and challenging role of the Commission. We hope you will join us, our staff and our Commissioners in celebrating the progress achieved to date.

**Frances McCandless**  
Chief Executive  
Charity Commission for  
Northern Ireland

**Tom McGrath CBE**  
Chief Commissioner  
Charity Commission for  
Northern Ireland

## The year in figures

**70,301**

unique visits to  
our website

**90**

engagement  
events with key  
stakeholders

**27**

pieces of  
external  
guidance  
published

**27,888**

views of our online  
"deemed list"

**12**

public  
consultation  
events across  
Northern Ireland

**1,283**

individual  
enquiries  
answered

**7**

registration  
workshops held,  
with 160 attendees

**107**

concerns  
about charities  
received

**31**

charities  
registered

**98**

concerns  
concluded  
at year end

**1,121**

organisations  
called forward  
to apply to  
register

This document is a summary of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's annual report and accounts for 2013-14. A copy of the full report and accounts is available and can be accessed online at [www.charitycommissionni.org.uk](http://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk)

## Charity registration

In many ways, 16 December 2013 is a day which will go down in the history of the Commission. The date on which charity registration began in Northern Ireland for the first time, it also marked the opening of the new, public *register of charities* – an online database which will grow to become the definitive directory of all charities in Northern Ireland.

**Find out more about charity registration or search for a Northern Ireland charity on the new *register of charities*:  
[www.charitycommissionni.org.uk](http://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk)**

The date also saw the Commission call forward the first tranche of 200 organisations to apply to register, marking a major step forward in charity regulation.

Given the estimated number of charities in Northern Ireland, registration is being rolled out by the Commission in a managed process, with organisations from the Commission's three registration lists (deemed, non-deemed and special circumstances) called forward to apply to register in tranches. The process of registration is continuing, with 1,121 organisations called forward to apply to register by the year end.



Little Orchids playgroup (Northern Ireland charity number: 100096)

## Northern Ireland's first registered charities



The launch of charity registration in Northern Ireland

During the summer of 2013, the Commission embarked on a registration pilot with 20 organisations test driving the new online registration system prior to its launch in December. The test organisations covered a diverse cross section of Northern Ireland's charitable sector and included a housing association, a soccer school for young players, a rural transport organisation, an ethnic community association and a parent teacher support group.

During the pilot, 14 of the 20 organisations gained charity status and were revealed as Northern Ireland's first registered charities as of 16 December 2013 – the day compulsory registration began. Representatives of the 14 organisations are pictured above, at the Commission's registration launch, with the 14 organisations listed on the right.

Registration of the remaining six organisations which took part in the pilot were also in progress by launch day, marking a successful conclusion to this test phase.

- Ulidia Housing Association
- The Boys' Brigade – Northern Ireland District
- Strabane Ethnic Community Association
- Advice NI
- Fírinne
- Lagan Valley Rural Transport
- Drumellan Community Association
- U3A Foyle
- Supporting Communities NI
- Cancer Lifeline
- Brookeborough Parent Teacher Support Association
- Clooney Soccer School
- Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)
- Groundwork NI

# The year at a glance

Six public benefit and registration guidance consultation events held during April and May 2013.

**APRIL 2013**



**JUNE 2013**

Commission Chief Executive Frances McCandless announces the Commission's plans to launch a public consultation on interim reporting proposals for registered charities in autumn 2013.

The Charities (2008 Act) (Commencement No. 4) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 comes into effect on 24 June 2013, meaning the Commission can begin compulsory registration of all charities later in the year.



**MAY 2013**



Two new Commissioners, Brenda Maitland and Geraldine Donaghy, join the Board of Commissioners.

Commissioner Walter Rader is appointed to the post of Deputy Chief Commissioner for a five year term.

**JULY 2013**

*Key lessons in charity governance* - new report marks 200th concern about a Northern Ireland charity.

The Commission makes, and publishes, the Charity (Failed Appeals and Disclaimers) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013.

**AUG 2013**

The Charities Act 2008 (Transitional Provision) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 comes into effect on 19 August 2013, increasing the number of charities to which the Commission's powers apply.

A registration pilot begins. Twenty Northern Ireland organisations take part to test drive new online registration system and process.

The summer sees the Commission grant its first consents to local charities under new powers from the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.



The Commission opens a consultation on 23 September 2013 on the interim reporting proposals for charities. The consultation runs for 12 weeks and includes a series of public events across Northern Ireland.

**SEPT 2013**

*Running your charity and Registering as a charity in Northern Ireland* guidance published during November 2013.

*Charity Giving* survey reveals Northern Ireland public are some of the most generous in the UK at Christmas time.

The *Public benefit requirement* statutory guidance and supporting documents are published, ready for the beginning of charity registration in December 2013.

**NOV 2013**

After beginning registration in December, the Commission begins processing its first registration applications.

**JAN 2014**

The Commission announces it will work with the Electoral Commission and other charity regulators to produce new campaigning guidance for charities.

**FEB 2014**

**OCT 2013**

The Commission and Queen's University Management School host a 'Charity Accounting, Reporting and Regulation: Reflections and Imminent Changes' conference on 4 October 2013, providing an insight into the new draft SORP for charities and changes in charity accounting, reporting and regulation.



**DEC 2013**



Compulsory charity registration begins in Northern Ireland for the first time on 16 December 2013, a process which will impact on every charity operating in Northern Ireland.

The new online *register of charities* opens with the names of the first 14 charities registered in Northern Ireland.

The interim reporting requirements public consultation closes on 13 December 2013, with feedback received from over 300 people who attended consultation events along with responses from 47 individuals and organisations.

**MAR 2014**

The Commission urges all organisations which are, or could be, charitable, to check the deemed list of charities, available on the Commission website, to ensure the Commission has their details to call them forward for registration.

The Commission makes the *Charities (Annual Return) Regulations 2014*, ready for the interim reporting programme to go live on 1 April 2014.

*New Interim arrangements and the annual return* guidance published, providing information on the annual reporting programme for charities registered with the Commission.

The Commission publishes new report providing anonymous case studies on concerns received about charities, *Latest lessons learned from concerns about charities*.

## Investigatory work

Over the 2013-14 year, the Commission received 107 concerns about Northern Ireland charities - an average of nine concerns per month. During the year, the Enquiries team progressed 98 concerns to conclusion, with 52 concerns remaining under investigation at 31 March 2014.

As always, the nature of those concerns covered a broad spectrum of areas, with common themes including transparency, use of charity property, payments and expenses to trustees, conflicts of interest and closing a charity.

The concerns caseload has helped the Commission to build a general picture of the charitable landscape in Northern Ireland, including the depth of the personal links and confidence people have in charities - and their disappointment when they spot issues of concern within a charity.

As the independent charity regulator, the Commission is committed to taking the necessary steps to put things right where mismanagement and misconduct in the administration of a charity has been identified, as well as working to encourage and promote compliance in the first instance.



## Annual reporting



The Charity Accounting, Reporting and Regulation: Reflections and Imminent Changes conference.

Following the beginning of charity registration, the next regulatory step for the Commission involved designing a new interim reporting programme, which will see registered charities reporting annually to the Commission on their activities, governance and finances. Annual reporting is an integral part of the Commission's regulatory role, helping to ensure that the information on the *register of charities* is accurate and up to date.

Subsequently, a major piece of work completed during the past year was the development of the new interim reporting programme for registered charities, which went live at the beginning of the new financial year on 1 April 2014.

Guidance on the interim reporting requirements for charities is available now on the Commission's website, along with a range of support tools to help charities understand and comply with their annual reporting and other obligations.

### Support tools for charities on [www.charitycommissionni.org.uk](http://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk)

- *Charity reporting: Interim arrangements and the annual return guidance*
- *Running your charity guidance*
- *Registering as a charity in Northern Ireland guidance*
- *The public benefit requirement statutory guidance and individual support*
- documents on the 12 charitable purposes
- *The purposes and public benefit toolkit*
- Online registration tutorial (YouTube)
- *How to submit a concern about a charity guidance*
- Reports on common themes and latest lessons learned from charity concerns

## Our equality commitment

A public body and regulator, the Commission is committed to equality, diversity and accessibility across all aspects of our work and activities. In keeping with that commitment, the Commission has undertaken a range of activities during the 2013-14 year aimed at mainstreaming equality and good relations considerations into all aspects of our work. Those activities have included:

- development of an internal system to monitor the implementation of the Commission's *Integrated equality scheme and action plan 2012-17* and responses to both charities and the public
- creation of a dedicated *Equality* page on the Commission's website where quarterly screening decisions are published
- internal staff training on equality and disability duties, empowering staff to understand more about equality of opportunity and good relations.



**The Commission's *Integrated equality scheme and action plan 2012-2017* - available at [www.charitycommissionni.org.uk](http://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk) - demonstrates our commitment to promoting equality and diversity across all our work.**

## The future

The past year has seen the Commission achieve one of its most important changes to date, with the beginning of compulsory charity registration. However, we are aware that much of the work has only just started.

Over the coming year the public *register of charities* will continue to grow, first hitting the benchmark 100 registered charities and on to 250, 500, 1,000 and upwards.

We will also continue investigating suspected or alleged charity misconduct and mismanagement, taking the appropriate action to resolve the situation. We know that, at times, such action may not make us popular but we remain committed, as always, to our values of independence, accountability, proportionality, impartiality, transparency and consistency.

Annual reporting will begin to play a major role within the Commission's activities. As of 1 April 2014 all charities registered with the Commission fall under the interim reporting arrangements and by law must report to the Commission on their first full financial period after this date. The Commission will continue working to inform charities of their responsibilities, as well as working alongside its sponsor department, the Department for Social Development (DSD), to support the development and implementation of full accounting and reporting regulations, which are expected to commence in 2015.

To promote good governance, we will also continue building our library of online support tools and guidance to help trustees run their charities in an open, transparent and accountable manner.

As highlighted at the beginning of this report, 2013-14 has been a year of significant achievements for the Commission with that progress set to continue apace over the next year.



## The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is the regulator of charities in Northern Ireland, a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Social Development.

### Our vision

To deliver in partnership with other key stakeholders in the charitable sector “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.”

### Further information on our activities is available from:

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