

Our Commitment to Equality

A **summary** of our Equality Scheme
and Action Plan 2012 - 2017



Statement of Commitment

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland was established in 2009 as the new independent regulator of charities in Northern Ireland. We are committed to delivering our functions whilst promoting:

- Equality of opportunity
- Good relations between different individuals and groups
- Positive attitudes towards people with a disability
- Participation by disabled people in public life.

We will also consider how best to encourage and support charities to fulfil their own equality obligations and meet best practice.

Equality is key to our policies and practice. It is embedded in our organisation's values of independence, accountability, proportionality, fairness, transparency and consistency. We have an obligation, as a public body, to publish an equality scheme. From our Board and Senior Management Team to individual members of staff we are committed to equality and fostering good relations; not just because of our obligations, but because it is the right thing to do.

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1. Introduction

Our equality duties come from three main sources: the Northern Ireland Act (1998) Section 75, the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) Sections 49A and 49B and the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008. We are obliged to produce an Equality Scheme and Action Plan. This document accompanies our Equality Scheme and Action Plan. It provides information in a more 'user-friendly' format and summarises the key messages.

What does the legislation say?

We are required to promote equality for, and good relations between:

- People of different religious belief; political opinion; race; marital status; gender; age; and sexual orientation
- People with, and without, a disability
- People with, and without, dependents.

Additionally, we must:

- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- Encourage participation of disabled people in public life.

These requirements apply to all of our functions, powers and duties. This means that we will be thinking about equality when we:

- Provide a service
- Make a decision
- Investigate an organisation

- Employ and manage staff
- Purchase goods or services.

Our Equality Scheme and Action Plan

Our Equality Scheme is our plan for ensuring that we meet these requirements. The Scheme is a lengthy and detailed document that sets out all of our legal obligations and an action plan for measures which we anticipate will help to promote equality in all of our work.

The Scheme follows a model scheme published by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

What is the purpose of this summary?

In order to make our commitment to equality more accessible we have produced this summary of our Equality Scheme. It contains the key messages and an overview of our commitments, using more 'user-friendly' terminology. For full details, we recommend that you

refer to our full Equality Scheme
and Action Plan 2011-2016.

2. The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland was established by Royal Assent in March 2009 to deliver the legislative requirements of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008. The Act sets out what obligations charities have, what they must do to be charitable, and what our obligations and responsibilities are.

What do we do?

We are responsible for granting charitable status, maintaining a public register of charities (from autumn 2013), investigating alleged misconduct or wrongdoing within charities, and facilitating and monitoring compliance with the Charities Act. Our regulatory framework is designed to empower charities to do what they do best while adhering to good governance best practice. We aim to promote:

- Public trust and confidence in charities
- Charitable public benefit
- Trustee compliance to their legal obligations
- The effective use of charitable resources
- Accountability of charities to donors/ beneficiaries / public.

What is our structure?

Our structure is as follows:

- **Board:** our Commissioners are responsible for setting the direction and policies of the Commission.
- **Charity Services:** this team will assess applications for charitable status (once registration has started) and applications for consent to changes a charity wants to make. It is also responsible for policy, research and legal advice.
- **Corporate Services and Compliance:** this team investigates complaints made against charities and analyses financial information. It also provides communications, human resources and information management.

Who do we work with?

We work with the general public, with charities, and also a wide

range of public bodies and other regulators.

3. Equality Scheme

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is committed to delivering our functions in a manner which promotes equality of opportunity and good relations, and eliminates inequalities between people with different characteristics e.g. gender, disability or age. Our Equality Scheme sets out these commitments, our arrangements for meeting them, and the process for monitoring our activities and policies to ensure that they are compliant with the Scheme. The various sections of the Equality Scheme are summarised below. For details please refer to our full Equality Scheme and Action Plan 2011-2016.

Background

The Equality Scheme and Action Plan were informed by an 'Audit of Inequalities'. The Audit of Inequalities looked at any inequalities within or affecting the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. Additionally, research from an Omnibus survey carried out by the Charity Commission, and research published by NISRA and NICVA were helpful.

The Scheme is structured using the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's model equality scheme.

Assessing our compliance

This section of the Scheme deals with how we assess our performance against our legal obligations. We have set out a

number of mechanisms through which we can do this:

- Including our commitments in our corporate and business plans;
- Sending an annual progress report to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland;
- Screening each project and programme for inequalities on a regular basis;
- Setting SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realist, time bound) objectives in our Action Plan.

Overall responsibility for meeting our equality obligations rests with our Chief Executive and Board.

Consulting and engaging

Consulting and engaging with our stakeholders is vital to gather information, views and ideas. We will consult on:

- Our Equality Scheme and Action Plan;
- Equality impact assessments;
- Any major policies which would merit from consultation.

Any consultation exercise that we plan will be **timely, open** and **inclusive**. This means that stakeholders and members of the public will have at least 12 weeks in which to make comments.

To ensure accessibility for all, we will use a variety of methods including discussion forums, social media and paper / online questionnaires. In particular, we will target hard-to-reach groups such as older and younger people, people with a disability and people from minority ethnic groups for whom English is not their first language.

Please contact us if you would like to be added to our list of consultees (our contact details can be found at the end of this document). We are committed to responsive consultations where feedback and comments are taken on board.

Assessing and monitoring the impact of policies

The focus of our Equality Scheme is on achieving outcomes and

measuring impact, not simply putting procedures in place.

All policies are screened for their impact on equality of opportunity and good relations. If a major impact is identified, an '**Equality Impact Assessment**' (EQIA) will be necessary. We will go out to consultation on all EQIAs. If there is little or no impact then this can be mitigated.

We will publish quarterly screening reports listing all of the policies screened in that period, with links to each relevant screening form. This information will be published on our website and emailed to consultees who have opted to receive updates.

We will also gather information through:

- Surveys and questionnaires (to charities, other stakeholders, website users etc);
- Monitoring the demographics of concerns / queries raised;
- Charity registration process.

Training

No equality strategy will be effective unless staff are committed to and trained to implement it.

All of our staff, Commissioners and committee members will receive training to ensure that they fully understand their role in implementing our Scheme.

All staff will attend annual in-house equality training to ensure they are kept up to date with S75 and S49A developments.

Public access to information

This section of the Scheme sets out how we will ensure that all of the information and services we provide are fully accessible to everyone in Northern Ireland.

Some groups will not have the same access to information and services as others. In particular:

- People with disabilities may require information in alternative formats;
- Ethnic minority groups may have difficulty with information provided only in English;
- Children and young people may not be able to fully access or understand information;
- Older people may have accessibility or communication issues.

All public documents will be screened for accessibility and we will provide information in alternative formats (e.g. audio format, easy read, other languages) where reasonably practicable.

We want to empower and enable all stakeholders to provide feedback and will take reasonable steps to facilitate this, e.g. accepting feedback in an audio format or arranging a meeting.

Communication and accessibility requirements will be considered when planning external events or inviting members of the public to our offices. We will review our arrangements annually.

Complaints

We aim to provide a quality service and to be responsive to the views of our stakeholders.

If anyone has a complaint regarding the implementation of our Equality Scheme they should contact us in the first instance. We will ensure that the complaint is treated seriously and is handled without bias or discrimination. We aim to respond fully to all complaints within 20 working days.

If the complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction you can raise the issue with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. We will make all efforts to implement promptly and in full any recommendations.

Publication

Our Equality Scheme will be published on our website and available in print / alternative formats, free of charge.

Review

We will review our Equality Scheme every 5 years or sooner if there are changes to the law.

We will provide an annual progress report to the Equality

Commission which will also be available on our website.

4. Action Plan

Our Action Plan sets out how we intend to meet our obligations under S75 of the Northern Ireland Act (to promote equality of opportunity and good relations) and S49A of the Disability Discrimination Act (to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage their participation in public life.)

Audit of Inequalities

Like our Equality Scheme, the Action Plan was informed by the Audit of Inequalities. It provides a set of factors against which progress can be measured. The audit was undertaken across the following strategic aims:

- Increase public trust and confidence in charities;
- Promote awareness and understanding of the public benefit requirement;
- Promote compliance by charity trustees with their legal obligations;
- Promote the effective use of charitable resources;
- Enhance accountability of charities to donors, beneficiaries and the public.

A final section covered equality of opportunity within the workforce.

Action Plan

The Action Plan sets out actions we will take to avoid discrimination, and to actively promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

It is divided into 6 'over-arching goals' under which there are several action points with intended outcomes, indicators of how we will measure our success, and the deadline for achieving this. These goals are to:

- Mainstream equality and diversity in the Commission;
- Address inequalities and promote good relations within the Northern Ireland charity sector, within our remit;
- Ensure all staff and Board members have equal opportunity in all areas of their employment and are treated fairly and with respect;

- Ensure equality of opportunity and promotion of good relations for and between all clients / stakeholders;
- Promote positive attitudes towards people with a disability;

5. Challenges: putting our Equality Scheme into action

We face a number of challenges in putting our Equality Scheme into action. It is important to recognise these challenges now so that we can put measures in place to limit the impact they will have on the successful on-going implementation of our Scheme.

The challenges we face

We face two main challenges in putting our Equality Scheme into action:

- **Resources:** The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is a relatively small organisation. We have 14 full time staff, to undertake all of our functions across Northern Ireland. This can be a challenge in terms of resources.
- **Information:** Currently, we hold limited equality information about charities. With no register previously and no one source of information to go to, we have to base some of our actions on estimates.

How we will overcome these challenges

We will overcome these challenges in a number of ways:

- **Resources:** It is our intention at all times to act proportionately, relevantly and consistently. We make best use of our resources by, for example, issuing general guidance where we cannot advise charities or others on an individual or specific basis. We will try to meet all requests that information be made available or be shared in different formats; however we advise that there may be time delays associated with this. Additionally, we will publish as much as possible on our website, using print and hard copy versions of guidance or forms only when necessary.
- **Information:** Once registration has commenced, we will have considerably more equality information about charities going forward, for example, relating to charitable

purposes and beneficiary groups. This will help us to identify priorities for action,

and assess the impact of our policies and procedures.

6. Your comments

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is committed to being responsive and accessible to all of our stakeholders. It is important to us that we hear from you.

Your comments

It is important that we receive feedback from all of our stakeholders. If you have any ideas or comments relating to our Equality Scheme or any other aspect of our work please contact us.

We look forward to hearing from you and incorporating your views into the work that we do.

The best way to contact us is by email; however all of our contact details are available below.

Our contact details

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