

Participation strategy

Analysis of consultation responses

September 2014

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1. Foreword

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (the Commission) is committed to the principle of ongoing dialogue with stakeholders. Through this dialogue our decision making is enhanced and our policies and procedures improved. The Participation strategy sets out our methods of consultation and participation and the principles underlying our approach.

Having conducted three significant consultations, the Commission wanted to gather feedback on how our approach worked in practice. In order to gather this feedback, we decided to consult on the draft *Participation strategy*. The consultation responses allowed us to gain an insight into which engagement activities were the most effective, and to identify barriers to participation.

This report provides an analysis of the feedback received and sets out the Commission's response, including any changes to the *Participation strategy* which we intend to make.

We would like to thank all those who completed a questionnaire, engaged in a telephone interview, attended a focus group or provided written comments. We recognise that most of the respondents were individuals working in the sector as charity trustees, employees and volunteers. We appreciate their taking the time to engage with us. We also appreciate the help we had from umbrella organisations and helper groups in raising awareness of the consultation.

We hope that this report will demonstrate that we have listened to what was said, responded where we could, and have explained the reasons behind our decisions.

Thank you



Frances McCandless

Chief Executive, Charity Commission for Northern Ireland

2. Introduction

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (the Commission) is committed to the principle of ongoing dialogue with stakeholders forming an essential part of general policy making. The Commission has sought the views of stakeholders in a number of consultations, confirming the importance of stakeholder participation in enabling us to make more informed decisions.

On Tuesday 6 May 2014 the Commission opened an 8 week public consultation into the effectiveness of our draft *Participation strategy*.

The consultation closed on Friday 30 June. We received feedback from 42 individuals and organisations. This report provides an analysis of the feedback received. Additionally, it contains commentary from previous consultations allowing some useful comparisons to be drawn which will inform planned action.

A list of the respondents to the *Participation strategy* consultation is attached at **Appendix 1**.

Background

In June 2012, the Board of the Commission approved a *Participation strategy* which identified effective consultation as the principal way to engage with stakeholders. The Commission gave a commitment to consult on the strategy when the sector, members of the public, and other stakeholders had had experience of engaging with the Commission.

By April 2014, the Commission had completed three significant consultation exercises:

- Equality scheme and action plan (spring 2012)
- Public benefit and registration guidance (spring 2013)
- Interim reporting requirements (autumn 2013).

These gave a wide range of stakeholders the opportunity to engage with the Commission and to experience our participation methods. We were keen to hear the views of those stakeholders on the strategy itself, and also the views of stakeholders who had not previously participated in a consultation or engaged with the Commission.

Consultation objectives

The objectives of the consultation were firstly to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to share their experience of engaging with the Commission and tell us how we can improve our methods of consulting with them, and secondly, to identify ways of contacting relevant individuals and groups with whom we may not have previously engaged.

The consultation sought views on the following:

- the objectives of the *Participation strategy*
- the proposed methods of engagement set out in the strategy
- stakeholders' experiences of engaging with the Commission
- how to engage with groups often described as 'hard to reach'.

Consultation methodology

A consultation document *Participation strategy: How the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland consults and engages with stakeholders* was published and information disseminated to stakeholders using email, twitter and the Commission website. We also asked network and umbrella organisations to bring the consultation to the attention of their members and to help identify groups or individuals with whom to engage. Four focus groups were arranged in Lurgan, Coleraine, Belfast and Bangor.

There were five ways to respond to the consultation:

1. Online survey.
2. Download a copy of the questionnaire and return by email.
3. Attend a focus group.
4. Telephone interview.
5. Face to face interview.

Responses

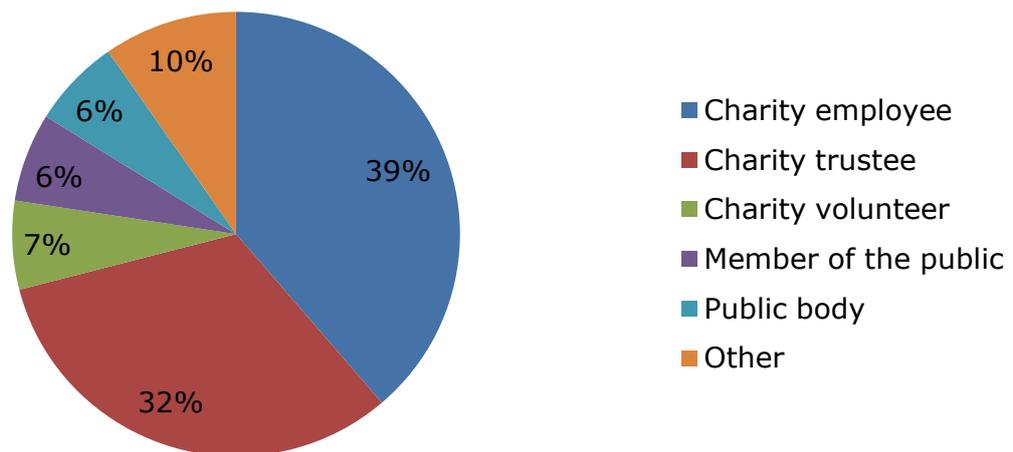
The Commission received a strong response to this consultation, including:

- 32 responses from individuals and organisations, gathered through the online survey, email, face to face and telephone interviews
- one focus group attended by ten individuals.

Of the 32 responses received from individuals and organisations outside of the focus group, 78% came from individuals working within the charity sector as trustees, employees or volunteers. 6% came from members of the public, 6% from public bodies and 10% came from other sectors such as legal or accountancy professionals.

The full breakdown of respondents by role is shown below:

Figure 1 Respondents by role



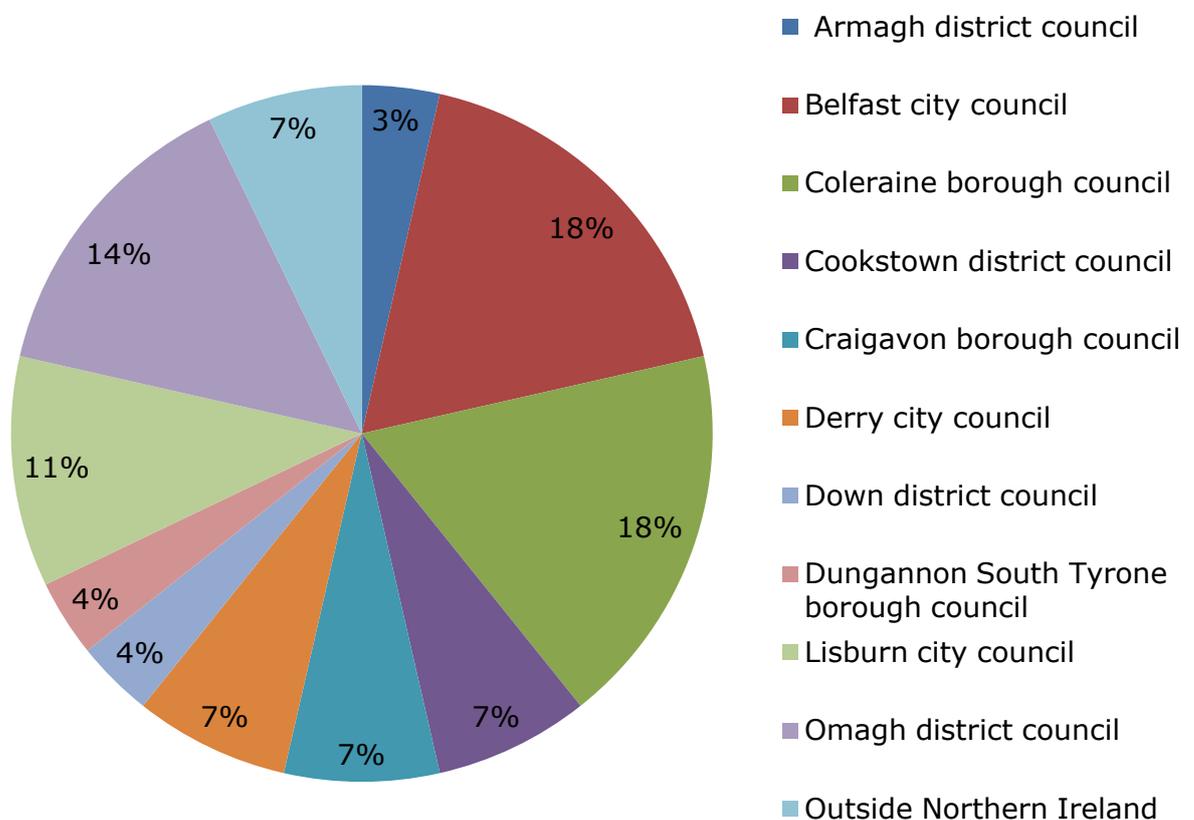
Of the 42 respondents, including those who participated in the focus group, 27 were female and 15 were male. Information on age and disability were gathered from the individual and organisational responses only. All age categories from 18 to 65+ were included with a majority of respondents (65%) identifying their age as being 46 years or over. Four respondents described themselves as a person with a disability.

We do not have enough information at present to understand why almost twice as many women responded to this consultation as men. This ratio is not reflected in engagement with other Commission events, for example registration workshops. These workshops have an almost 50:50 attendance rate of males and female. Nor do we have enough information to state whether the age profile

of respondents reflects the sector in general. However as the Commission continues to collect information during registration, events and consultations, we will be able to create a more detailed picture of the sector.

This consultation was carried out before the process of local government reform in Northern Ireland was completed. Where respondents indicated in which council area they lived or worked, they are referring to one of the 26 councils in Northern Ireland, and not the 11 'super councils' which will come into operation in April 2015. We received feedback from 10 of the 26 council areas in Northern Ireland, with 18% coming from Belfast City Council area and the Coleraine Borough Council area. 14% were received from Lisburn City council and 11% from Omagh District Council area. 3% of respondents lived and worked outside Northern Ireland.

Figure 2 Respondents by council area

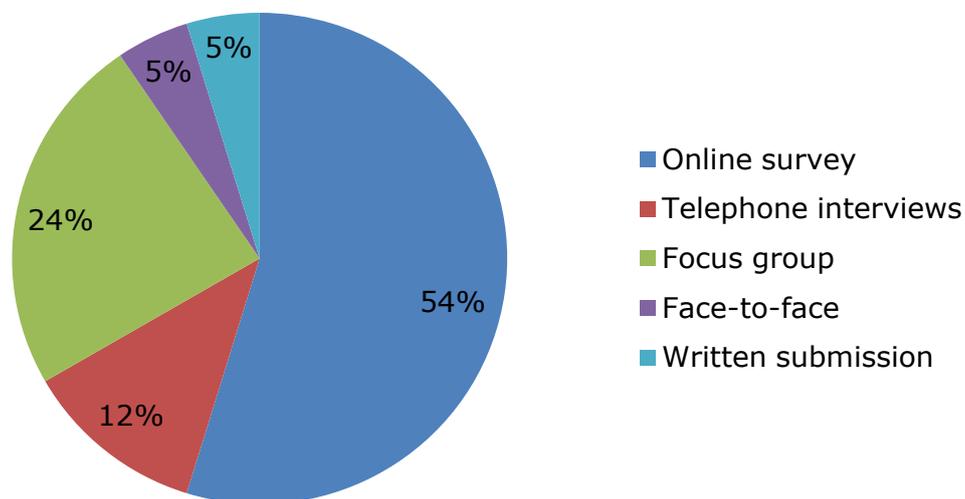


Some respondents provided information not requested as part of the consultation, or raised issues that are relevant to charities, but do not fall within the regulatory remit of the Commission. For example one respondent hoped that the Commission could ensure that services provided by charities would be improved professionally and maintained, especially for carers. Two thirds of respondents indicated that they had not read the *Participation strategy*, or did

not answer this question. However, these respondents did provide valuable feedback on their experience of engaging with the Commission.

The Commission offered five ways to respond to this consultation. When asked for their 'most preferred' method of responding to consultations, respondents identified two of the methods offered by the Commission; namely the opportunity to attend a focus group or to have a face to face interview/meeting. Despite this, of the four focus group events that had been planned, three were cancelled due to lack of numbers. The one that was well attended was hosted by a network group, confirming the importance of the Commission's relationships with these organisations.

Figure 3 Methods used by respondents



54% of respondents opted to participate using the online survey, 24% attended a focus group and 12% opted for a telephone interview. 5% participated in a face to face interview, and a further 5% made a written submission.

These figures reflect the methods used by respondents in the Public benefit and registration consultation, where 72% of responses were also received via email or an online survey. However, during the interim reporting requirements consultation, 86% of responses were received as feedback from people who attended events while the remaining 14% were submitted via email or online survey, with one response being received by post.

Feedback on this consultation is grouped into 5 sections:

1. Experience of previous consultations
2. Feedback on the consultation objectives of the *Participation strategy*
3. Feedback on methods of engagement set out in the *Participation strategy*
4. Feedback on how to engage with those traditionally described as 'hard to reach'
5. Commentary on participants' experience of Commission consultation events.

The statistics quoted here are drawn from key areas of the questionnaire to which the Commission received responses. While the respondents represent a sample of stakeholders, they have helped the Commission to improve the *Participation strategy*. Statistics from feedback we have received from previous consultations have also been integrated into this report as this feedback has helped the Commission to improve its service and contribute to creating a fuller picture of engagement.

Thank you

The Commission would like to thank everyone who took part in this consultation. We would particularly like to thank those network organisations who encouraged others to respond to the consultation. We have considered all comments and submissions and our responses to them are noted within this report. Through this consultation, the capacity of the *Participation strategy* to facilitate open and ongoing dialogue with stakeholders has been improved.

3. Experience of previous consultations

3.1 What we asked

As consultation has become a key feature in the public life of Northern Ireland, these stakeholders received numerous invitations to participate in a wide range of consultations across the year. Most respondents indicated that they responded to at least two consultations a year and some responded to an average of 10 consultations in a year.

The Commission's questionnaire explored respondents' experience of previous Commission consultations and consultations in general.

We asked:

- In your experience what three words would describe a good consultation?
- In your experience what three words would describe a poor consultation?
- What factors influence you to engage in a consultation?
- Which of the following Charity Commission for Northern Ireland consultations have you participated in?

3.2 What you told us

When describing either a good or poor consultation, respondents had difficulty confining their response to three words, often finding phrases more useful. For example:

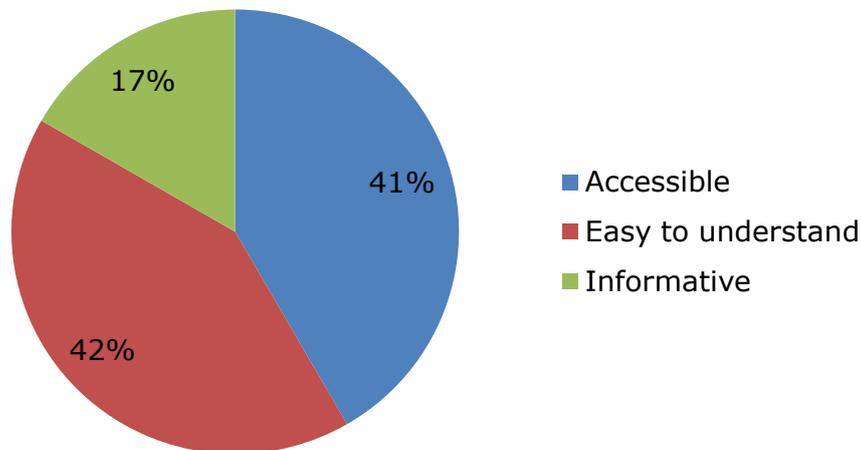
- asking clear questions to stimulate people's ideas (good)
- offering widespread, well publicised opportunities for input (good)
- unclear about the purpose (poor)
- pre-determined, narrow focus, short timescales (poor)

Question: In your experience what three words would describe a good consultation?

Collating the terms that have a similar meaning we find that a number of themes emerge, revealing a general consensus on a good consultation being one that is:

- accessible
- easy to understand
- informative.

Figure 4 Key features of a good consultation



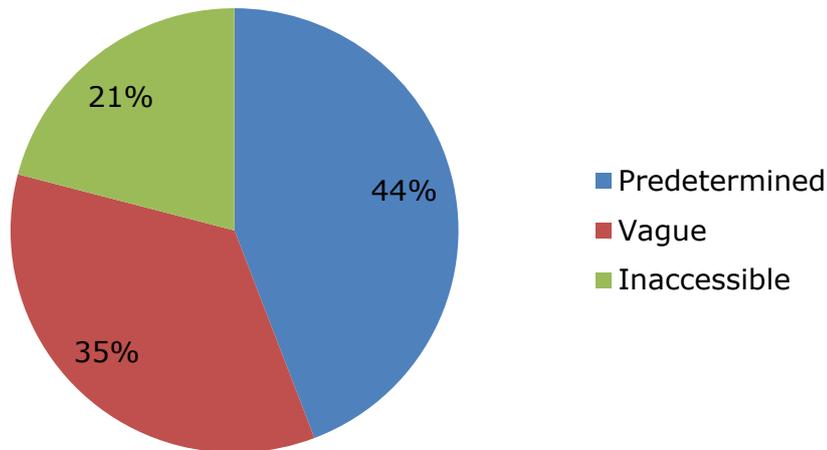
42% of respondents, using a variety of terms, identified a good consultation as being one where the issues being consulted on, and the questions asked, were easy to understand. A consultation was deemed easy to understand if it was clear, concise and did not use jargon. 41% of respondents viewed a good consultation as one that was accessible. This referred not just to timings and venues, but to widespread publication of the consultation and offering a range of ways in which to respond. Being provided with enough information to allow genuine engagement with the consultation was identified by 17% of respondents as a key characteristic of a good consultation.

Question: In your experience what 3 words would describe a poor consultation?

Drawing on their experience of participating in a range of consultations, respondents chose a range of words and phrases to describe a poor consultation. Again, when collated, a general consensus emerged describing a poor consultation as:

- predetermined
- vague
- inaccessible.

Figure 5 Key features of a poor consultation



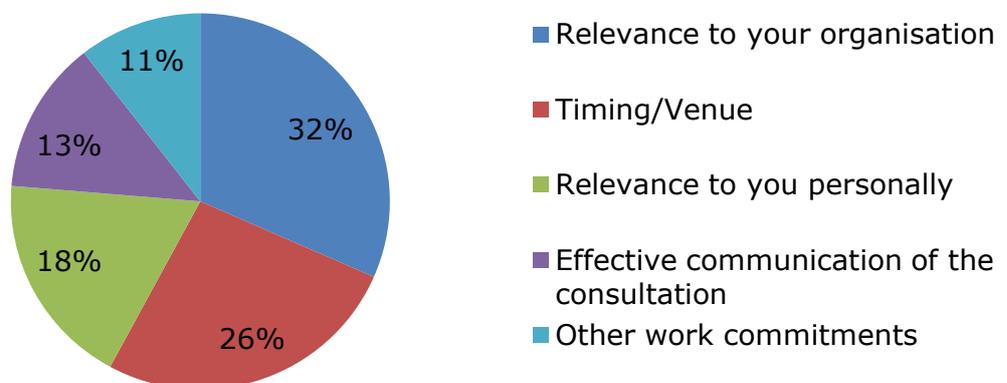
44% of respondents, using a variety of terms, identified outcomes being already decided as a key feature of a poor consultation. Likewise a consultation that was unclear, vague or used jargon was deemed by 35% of respondents to be poor. 21% identified the timing of events, language used in documents, or limited means of responding as barriers to consultation.

Consultation events which were held during working hours were highlighted as excluding those charity volunteers who were in paid employment elsewhere. Timing was only one of the factors which influenced whether or not someone took part in a consultation.

Question: What factors influence you to engage in a consultation?

The relevance of the consultation to their organisation was identified by 32% of respondents as the main factor that would motivate them to engage in a consultation. This was closely followed by the timing/venue of consultation events (26%), and the personal relevance of the consultation (18%).

Figure 6 Factors which influence participation in a consultation

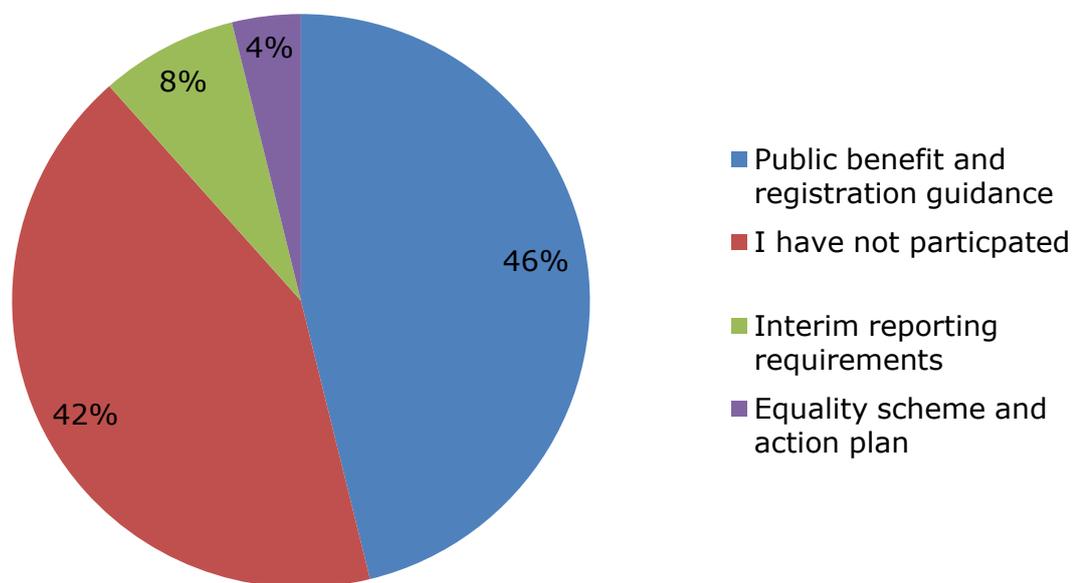


The various levels of importance given to these factors may help to explain the different levels of participation in previous Commission consultations.

Question: Which of the following Charity Commission for Northern Ireland consultations have you participated in?

23 respondents answered this question and were almost evenly split between those who had engaged with the public benefit and registration guidance consultation (46%) and those who had not participated in any of the previous consultations (42%). A smaller proportion of respondents had participated in the interim reporting requirements consultation (8%) and the equality scheme and action plan consultation (4%).

Figure 7 Participation in previous Commission consultations



Respondents identified the relevance of a consultation to an organisation as a key factor which influenced whether or not they participated in a consultation. If other potential participants share this view, this may help to explain the different levels of participation in previous consultations. It may be that the public benefit and registration consultation was perceived as having more immediate relevance to stakeholders.

Likewise the timing/venues, which were also identified as a key factor influencing participation, may not have suited those who wished to participate in some of the other Commission consultations.

3.3 What we will do

The key learning that the Commission has taken from this feedback is the need to clearly state the relevance to stakeholders of any future consultation. The Commission will also continue to analyse the information it gathers from stakeholders about the location, timing and venues of any Commission events.

This feedback has also reinforced our efforts to present complex information in an easy to understand format and confirmed the Commission's practice of providing a glossary with its materials. In this way, the unavoidable use of some legal terms, which may appear as jargon, can be explained in plain English.

4. Feedback on the consultation objectives of the Participation strategy

4.1 What we asked

This section of the questionnaire explored respondents' thoughts about the Participation strategy consultation objectives.

We asked:

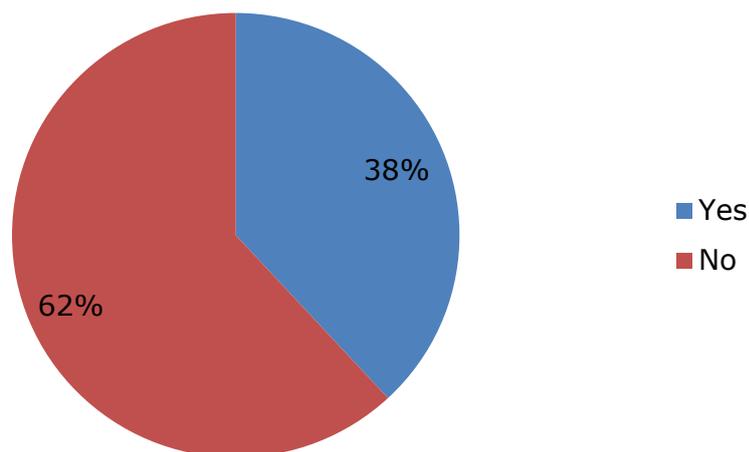
- Have you read the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's *Participation strategy*?
- Do you have any comments on the objectives of the *Participation strategy*?

4.2 What you told us

Question: Have you read the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's *Participation strategy*?

Over a third of respondents (38%) indicated that they had read the *Participation strategy*. Even though the majority of respondents (62%) had not read the *Participation strategy*, they did provide valuable feedback on their experience of engaging with the Commission in other settings.

Figure 8 Have you read the Commission's Participation strategy?



Question: Do you have any comments on the objectives of the *Participation strategy*?

Each of the respondents who indicated that they had read the *Participation strategy* also commented on the consultation objectives. The responses revealed a consensus that the Commission's objectives are realistic, specifically in terms of the allocation of funding and time.

One respondent suggested that, in seeking a meaningful dialogue with stakeholders, the Commission should not rely solely on consultations but should facilitate regular information sessions through relevant network organisations or 'helper' groups. They felt that this would then increase the range of interested parties involved in the development of policy. This approach may also prove to be more accessible for a wider range of groups.

Another respondent asked the Commission to make a more definite statement on consulting with stakeholders by changing the phrase, at section 2.5, 'we will consider consulting' to 'we will consult.'

This respondent also suggested that the *Participation strategy* should refer more explicitly to chapter 4 of the Commission's approved Equality Scheme and Action Plan. This chapter deals with how the Commission will assess, monitor and publish the impact of our policies. This chapter also outlines the use of Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) and the Commission's commitment to consult on any EQIA, unless there are exceptional reasons not to do so.

4.3 What we will do

The Commission has decided that retaining the wording 'we will consider consulting' is a more transparent statement of our position, in that it recognises that there may be times when the Commission would like to consult, but does not have the necessary resources to do so. We would rather be transparent about this position than to commit to consulting in all circumstances and then find that we cannot. The Commission will develop criteria against which any decision not to consult will be measured.

We will reword the *Participation strategy* to make the links between our commitments in chapter 4 of the Equality Scheme and Action Plan and our approach to participation more explicit.

The Commission will continue to develop relationships with network and umbrella bodies and facilitate information sessions as part of this process.

5. Feedback on methods of engagement set out in the Participation strategy

5.1 What we asked

This section of the questionnaire explored respondents' experience of consultation methods. We asked about how they became aware of Commission consultations, which methods they had used to respond, and what their preference was for different methods of consultation.

Referring to the previous consultations we asked:

- How did you hear about each consultation?
- How did you engage with:
 - the Equality Scheme /Action plan consultation?
 - the Public benefit and registration guidance consultation?
 - the Interim reporting requirements consultation?
- What would be your preferred method of consultation?
- What would be your least preferred method of consultation?
- Do you have any comments on the consultation methods set out in the participation strategy?

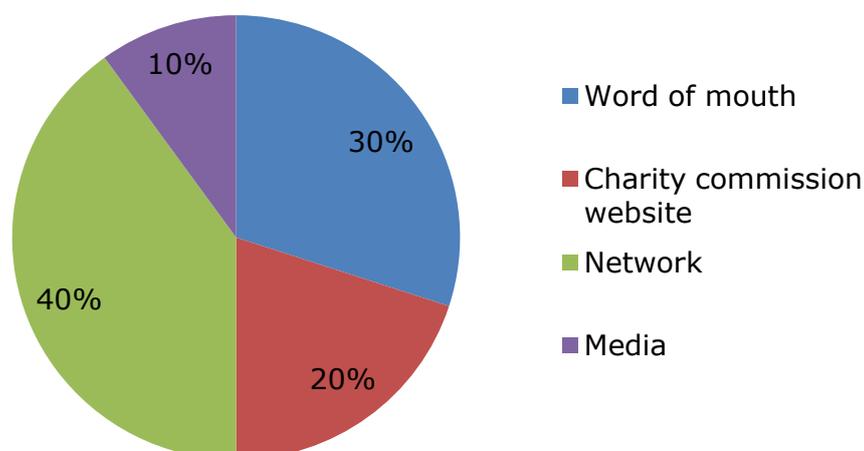
5.2 What you told us

Question: How did you hear about each consultation?

Analysis of feedback from previous Commission consultations revealed almost half of respondents had heard of the consultation through a direct invite email, with around a fifth hearing by word of mouth.

46% of respondents to the *Participation strategy* consultation had participated in previous Commission consultations. 40% of those respondents reported that they had heard of those consultations through a network organisation, a third (30%) through word of mouth contact and one fifth (20%) through the Commission website.

Figure 9 How respondents heard of previous Commission consultations



At the outset of the *Participation strategy* consultation an invitation email was sent to previous consultees and a range of stakeholders who had had other forms of contact with the Commission. Network groups were also contacted and asked to encourage participation in this consultation.

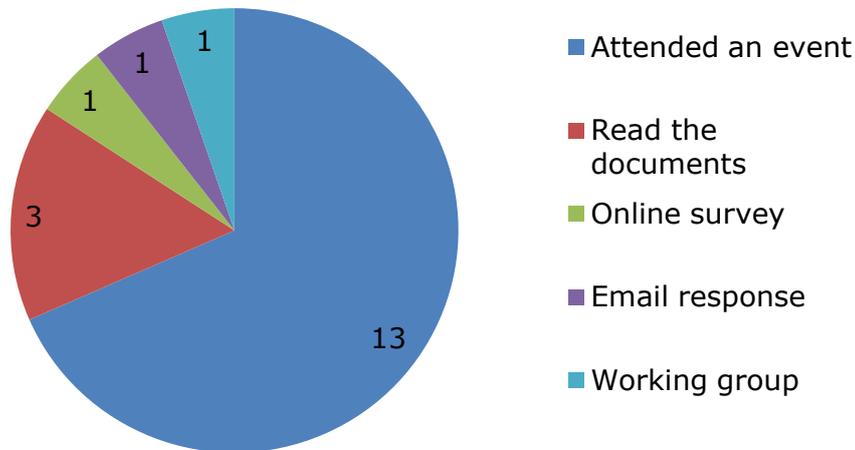
42% of respondents had not participated in any previous Commission consultation, and had not been contacted through the Commission's consultation database. The power of networking organisations to facilitate engagement with the Commission is a theme which emerges throughout this consultation report.

Question: How did you engage with the:

- **Equality Scheme and Action plan consultation?**
- **Public benefit and registration guidance consultation?**
- **Interim reporting requirements consultation?**

Most respondents did not answer this question as they had not participated in any of the consultations. Of the 19 who had, 13 had participated by attending a consultation event. Three had read the consultation document and one respondent each had engaged via an online survey, an email response or through a working group. When looking at these figures it is important to remember that one individual may have engaged with a consultation in several ways, for example by reading the consultation document and attending an event, or by reading the document and completing an online survey.

Figure 10 How respondents engaged with previous Commission consultations

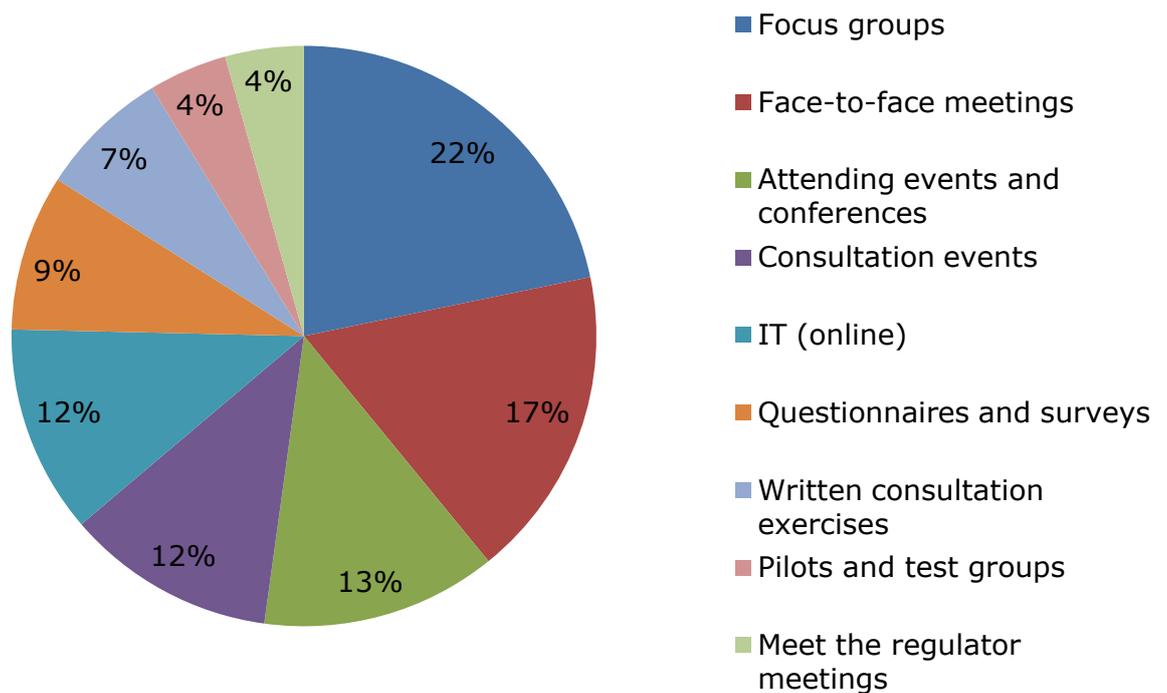


This preference for engaging with consultations by attending events was reflected in the responses to other questions relating to 'most preferred' and 'least preferred' methods of consultation.

Question: What would be your preferred method of consultation?

The respondents to this consultation showed a strong preference (68%) for consultation methods which entailed some form of meeting or face to face engagement; over twice as many as those that did not involve meeting (32%).

Figure 11 Preferred methods of consultation



Participants offered a range of reasons for preferring consultation methods which entailed meeting those who had launched the consultation. Some of these preferences arose from a time management approach; attending a meeting or focus group allowed the participant to receive and clarify information and also make their contribution. The time consuming activity of recording and inputting responses could then be done by those running the consultation.

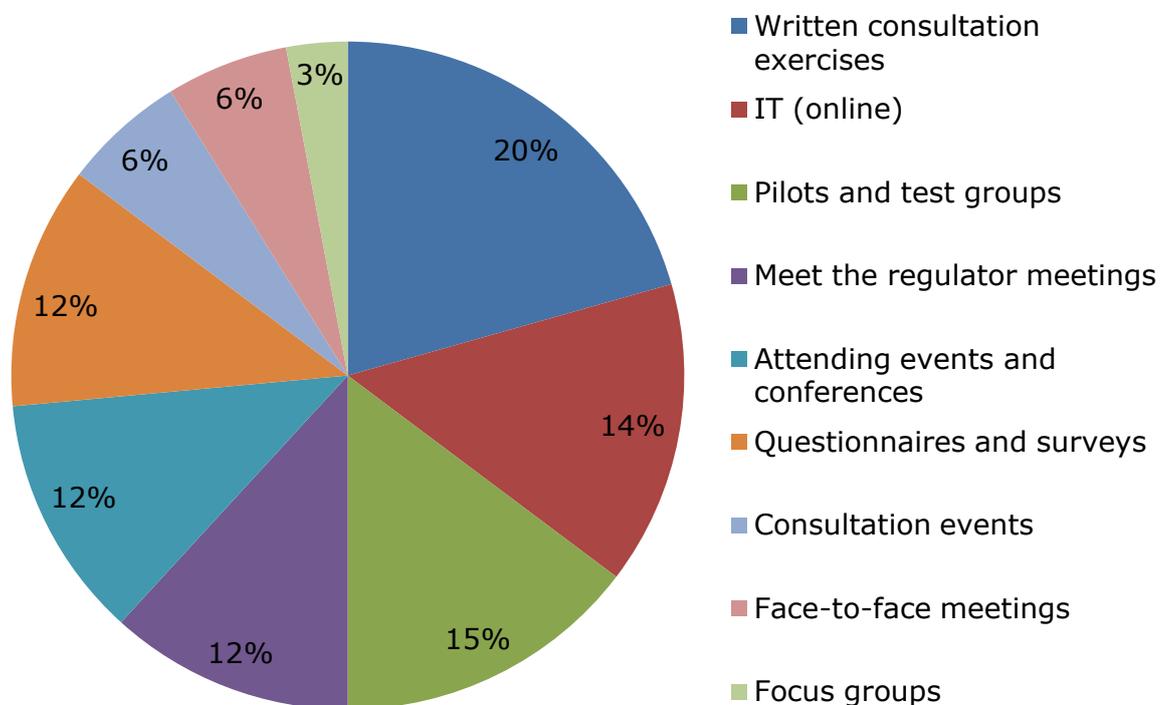
For others, their responses reflected their preference for participating within a forum which allowed them to meet and discuss with others, especially in smaller groups. In a face to face forum these participants had the opportunity to hear the views of others and to elaborate their own.

These preferences were reflected when asked for least preferred methods of consultation.

Question: Which of the following would be your least preferred method of consultation?

Unsurprisingly the feedback here is almost a mirror image of that above, with 61% of respondents indicating that methods that do not involve face-to-face contact were the ones which they preferred least.

Figure 12 Least preferred methods of consultation



Participants offered a range of reasons for finding non face-to-face methods 'least preferred'. As expected, many of these were the opposite of those outlined above. Participants found these methods least preferred because they prefer to discuss within a group and then return to the issue and change or qualify their response. Others felt that online surveys are anonymous and feel impersonal and are used to gain numbers without valuing the comments received.

Question: Do you have any comments on the consultation methods set out in the participation strategy?

Responses to this question agreed that the *Participation strategy* set out a good variety of consultation methods. Feedback from the focus group indicated that they felt the *Participation strategy* set out a good variety of ways to respond to Commission consultations and had a positive focus on stakeholders. However, they were aware of consultation fatigue and identified the need for more creative and relevant ways to conduct consultations. They felt that a more interactive approach would enable people to feel engaged and also, in some circumstances, to get real time feedback on others opinions. They suggested this could be done through a 'buzzer event.' In this kind of event participants would have access to a buzzer and could vote on issues that lent themselves to quantitative analysis. The discussion would then be enhanced by participants being able to see the responses of the other people attending the event. This method is regularly used in webinars to ask key questions and invite the participants to vote.

5.3 What we will do

The Commission has learned a lot from this consultation about preferred methods of consultation and the reasons underlying these preferences. Using this information, we will endeavour to provide stakeholders in future consultations with a means of responding that suits them. These methods will include a mixture of face-to-face engagements and online options.

Building on the experience of this consultation, the Commission will continue to engage with umbrella organisations or helper groups. We will also continue to organise focus groups outside these settings for other stakeholders and members of the public. In this way we will be able to select times and venues that are suitable for the largest number of stakeholders with whom we are trying to engage.

We will also look at developing more interactive ways of consulting to enhance the experience and participation of respondents.

6. Feedback on how to engage with those traditionally described as 'hard to reach'

6.1 What we asked

As part of the *Participation strategy* consultation the Commission sought to identify ways of contacting individuals and groups with whom we may not have previously engaged. We also wanted to reach those individuals and groups who are often described as 'hard to reach.'

We asked:

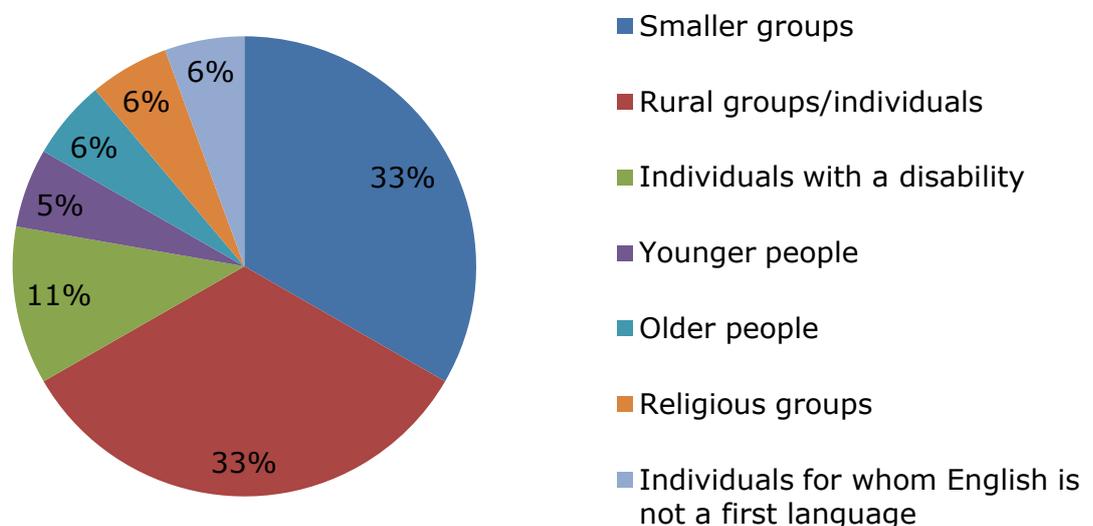
- Do you think there are any particular groups who are more difficult to engage with? If yes, who are they?
- Is there anything we can do to reach these groups?
- Do you have any recommendations for the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland regarding engagement and consultation?

6.2 What you told us

Question: Do you think there are any particular groups who are more difficult to engage, if yes, who are they?

64% of those who responded to this question agreed that there were groups who were 'hard to reach' while 36% disagreed or did not respond. 33% of respondents identified smaller organisations, and those in rural areas, as being 'hard to reach.' 11% thought that people with disabilities would also be hard to reach. Other groups identified by respondents included those for whom English is not a first language (6%), older people (6%) some religious groups (6%) and young people (6%).

Figure 13 Groups which may be 'hard to reach'

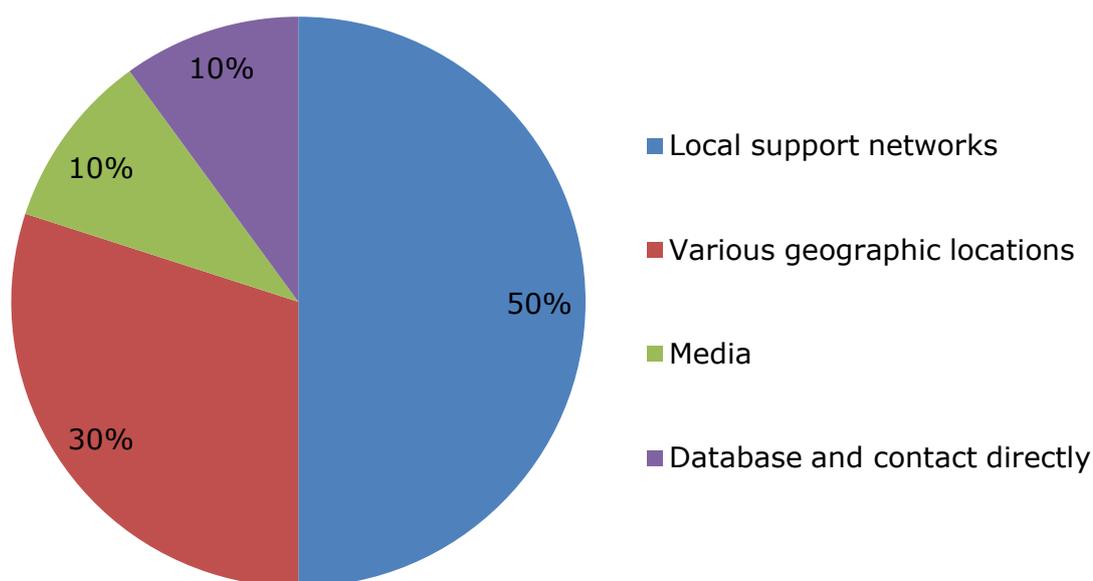


Question: Is there anything we can do to reach these groups?

Respondents offered suggestions as to how the Commission might engage with these groups and individuals. Over half (56%) recommended reaching these groups through local support networks. One umbrella group suggested the Commission create an engagement plan with umbrella bodies to facilitate the sharing of relevant news and updates from the Commission on a regular and targeted basis.

33% suggested having events in different geographic locations, to facilitate engagement by those in rural areas, and 10% suggested that we use local media. Another 10% suggested having a database of as wide a range of stakeholders as possible and contacting them directly.

Figure 14 How to engage 'hard to reach' groups



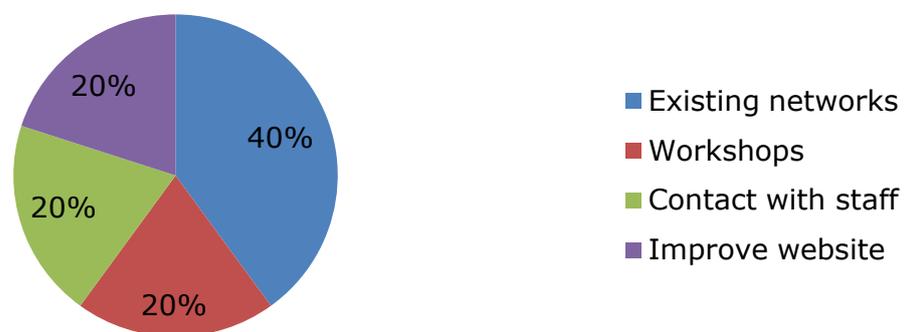
One respondent suggested that approaches that were not computer based may also reach some of these groups.

These results support what we have seen in earlier replies, that liaising with network groups is a good way to reach some of these individuals and groups, particularly smaller organisations and those working in rural locations. Umbrella groups also provide a way of reaching those who may be seldom heard from in consultations including organisations representing older or younger people, those with disabilities and those who use English as a second language.

Question: Do you have any recommendations for the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland regarding engagement and consultation?

40% of those who responded to this question recommended the Commission build on its links with existing networks and 20% suggested the Commission improve its website. The remaining respondents referred to other ways of engaging with the Commission including through workshops (20%) and general contact with staff (20%).

Figure 15 Recommendations for the Commission on consultation and engagement



In answering this question some respondents referred to the registration process, both its frustrations and the help they have received from Commission staff. Several respondents suggested the Commission should have fewer consultations. Others asked the Commission to listen, learn and act, while others expressed admiration for the energy of the Commission in producing materials for consultation and encouraged the Commission to keep them coming.

6.3 What we will do

This feedback confirms the Commission’s liaison with umbrella groups as an effective way of reaching a wider range of stakeholders. We will develop closer relationships with a wide range of umbrella groups and develop approaches that are best suited to a variety of audiences. For example, when consulting with younger people we will elicit their views in less formal settings.

The Commission website is currently being redeveloped. When it is re-launched we will continue to monitor the experience of users and plan further improvements if required. The Commission will also continue to use other forms of media including newspapers, radio and twitter.

The Commission will continue to provide workshops and other events in venues selected across a wide geographic area.

7. Commentary on participants' experience of Commission consultation events

Logistics such as venue and timing are key factors in a person's decision whether or not to take part in a consultation. The Commission gathers feedback on these and other features after each of its events.

This section considers this general feedback which the Commission has received over the consultations which we have conducted. These figures are average scores from across the consultations.

Participants were encouraged to assess the:

- accessibility of the event
- content and delivery of the sessions
- length and timing of events
- venue and facilities.

91% of attendees have rated the accessibility of events as 'excellent' or 'good', with venues and facilities scoring an average of 90%, and the length and timing of events scoring an average of 84%.

	Rated 'excellent' or 'good' (%)
Accessibility of events	91%
Content and delivery of the sessions	89%
Length and timing of events	84%
Venue and facilities	90%

The Commission is pleased that, across its consultations, feedback from attendees has been very positive. However, we will continue to try to improve our events, in particular the timing, by liaising with network organisations.

8. Next steps

Feedback received during the *Participation strategy* consultation has been used to amend and update the Participation strategy and refine how the Commission will engage with stakeholders in the future.

The Commission will:

- clearly state the relevance of any future consultation to stakeholders
- continue to develop relationships with network organisations
- only decide not to consult, or to reduce the consultation period, in very exceptional circumstances, when we will record the reasons for the decision which will be available on request/published on our website.
- seek the advice of umbrella groups in terms of venues and timing of events
- continue to develop approaches that are best suited to a variety of audiences, for example, when consulting with younger people we will elicit their views in less formal settings
- change the *Participation strategy* to make the links between our Equality Scheme commitments and our approach to participation more explicit
- plan consultations to include a range of methods for capturing information, for example face-to-face engagements and online questionnaires, more arms length methods
- develop more interactive ways of consulting to enhance the experience and participation of respondents
- monitor the experience of users of the website and plan further improvements
- expand use of other forms of media including newspapers, radio and twitter
- continue to provide workshops and other events in venues selected across a wide geographic area.

Appendix 1: Consultation participants

Below is a list of participating organisations and individuals. Note that a number of respondents chose to remain anonymous therefore their details are not listed below.

Carmel Costello

County Armagh Community Development

Terry Downey

Down Masonic Widows Fund

East Belfast Community Development Association

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Harpurs Hill Family Centre

Mrs Stella McCauley

North Down Community network

Northern Ireland Muslim Family Association

Omagh Support and Self Help group

Deirdre Owens

Termon Community Responders

Transition Towns Omagh

Francesca Quint /Radcliffe Chambers