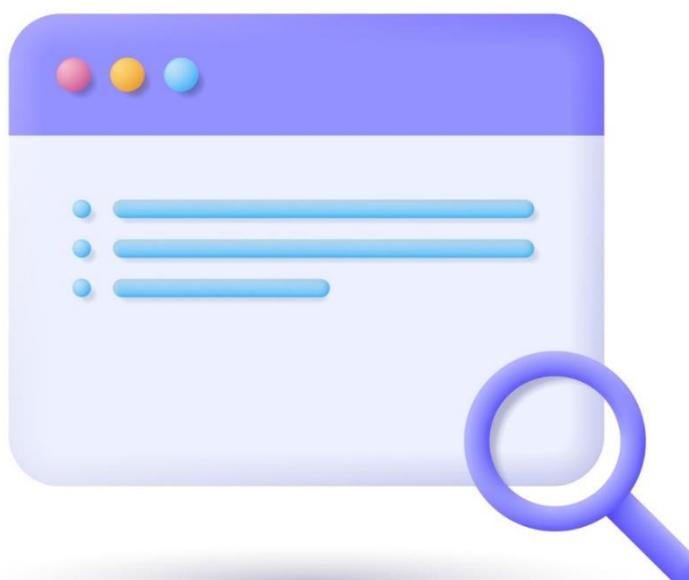| Version	Author	Date approved
2.0	PRO	10 February 2026

Using and updating the register of charities

Guide 4: Searching the register.

If you need any help to access this guide please email admin@charitycommissionni.org.uk and tell us what format you need so we can consider how to help you.

Contents

About this guide

This guide has been produced to help a variety of stakeholders to search the information on the register of charities for a range of uses.

The register is a one stop shop to learn more about:

- an individual charity - its charitable purposes, who are its trustees, number of staff it employs or number of volunteers it has. You can also read the charity's annual accounts and hear about its activities, in the Trustees' annual report.
- the whole charity sector or part of the sector - where a range of charities work, who they help, how they get and spend their money, whether they comply with their legal duty to report annually to the Commission.

For information about reading the accounts that are published online and what terms used in the accounts mean, please see Guide 3: Charity accounts and reports.

What searches can I carry out?

Below is a short description of the three main types of searches you can carry out on the register of charities. These searches are free, and you can carry out as many searches as you like.

Use the general search function – if you are looking for a particular charity and you know its name or registered charity number.

Use the filters – if you are looking for charities that share a characteristic, for example, are in the same income bracket, work in the same region or help the same group of people. You can also use this function to see how many charities in the register have filed their annual accounts and reports on time, were late or have failed to do so.

Download from the register - you can download information about all the charities on the register to understand the profile of the registered charity sector in Northern Ireland. Or you can download part of the register to get a picture of part of the charity sector.

The amount of information available for each charity depends on whether it is recently registered, must submit an annual monitoring return to the Commission and what size it is. Some information can be downloaded from the register in a CSV format.

This is a simple file format used to store data on a spreadsheet or database. A CSV format enables information to be downloaded and searched quickly rather than each entry having to be searched individually. There is more information about downloading information on page 12.

Before searching the register or drawing conclusions from the information you find, there are a few things to bear in mind:

Charities that are not on the register: the register is not the full picture of the sector in Northern Ireland. Charity trustees are responsible for applying for registration, but not all of them have or recognise that their organisation is a charity in law. There are other organisations working here that cannot yet apply for charity registration. This is because they were established elsewhere and are governed by law outside Northern Ireland. These organisations do indicate their willingness to register by submitting an *Expression of Intent* form to the Commission. You can learn more about this type of organisation and see a list of them on the operating in Northern Ireland page of the Commission's website.

Different levels of information: while all charities provide a baseline of information, depending on their size and income some charities provide more detailed information than others.

Reading the financials page of a registered charity: To fully understand a charity's finances, visitors to the register must read the information on the *Financials* page of a charity's entry, alongside its detailed accounts and reports, which are available to view and download from the *Documents* tab. For more information about reading the accounting and reporting information on the register please see Guide 3 Charity accounts and reports.

Disclaimer:

The Commission cannot and does not guarantee the accuracy of information on the register which has been supplied by third parties. The charity trustees of registered charities have a legal duty to ensure their charity's register entry is accurate. Therefore, the Commission is not responsible for any error or omissions arising from this information held on the register.

As information is filed electronically, errors may occur when it is entered on to the register by charity trustees or their agents. The Commission does not edit this information. Where errors are discovered or reported to the Commission they will be brought to the attention of the charity.

If, when using the *register of charities,* you notice any apparent errors on the register please let the Commission know by sending an email to admin@charitycommissionni.org.uk.

Charities with the words 'In Suspense' beside their name.

The Commission decides whether or not an organisation is a charity based on the evidence provided at the application stage. Occasionally, when an organisation is added to the *register of charities,* an appeal against the Commission's decision is lodged with the Charity Tribunal. While the Charity Tribunal is considering the appeal, the words 'In Suspense' are added in brackets to the charity's name on the register. In this circumstance a charity's entry on the register will appear, for example, as The Marble Project (In Suspense).

When the Tribunal takes a decision on the appeal these words will either be removed from the charity's entry or the organisation will be removed from the *register of charities*.

This only applies to appeals which are lodged with the Charity Tribunal. It is not applied when the Commission is asked to conduct an internal review of its decision to enter an organisation on to the *register of charities*.

As this situation only arises in very rare occasions the 'In Suspense' tag is not included in the drop down menu of searches.

Searching the register of charities

This section of the guidance describes in detail the various ways in which searches can be conducted on the *register of charities* and how to download information from the register.

Using the general search function

A charity's entry on the *register of charities* can be found by using the *Search results for* box, near the top of the screen. See screenshot below:
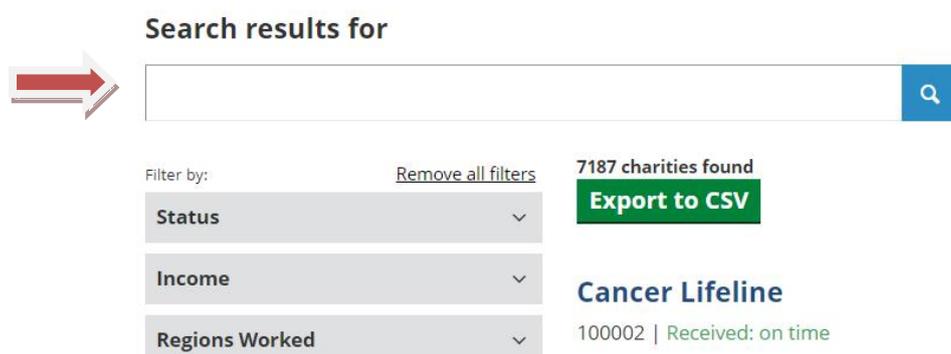
If you know the name of the charity or its Northern Ireland 6-digit Charity number (NIC 123456), you can use this search function to find its entry on the register. When searching with the charity number do not include any letters. Please check you have their correct details, for example, double check the spelling is correct and that you are using their registered name. Some charities are registered under a legal name that is different to the name they use for their day-to-day work. If a charity has a website, you should be able to find their details there too.

If you do not know the full name of the charity, searching key or unusual words from its name will reduce the number of results produced by the search. Try to avoid using words that are common in charity names, for example, association, club or group.

Using the search filters

If you are not looking for information about a particular charity, but for a range of information about charities, using the search filters is recommended. See the screenshot below.

Filter by: Remove all filters

Status	⌄

Income	⌄

Regions Worked	⌄

Countries Worked	⌄

What the charity does	⌄

Who the charity helps	⌄

How the charity operates	⌄

You can search using one or more of these filters at the same time. The overview of what information can be found at each filter will help you decide where to find the information you are looking for.

Status: this indicates whether a charity is registered, has submitted its annual monitoring return on time, whether this was late or is overdue. It also shows if a charity has been removed from the register. There is more detailed information at the *Search using the Status filter* section below.

Income: includes filters for: less than £100k, between £100k and £1m, over £1m.

When using this filter, it is important to note that these figures are drawn from accounts submitted to the Commission, by charity trustees or their agents, as part of an annual monitoring return. The accuracy of these figures is the responsibility of charity trustees.

Regions worked: includes filters for working in Northern Ireland, Ireland, the UK or Internationally.

This filter indicates where, at registration, a charity has reported that it works to achieve its charitable purposes. When a charity selects 'Internationally' this usually indicates that it has staff or volunteers working overseas or it may be a grant-making charity sending funds overseas.

Countries worked: This filter lists over 180 countries. Beside each one is the number of charities on the register reporting that they work in that country. When using this list remember that one charity may have indicated they are working in a number of different countries.

What the charity does: This filter shows which of the 12 descriptions of charitable purposes the charity's purposes fall under, as listed in the Charities Act. A charity will select one or more of these descriptions at registration. These descriptions are listed under this filter in order of frequency with which they appear in charity applications.

Who the charity helps: This filter refers to the beneficiaries of a charity. For example, the general public, children (5–13 year olds), youth (14-25 year olds), and ethnic minorities. Again, these descriptions are listed under this filter in order of frequency with which they appear in charity applications.

How the charity operates: This filter refers to the activities which a charity carries out to achieve its charitable purposes. For example, education and training, community development, relief of poverty, counselling/support. Again, these descriptions are listed under this filter in order of frequency with which they appear in charity applications.

When using these filters, the search results will include a number in brackets, for example, see the screenshot below where we have searched for *What the charity does*, *The advancement of education*.
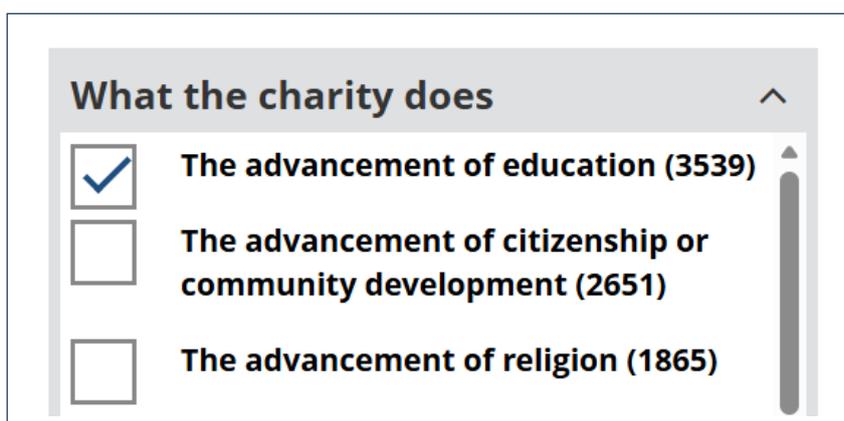

The number 3,539 in brackets is the number of charities which fell into this category when we were writing the guidance. These numbers change as charities are added or removed from the register. These numbers especially change when searching in relation to whether annual

monitoring returns have been submitted on time or after the deadline. Likewise, a charity can select more than one option in most of these filters, therefore numbers shown with the results may add up to more than the number of charities on the register.

Search using the Status filter

By using the drop-down arrow you can search for charities using one of the *Status* functions shown in the screenshot below.
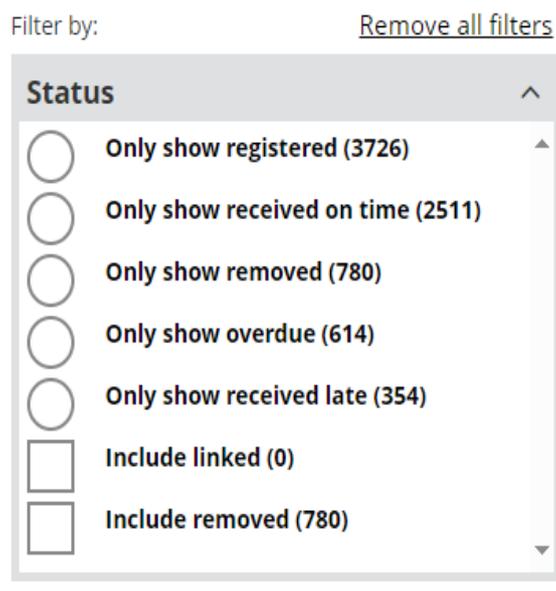
The meaning of each of these *Status* filters is set out in the table below.

Filter	Displays charities that:
Only show registered	have been added to the register.
Only show received on time	have submitted their annual monitoring return on time.
Only show removed	have been removed from the register. This is usually because they have closed or merged with another charity.
Only show overdue	have failed to submit their annual monitoring return.
Only show received late	have submitted their annual monitoring return after the deadline.
Include linked	that are connected. For example, the ruling body of a church and connected social clubs.
Include removed	have been on the register but have been removed.

A note about the *Include removed* filter

A charity may be removed from the *register of charities* when the charity trustees have closed the charity, merged with another charity or where the charity has ceased to operate.

Charities that have been removed from the register are not automatically included in a search unless this box is ticked. For example, if you search for a charity by name and it does not appear in the search results, apply the *Include removed* filter to find more results. Likewise, when using any of the other filters you also need to tick the *Include removed* box to see charities, with these characteristics, that have been on the register but have since been removed.

Registered charities must inform the Commission if they are closing or merging. For more information on closures see the Commission's *Mergers and closures* guidance.

Using multiple filters

You can use several filters to search for more specific information. For example, the screenshot below shows the result of a search of the register for charities:

- whose annual return has been *Received on time*
- have an income of less than £100k and
- work internationally.

We have not used the *Include removed* filter because we want to see what charities are on the register on the day we searched it.

When this guidance was written 103 charities met this combination of factors. By clicking on the *Export to CSV* button the results will be downloaded to your computer as an Excel spreadsheet.

Downloads from the register of charities

Information can be downloaded in a CSV format. This is a simple file format used to store data on a spreadsheet or database. A CSV format enables information to be downloaded and searched quickly rather than each entry having to be searched individually.

For example, researchers may want to find out how many registered charities have purposes concerning the advancement of education. They may want to compare this with the charity sector in other countries. Or funders may want to download a list of registered charities that have not submitted their annual reports or submitted them late, to assist them to carry out due diligence before awarding funds to a charity.

The information contained in downloads from the register, which are available to anyone, are restricted by the Commission to information which does not fall under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UKGDPR) or the Data Protection Act 2018, and other sensitive data.

The full list of categories which can be downloaded is set out in the table below:

Charity registration number	Charity name	Date of registration	Status
Date for financial year ending	Total income	Total spending	Charitable spending
Income generation	Public address	Public website	Public email address
Telephone number	Company number	What the charity does	Who the charity helps
How the charity works	Charitable purposes	Other name	Type of governing document
Financial period start	Financial period end	Total income. Previous financial period.	Employed staff
UK and Ireland volunteers	Income from donations and legacies	Income from charitable activities	Income from other trading activities
Income from investments	Income from other	Total income and endowments	Expenditure on Raising funds
Expenditure on Charitable activities	Expenditure on Governance	Expenditure on Other	Total expenditure
Assets and liabilities - Total fixed assets	Total net assets and liabilities	Left blank on purpose.	Left blank on purpose.

Sometimes when you download results you will find that the *Total income, Total spending, Charitable spending and Income generation* columns all have a '0' in them. It is likely that these charities have no legal requirement to provide this information as only charities with an income of £250k fill in this part of the form.

Freedom of information and data protection

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is responsible for registering, regulating and reporting on the charity sector in Northern Ireland. As part of its work the Commission is lawfully required to collect and process personal data. Your personal details will be treated as private and confidential, and will only be retained for as long as is necessary in line with our retention policy and in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018. You may want to read the Commission's Privacy notice which explains what we do with personal data and your rights in relation to that processing.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives members of the public the right to know about and request information that we hold. This includes information received from third parties. If information is requested under the Freedom of Information Act, we will release it unless there are relevant exemptions. We may choose to consult with you first. If you think that information you are providing may be exempt from release if requested, please let us know.

More information

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