

Issue four, spring 2016

Online charity registration application to be updated

With an updated version of the online charity registration application form set to go live in April, all organisations already called forward for registration are being urged to submit their application as soon as possible and no later than 31 March 2016.

The updated online application form is expected to replace the current online form towards the end of April.

However, to minimise the impact of the change on organisations, the Commission is strongly encouraging all applicants who have been called forward, to complete and submit their registration application before 31 March 2016.

Information saved on applications which have not been submitted before the update goes live will be lost and the organisations will be required to begin their application again, using the updated form.

Please keep an eye on the Commission's website www.charitycommissionni.org.uk for information on when the update will go live, as well as to access FAQs relating to the forthcoming update.

If you begin your application but cannot complete it before the update goes live, we would advise you to print or save a copy of the information completed to that point for use in your new application.

The updated form, which will offer a more user friendly and intuitive system, will request the same information and documents as the current application.



However, the overall look of the form and the flow of the questions will change.

If your application deadline falls after the update, you will still be able to apply for registration using the updated online form by issuing yourself with a new password.

The Commission will be updating its suite of registration guidance to reflect the changes which will be made to the form, including publishing new application screenshots as soon as they are available.

However, as the information currently requested will not fundamentally change, the Commission's current registration guidance will remain a vital support for all applicants both before and after the update.

Registration top tip

Use the Commission's *Document and information checklist* to ensure you have all the information you need to hand before you begin.

See the *Registration support* section of www.charitycommissionni.org.uk to access the checklist.

Lessons learned - new thematic reports available

The Commission has published a series of new reports, highlighting how it has dealt with real life concerns about charities in Northern Ireland.

The anonymised studies, produced by the Commission's enquiries team, are aimed at building awareness of how the team works, as well as providing lessons learned for other charities.

Head of Compliance and Enquiries at the Commission, Myles McKeown, said: "As regulator, the Commission has a remit to investigate concerns about charities and, where appropriate, take action to protect charities from mismanagement and abuse.

"Much of that investigatory and remedial work is behind the scenes, highlighting to charities where they have gone wrong and supporting them in putting things right for the future.

"Our suite of thematic reports provides a way for us to share this learning, highlighting common concerns and experiences so other charities can avoid making similar mistakes."

The Commission has recently added a further four reports and case studies to its suite of thematic reports, all of which are available in the *Charity essentials* section of the Commission's website.

The latest additions are as follows.

- [Regulatory case study: Using professional fundraisers.](#)
- [Regulatory case study: Calling an Annual General Meeting.](#)
- [Why is evidence so important?](#)
- [Disqualified trustees.](#)

The two case studies are aimed at providing an insight into a particular area of concern, providing guidance on the legislative background as well as the Commission's regulatory actions.



The thematic reports were created as a result of a number of common queries or concerns and, using anonymous case studies for context, provide detailed information and guidance on the issues.

For example, the *Disqualified trustees* report advises charities on the checks they should undertake on potential trustees and highlights what the Commission will do if a disqualified trustee remains in post.

The evidence focused report explains the important role evidence plays in the Commission's charity investigations, not only in substantiating allegations made but also in supporting the Commission in deciding the steps to be taken.

Mr McKeown added: "I would encourage all charities, their trustees and staff to make good use of the reports and case studies we publish.

"Prevention is always better than cure and reading through our thematic reports may be enough to highlight an issue or answer a query about your charity, helping you to follow good governance practices from the outset."

All thematic reports are available in the *Charity essentials* section of www.charitycommissionni.org.uk

Charity Commission - news in brief

Public consultation on accounting and reporting guidance

With the introduction of new annual reporting regulations set to impact on every registered charity in Northern Ireland, the Commission recently called on the public to share their views on its draft accounting and reporting guidance.

The Commission's public consultation on the draft guidance opened on 18 December 2015 and closed on 11 March 2016.



The Commission also sought views on new, draft Directions for Independent Examiners, which examiners must follow when reviewing charity accounts.

The Commission is now busy collating and analysing the responses it received during the 12-week consultation, and will publish a consultation report and a final version of the guidance later in 2016.

Once finalised, the guidance will be a vital support for all registered charities, supporting them in understanding their duties under new annual reporting regulations, which went live on 1 January 2016.

For more information on the consultation, or to view the draft guidance, please see the *Closed consultations* section of www.charitycommissionni.org.uk

EU Referendum guidance for charities

The Commission is encouraging charities considering engaging in political activity in the run up to the EU referendum to ensure they abide by the law.

A referendum on Britain's membership of the EU is taking place on 23 June 2016, when the public will be asked "Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?"

Some charities may be considering how they can, as part of the referendum, campaign or advocate on behalf of their beneficiaries. For example, a charity may wish to highlight the implications a 'remain' or 'leave' vote would have on charity beneficiaries, or encourage people to participate in the voting process.

To support charities' understanding of how, and when, they can campaign, the Commission has published new *Guidance for charities on campaigning in the run up to the European Referendum*.

Additionally, in the run up to the Northern Ireland Assembly elections in May 2016, charities may be interested in the Commission's *Charities and politics* guidance.



Charity registration

The Commission marked another milestone on Wednesday 23 March 2016, when it registered the 4,000th charity.

The charity which hit number 4,000 was Newry and Rathfriland Girl Guides (NIC104580).

Guidance and updates

Potential new funding source for charity sector

Finance Minister, Mervyn Storey, has announced a scheme designed to release money from dormant bank accounts for use by the charity sector.

The Northern Ireland Community Finance Fund was first proposed in the 2015-16 budget and mirrors similar schemes which operate in other parts of the UK.

While the amount of funding will vary from year to year it is estimated that £0.8m will be available each year.

Under the scheme money from accounts which have had no customer related activity for at least 15 years will be identified by the banks.

If the banks are unable to contact the owner of the accounts they will transfer the funds to a central account.

These funds will then be distributed to the charity sector by the Big Lottery Fund.



Commission seals first Educational Endowment Amending Scheme

On 12 February 2016, the Commission sealed its first Educational Endowment Amending Scheme for the Presbyterian Children's Society.

The sealed scheme is available to view in the *Concerns and decisions - Recent casework decisions* section of the Commission's website.

New guidance for charities

New guidance now available on the Commission's website includes:

- [Changes to fundraising regulation briefing paper](#)
- [Updated model governing documents.](#)



Big Lottery Fund launches online tool

The Big Lottery Fund has launched a free online 'strength checker' tool for charities.

The *VCSE StrengthChecker* website, developed by the Fund in partnership with the Cabinet Office, can be used by charities, community groups and social enterprises to receive free personalised reports on how to improve their performance and sustainability.

The website generates the personalised reports based on five areas, highlighting an organisation's key strengths and areas to help them become more effective.

See vcsestrengthchecker.org.uk for more information.

Contact us ...

Email: admin@charitycommissionni.org.uk

Tel: 028 3832 0220

Fax: 028 3834 5943

Textphone: 028 3834 7639

Twitter: @CharityCommNI

www.charitycommissionni.org.uk