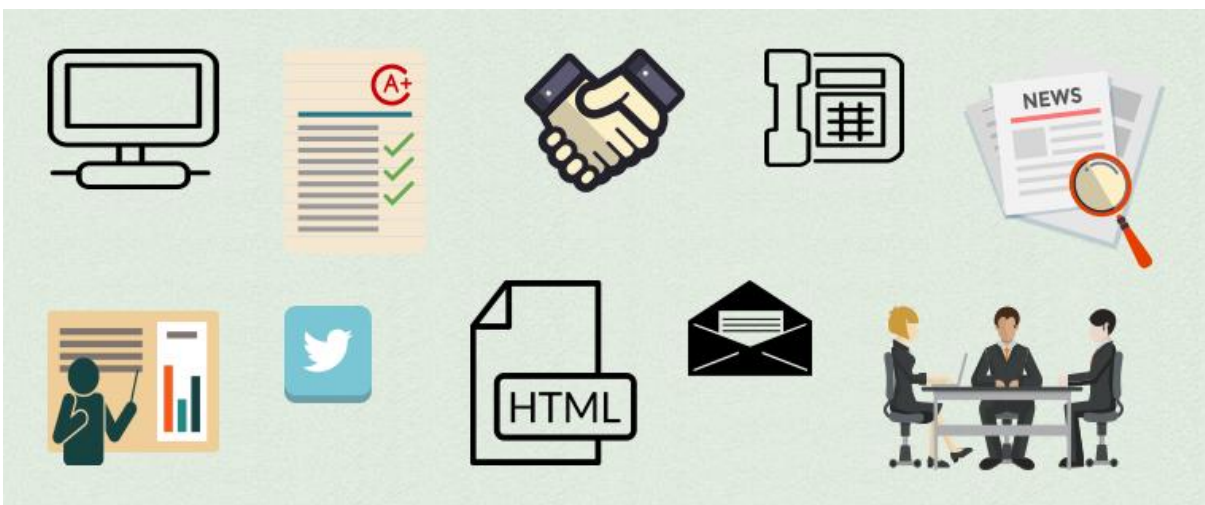


Customer satisfaction survey 2016

What you told us and what we seek to improve



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 role.” Further information about our aims and activities is available on our website

www.charitycommissionni.org.uk

Equality

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is committed to equality and diversity in all that we do.

Accessibility

The Commission’s website has been designed to **W3C standards** of accessibility and includes a number of features to enhance accessibility for a wide range of individuals. These include colour contrast and resize options. Materials may be made available in alternative formats on request. If you have any accessibility requirements please contact us.

Online or in print

If you are viewing this document online, you will be able to navigate your way around by clicking on links either within the contents page or text. We have produced a glossary that provides further information, definitions and descriptions of some key terms. The words in **bold green type** indicate words that are found in the glossary towards the end of this document. If you are reading the document online you can click on the word and it will link you to the definition in the glossary. The words in *pink* italics indicate other guidance or databases, and these are also listed on the *Useful supporting documents* page.

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Foreword

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (the Commission) works with a range of stakeholders including members of the public, charities, community and voluntary groups, charity umbrella organisations, public bodies and other regulators. We aim to provide the highest possible standards and quality of service to all our stakeholders.

The Commission has set out its customer service commitments in our [Customer charter](#). Feedback and comments are welcomed by the Commission at anytime. However, this *Customer satisfaction survey* was the first time we asked the public to share their views on how we are performing against those service standards. The feedback from the survey will enable us to monitor and respond to customer needs and to identify areas which need improvement. The purpose of this report is to reflect on the feedback we received and to respond to some of the issues raised by respondents.

We were very pleased with the high quality of the feedback received. We would like to thank all of those who took the time to respond to the survey. We acknowledge that many respondents were acting on behalf of charities in a voluntary capacity and were using their own time to engage with us. We appreciate this, and hope this report demonstrates that we have heard what was said, and will respond and make changes where we can.

Thank you



Frances McCandless
Chief Executive, Charity Commission for Northern Ireland

Section 1: Introduction

Customer satisfaction surveys are an opportunity for stakeholders to provide genuine, confidential feedback. They also give organisations providing a service to the public, specific information about their stakeholder's perceptions, both positive and negative. This feedback can be used to improve or enhance services.

Background

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (the Commission) aims to provide the highest possible standards and quality of service to all of our stakeholders. All staff across the Commission engage with a range of stakeholders on a daily basis. The Commission's *Customer charter*, available on the website, sets out standards relating to answering the telephone, corresponding with stakeholders in writing, issuing guidance, making decisions and welcoming visitors to the office. It also provides information for customers with accessibility needs.

The Commission gathers feedback on an ongoing basis in a number of ways, including through a post-registration survey, the 'contact us' form on the website, feedback forms at events and the 'complaints about our service' process. Additionally, standards are monitored through regular internal assurance checks. In the *Customer charter* we have also committed to providing stakeholders with a formal opportunity to feedback their experience to the Commission through customer service surveys.

Our first customer satisfaction survey was launched on 10 October 2016 and closed on 14 December 2016. We received feedback from 41 stakeholders. This report provides an analysis of the feedback received and outlines our response to some of the issues raised.

Section 2: Aims and methodology

As our first customer satisfaction survey, this survey was designed to provide a forum for stakeholders to provide genuine, confidential feedback. It also aims to capture key information which will act as a baseline for future research. The survey was also intended to provide an opportunity to identify specific needs of customers with accessibility or equality needs.

To do this we set out to gather feedback from stakeholders on how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with their experience of:

- contacting the Commission
- interacting with staff
- accessing information from the Commission

We also asked what the Commission is doing well in terms of communicating and engaging with customers.

Design and circulation of the survey

A short survey was developed and made available on *SurveyMonkey* through the Commission website. Stakeholders were alerted to the survey in a number of ways, including:

- a news release
- an article in the Commission's newsletter with a link to the survey
- an email to individuals and organisations on the consultation database
- an email strapline with a link to the *SurveyMonkey* form.
- a blog post about the survey
- twitter messages, with links to the *SurveyMonkey* form.

Stakeholders could respond to the survey online, in hard copy or through a telephone interview.

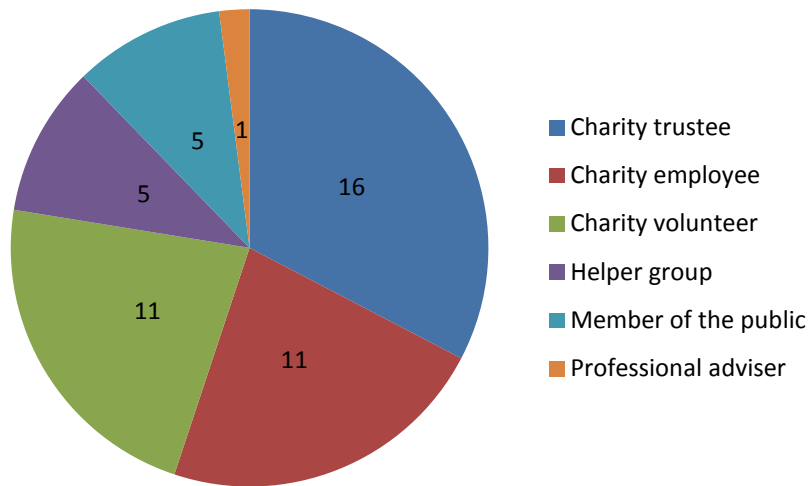
Individual and organisation responses

The Commission received feedback from 41 stakeholders. While the small number of respondents means any results are not statistically significant, a narrative analysis will help the Commission to improve its processes and celebrate what it does well.

Respondents were asked to indicate the role they have in relation to the Commission. As a result some individuals could indicate more than one

role, for example a respondent could be a charity employee and a helper group representative. Those who responded included charity trustees, charity employees and volunteers as well as helper group representatives, members of the public and a professional adviser. The range of roles held by respondents is shown in the diagram below.

Figure 1: Roles of respondents



Section 3: Contacting the Commission

3.1 What we asked

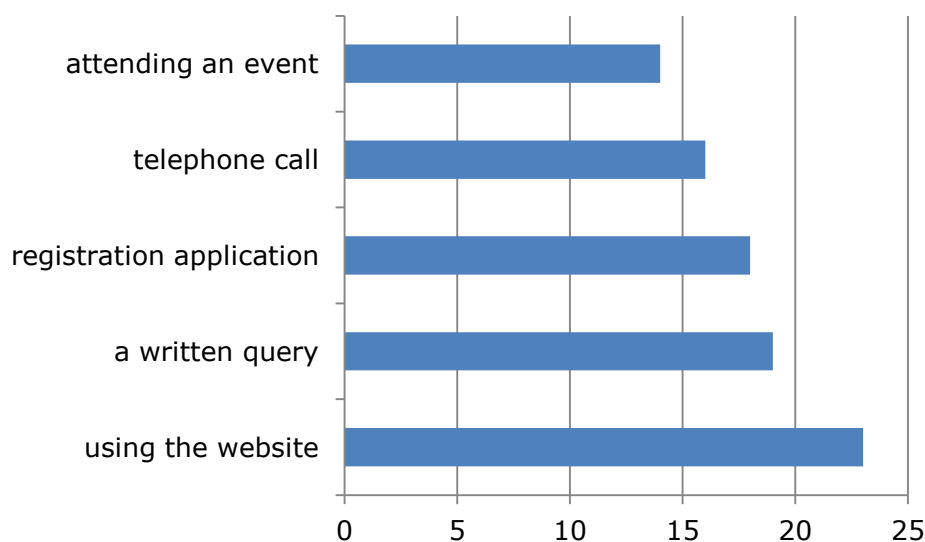
We asked:

- In what ways have you had contact with the Commission? Please tick all that apply.
- Thinking about the contact you had with the Commission, how would you rate its performance in each area? If you have not had experience of a particular contact please select N/A (not applicable).
- Thinking about how the Commission engages with customers, how would you rate the Commission overall?

3.2 What you told us

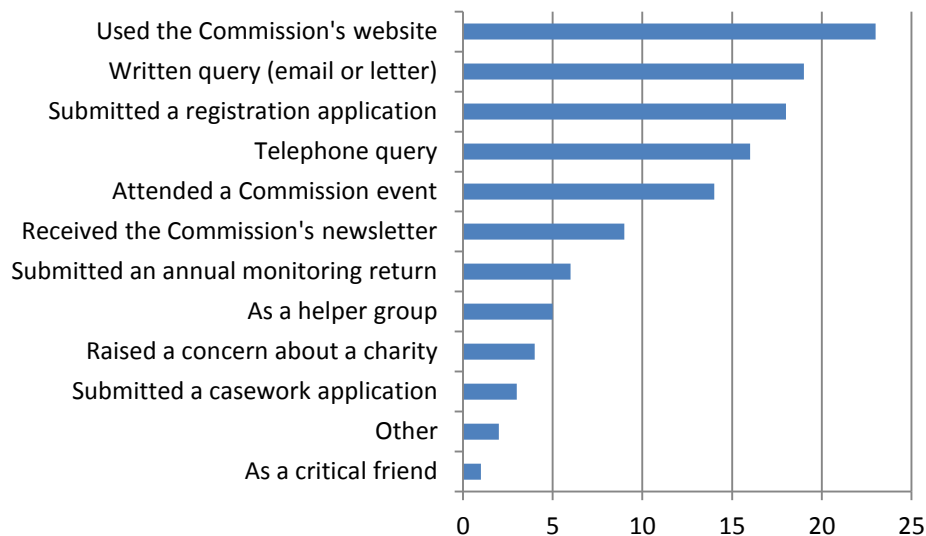
The five most common forms of contact with the Commission were: using the website (23), a written query (19), submitting an application for charity registration (18), telephoning the Commission (16) and attending a Commission event (14).

Figure 2: Most common form of contact with the Commission



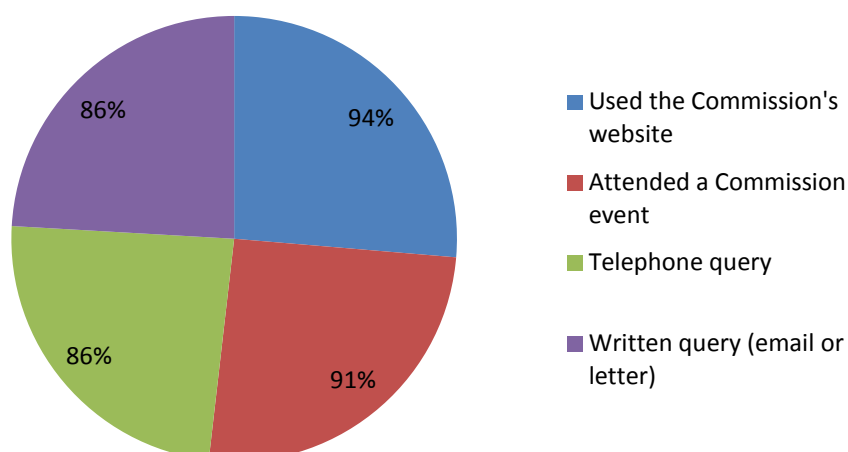
Other ways in which respondents had contact with the Commission included: receiving the Commission’s newsletter (9), submitting an annual monitoring return (6), as a helper group (5) raising a concern about a charity (4) submitting a casework application (3) acting as a critical friend (1) or other means, such as responding to a Commission consultation (2). The range of ways in which respondents had contacted the Commission is shown in the diagram below.

Figure 3: Range of contacts with the Commission



Respondents who rated the performance of the Commission in each of these areas, reported the highest levels of very/fairly good performance when using the website (94 per cent), attending Commission events (91 per cent), telephone queries (86 per cent), and Commission’s response to written, (letter/email) queries (86 per cent).

Figure 4: Areas where the performance of the Commission was rated very /fairly good.



Respondents explained the rating which they gave to the Commission by commenting that concise and prompt answers were given to queries or that they had been dealt with by extremely helpful staff.

Respondents' rating of their experience of submitting an application for charity registration was more mixed, with 69 per cent of respondents rating this experience as very/fairly good and 31 per cent rating their experience as very/fairly poor. The third of respondents who reported a negative experience of making their application illustrated their experience with comments such as:

- Not possible to make an appointment to discuss a charity registration.
- Why is this taking so long?
- The time taken has been unreasonable and only now have I had contact after more than a year.

Some of these comments, about the length of time appear to refer to those who have submitted an 'expression of intent' form to the Commission, but have not yet been called forward to apply for registration. Frustration with this delay was expressed in other parts of the survey and is recorded later in this report.

3.3 What we do and how we seek to improve

The Commission has been calling forward organisations as part of a managed process of registration. It is estimated that there are between 11,000 and 17,500 charities in Northern Ireland. Registration commenced in December 2013 and the Commission acknowledges that it will be a lengthy process to register all charitable organisations. There are currently over 5,500 charities on the register of charities.

The Commission's ability to register at speed depends to a large extent on the resources available to it as well as the quality of applications received, and the complexities of the organisations which are being registered. We understand that for some organisations that have submitted expressions of intent the wait has been lengthy. Our *Registering your charity* guidance explains how we manage the process and an email is also sent to acknowledge receipt of each expression of intent. These emails clarify that 'call forward' will not be immediate. We recognise however that we could improve our communication frequency. In November 2016 the Commission took a first step towards doing this, by circulating an update email to all organisations on the expression of intent list, explaining organisations from this list would not be called forward in 2016-2017, unless there were special circumstances which the Commission would consider.

One respondent expressed frustration with the delay in processing expressions of intent. This respondent suggested that updates from the Commission would be appreciated and could then be shared with the organisation's trustees.

The feedback from the survey suggests that this message was not clear enough and we could deal with these expectations better. The Commission intends to:

- Recommence the call forward of organisations from the expression of intent list from April 2017.
- Communicate every six months with those awaiting call forward.
- Review the text on our website to give clearer information about what happens after an expression of intent form is submitted.

Section 4: Interacting with staff and accessing information from the Commission

4.1 What we asked

What we asked:

Thinking about your overall experience of interacting with the Commission, please rate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the following:

- professionalism of staff
- helpfulness of staff
- politeness of staff
- range of methods by which you can contact the Commission
- availability of information on website
- Commission guidance
- effective and timely answers to queries
- accessing the application process
- fair and equal treatment of customers.

Respondents could indicate their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their experience or indicate that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, or respond that the question was not applicable to them.

To assist analysis of responses to this question these areas were grouped under the headings: staff, access to information, and customers are treated fairly and with equality.

4.2 What you told us about contact with staff

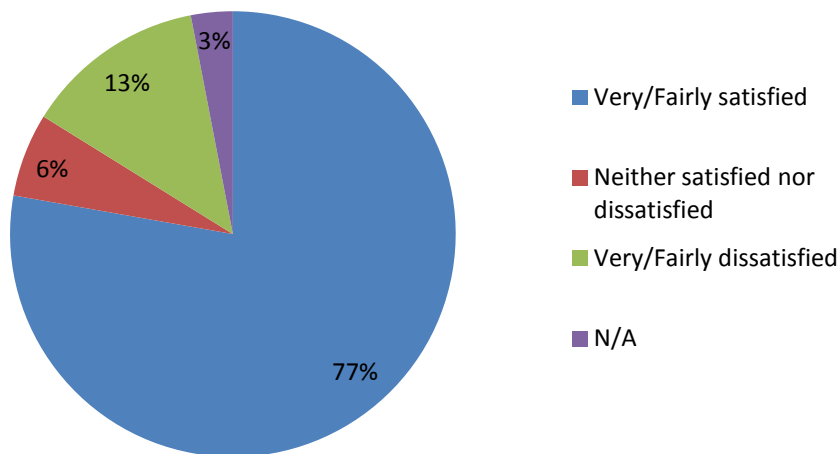
Of those who reported their level of satisfaction with staff, in terms of their professionalism, helpfulness, politeness and effective and timely responses to queries, 67 per cent were very/fairly satisfied, while 13 per cent were very/fairly dissatisfied. 13 per cent reported being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the Commission's service in these areas. It should be noted that these percentages do not add up to 100 per cent because some respondents chose the 'not applicable' option.

4.3 What you told us about access to information

Figure 5 below illustrates the levels of satisfaction with the availability of information on the Commission's website. A high proportion of respondents, 77 per cent, reported being very/fairly satisfied with the availability of information on the Commission website. However, 13 per

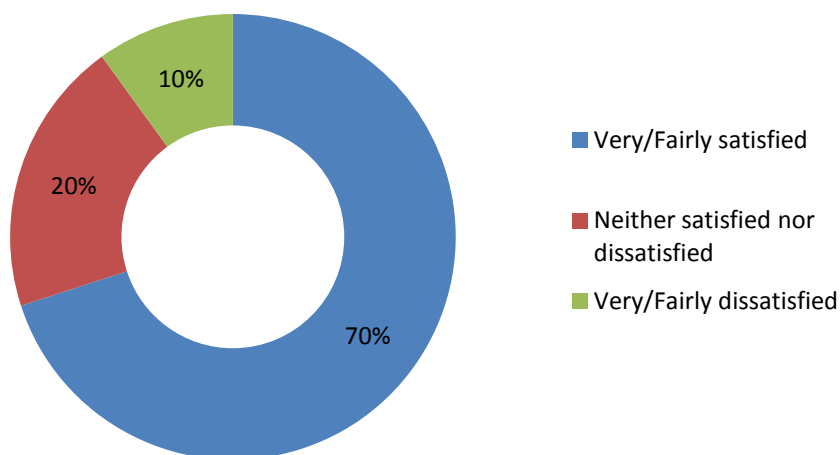
cent (4 respondents) of those who answered this question were very/fairly dissatisfied.

Figure 5: Levels of satisfaction with availability of information on the Commission website.



As shown below, 70 per cent of respondents were very/fairly satisfied with the Commission's guidance.

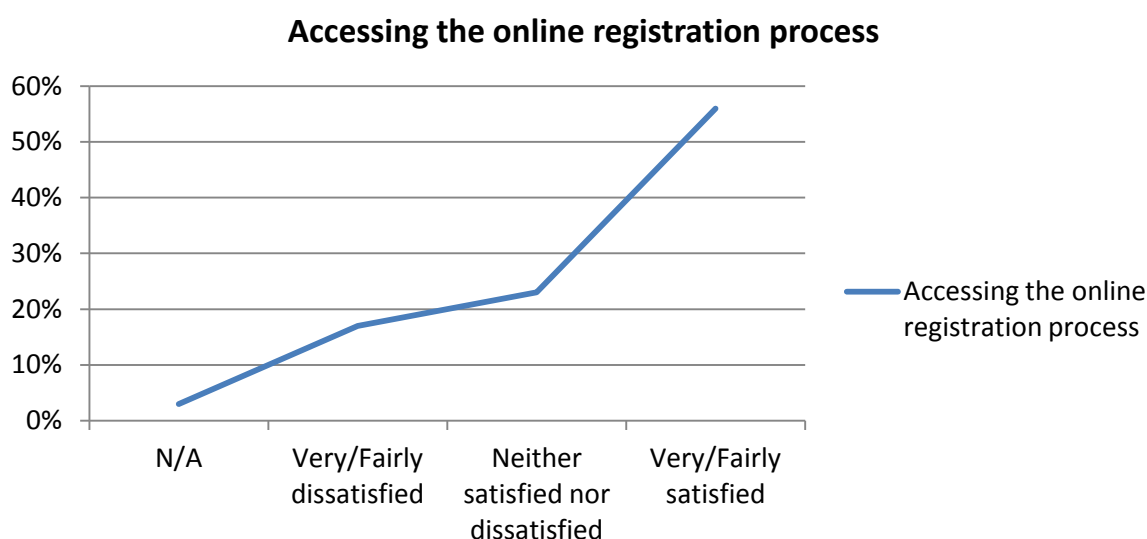
Figure 6: Levels of satisfaction with the Commission's guidance.



However 10 per cent (3 respondents) of those who answered this question were very/fairly dissatisfied with these sources of information. It should be noted that some of these percentages do not add up to 100 per cent because some respondents chose the 'not applicable' option.

Levels of satisfaction with the online registration process were lower, with 56 per cent of respondents finding the process very/fairly satisfactory. Almost a quarter of respondents (23 per cent) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the online registration process, however, 17 per cent were very/fairly dissatisfied with their experience of this process.

Figure 7: Levels of satisfaction with the online registration process.



Methods of contacting the Commission

When reporting levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the range of methods by which they could contact the Commission 74 per cent of respondents reported being very/fairly satisfied, while 13 per cent were very/fairly dissatisfied and 13 per cent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Those who supplied comments with their positive level of satisfaction referred to the helpfulness of staff and the support they received with their application. Unfortunately we did not receive any specific comments from those who reported their level of satisfaction as being very/fairly dissatisfied.

As in other surveys we have received some comments which are not directly related to the survey topic but which are useful for us to receive. For example one respondent noted that the Commission does not appear to have a code of conduct, despite promoting good governance among charities. This comment may have arisen from different expectations of a code of conduct. On our website the Commission has published a [Code of conduct](#) for Board members, which sets out the general conduct expected from Commissioners and their roles and responsibilities. The [Customer charter](#) sets out the standards of service which staff are expected to provide to stakeholders and the standards to which the Commission aspires. The Commission welcomes feedback on its approach to these areas as it strives for continuous improvement.

4.5 What we do and how we seek to improve

While the Commission is pleased that most people recorded satisfaction with its services, it is not complacent about those who expressed dissatisfaction, and will aim to improve the experience of those who are in contact with us and using our services.

The Commission also receives ongoing feedback from those using the online registration application system through a post-registration survey, and from those who attend registration workshops and other events. This feedback helped the Commission to redesign parts of the online application system when it updated its online systems in June 2016. For example, the questions on the updated system flow more logically from one to the other, making the system easier to move through. The public benefit statement has also been clarified by being broken down into a series of questions which the applicant answers.

The Commission used this experience to produce screenshots of each of the questions required for the annual monitoring return form and was disappointed to hear that one respondent had found this guidance unhelpful. We will review the usefulness of the screenshots and guidance as more people use the system and provide feedback.

Section 5: Communication and engagement with customers

5.1 What we asked

What we asked:

- What do you think the Commission is doing well in terms of its communication and engagement with customers?
- What do you think the Commission could do better in terms of its communication and engagement with customers?

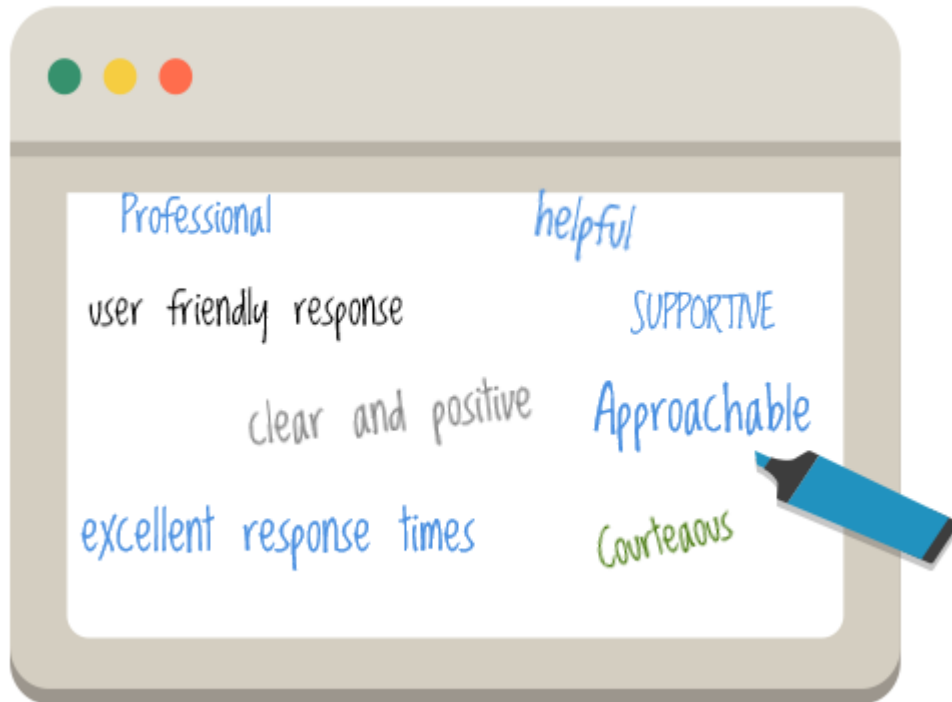
5.2 What you told us

When asked what the Commission did well, respondents told us that the staff with whom they engaged using the telephone, were very helpful and supportive. The website is well laid out and provides a lot of information. That communications are clear and positive with helpful feedback.

These respondents also praised the Commission for providing personal communication and engagement with customers. Answering queries quickly and being user friendly, with excellent response times. Respondents also felt the Commission's local information workshops, training and information events were good.

Some of the respondents to the Commission's first *Customer satisfaction survey* remarked that given its resources, the Commission has done an excellent job of organising the process of registration and keeping it manageable. Others said that the Commission is very good at thinking issues through and reaching decisions that will stick, without needing to be amended as other issues unfold.

Overall respondents found the staff at the Commission to be thoroughly professional and helpful, always courteous and approachable and the guidance given authoritative and precise.



Thinking about what the Commission could do better in terms of its communication and engagement with customers, respondents suggested the Commission rely less on online communication, provide face-to-face appointments and employ more staff to speed up processes. Others suggested that the Commission publicise its aims and remit more widely.

5.3 What we do and how we seek to improve

The responses to these questions indicate that those areas which some customers think we do really well are the same areas where others feel we could do better. This demonstrates how difficult it is to meet the needs of a diverse sector. The Commission works within constraints of the legislation, government policy and its allocated budget. For example, our online services reflect the strategic policy position adopted by both the UK government at Westminster and the Northern Ireland Assembly to move many public services online. *The Government Digital Strategy (2012)* aims to make dealing with public services online as natural as banking or shopping online. This e-government approach also provides the government with the opportunity to reduce costs and manage publically funded resources. Bodies such as the Commission are resourced, in terms of staff and budgets, to reflect this strategic decision.

The Commission has made our sponsor department aware of the challenges created by the current level of resourcing. Within these parameters we do try to publicise our aims and remit more widely through the website, a newsletter, twitter and *Registration at a glance*, a help sheet for smaller charities.

The Commission's recently updated video of the online registration application, with subtitles, is currently being finalised and will be available shortly. The Commission is considering adding a subtitled video of the annual monitoring return process to the website, similar to the registration application video. We will consider how we can further extend the audio-visual section of the website through more videos and perhaps webinars.

6. Conclusion

The Commission notes the positive feedback which it has received from the respondents to the survey and appreciates the time taken to communicate this to us. Many of the comments received were very specific about why respondents rated their level of satisfaction with the Commission as being very/fairly satisfied. For example, commenting: Staff at the Commission are always thoroughly professional and helpful, always courteous and approachable and the advice and guidance given is always authoritative and precise.

The Commission is proud of these achievements but also grateful for the genuine and honest feedback which respondents to this survey have provided, which can help us improve our services. For example by increasing the frequency of our communications with those who have submitted expressions of intent forms, providing clearer information about our remit and our approach to charity regulation and the limitations within which we work with regard to online services.

By reflecting on and acting, where possible, on this feedback the Commission looks forward to improving its services and the experience of those applying for charity registration, seeking guidance, submitting annual reports or seeking permission for a range of actions within their charity.

Thank you

The Commission would like to thank everyone who took part in the survey. We have considered all comments and our responses to them are noted within this report. The information provided will help us to continue to improve our services.

Further information on our activities is available from:

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