



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

Business Plan 2019-20

April 2019

Table of Contents

	Page
Our mission	3
Who we are	3
The principles that underpin our work	4
The context in which we are working	5
Priority 1: Building a culture of human rights	7
Priority 2: Protecting human rights as a consequence of leaving the European Union	8
Priority 3: Poverty, health and well-being	8
Priority 4: Meeting domestic and international human rights standards and good governance	9
Priority 5: Protecting human rights in a digital age	9
Core activities	13
Budget 2018-19	15
Learning and development plan 2018-19	16
Appendices:	
1. Commissioners	17
2. Staff	18

Commented [LH1]: Should Our Vision not be included here?

Commented [LH2]: Check page numbers are correct

Our vision:

A society with human rights values and standards at its heart to achieve fairness, peace and justice.

Our mission:

To protect and promote the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland.

Who we are:

The Commission was established as a result of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. Our governing legislation is the Northern Ireland Act 1998, as amended by the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007.

The Commission is a National Human Rights Institution with A status accreditation from the United Nations. This recognition means that the organisation operates independently in full accordance with the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 48/134 (the Paris Principles).

The Commission is also a non-departmental public body, and receives grant-in-aid from the United Kingdom government through the Northern Ireland Office. We report to Parliament through the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

There are seven Commissioners (a full time Chief Commissioner and six part-time Commissioners) appointed by the Secretary of State. As far as practicable, the Commissioners, as a group, is representative of the community in Northern Ireland.

The principles that underpin our work:

A human rights-based approach underpins the Commission's work. This is predicated on the conviction that human rights compliant outcomes require processes that adhere to both the values which underpin human rights laws as well as their substantive content. On this basis our core principles are:

Participation

People should be involved in decisions affecting their human rights.

Accountability

There should be effective monitoring of how human rights are implemented and meaningful remedies available when things go wrong.

Non-discrimination and equality

All forms of discrimination must be prohibited, prevented and eliminated. People facing the biggest barriers to realising their rights should be prioritised.

Empowerment

Everyone should understand and be able to fully exercise their human rights.

Legality

Policies and services should be grounded in enforceable domestic and international human rights laws.

Partnership

In developing a culture of human rights the Commission will work with other organisations across a wide spectrum of society.

Our core activities:

The Commission's primary role is to make sure government and public authorities protect, respect and fulfil the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland. We also help people understand what their human rights are and what they can do if their rights are violated or abused. To pursue this objective we consider the full range of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. Our work is based on the international human rights treaties ratified by the United Kingdom government, domestic legislation and relevant soft law standards.

The statutory functions of the Commission include:

- (i) providing advice on legislative Bills introduced in the Northern Ireland Assembly and on policy proposals made by Ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive. We also provide advice to the United Kingdom government and Parliament on matters affecting human rights in Northern Ireland.
- (ii) conducting investigations on systemic human rights issues. To do so, we may enter places of detention, and can compel individuals and agencies to give oral testimony or to produce documents.
- (iii) promoting understanding and awareness of the importance of human rights in Northern Ireland. To do so, we may undertake or support research and educational activities.
- (iv) providing legal assistance to individuals and initiating strategic cases.
- (v) monitoring the implementation of international human rights treaties and reporting to the United Nations and Council of Europe.
- (vi) engaging with other National Human Rights Institutions in the United Kingdom and working in partnership with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

The Commission, with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, has been designated under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons as the independent mechanism tasked with promoting, protecting and monitoring implementation of Convention in Northern Ireland.

Our Annual Statement, published in December each year, records how much progress has been made towards meeting human rights obligations in Northern Ireland. This strongly informs our future work priorities.

The Commission's partnership with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is through a Joint Committee established under the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. This considers human rights issues in the island of Ireland.

It is proposed that the Commission will be mandated as a 'dedicated mechanism', alongside the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, to ensure no diminution of rights protected in the Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity chapter of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement as a result of United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. To fulfil this role the United Kingdom government is to confer upon the Commission new powers to monitor, supervise, advise, report on and enforce the commitment, as well as provide adequate resources to ensure that it is able to perform this enhanced role effectively.

The context in which we are working

It is 20 years since the Commission first opened for business. There have been many changes in that time, but there is little opportunity to reflect in the year ahead because 2019-20 promises to be so significant for the institution and our work.

This year the Commission will, subject to resources, move premises. We have been based in North Street, Belfast, since our inception. But planned development in the area combined with a need for increased space to address the challenge of protecting human rights in the context of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union means a relocation is now necessary.

Our work programme reflects a new three year strategic plan for 2019-2022. We will continue to operate across a range of subjects from the promotion of human rights in and through sport, to advising on the cumulative impacts of tax, welfare and spending policies. Protecting human rights in a digital age will be a complex area of interest which we are seeking to develop. At the same time, we must continue to address the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict and encourage the implementation of mechanisms that are human rights compliant as soon as possible.

More so than ever, the Commission recognises we need to exercise self-restraint in the breadth of our work and take time to prepare for the new tasks facing us. Organising to meet the challenges of leaving the European Union and ensuring no-diminution of human rights will require changes in operation and structure. The government has committed to enabling this

work by enhancing our powers and duties in Westminster legislation. It is envisaged that we will be provided with a necessary increase in resources for this purpose.

At the same time as preparing for the proposed changes to enhance our role, the Commission faces a dichotomy of yet another round of budget cuts. This is the eighth recurrent annual decrease. Over the years we have reduced staffing numbers on four occasions and there has been a significant impact on programme costs. Whilst seeking to shield our core business, the Commission is unable to meet the demand of a further cut without compromising the ability to fulfil statutory obligations and appropriately utilise our powers.

In response we will seek to maintain what is the minimum number of staff, but to do so a further reduction in our legal and research budgets will be required. As a consequence, the Commission will no longer exercise its investigatory powers. In addition, it will need to seek business case approvals from the Northern Ireland Office in an attempt to secure additional resources before supporting legal cases that challenge human rights violations.

These are difficult decisions that have been taken reluctantly. The Commission is also acutely aware that the requirement to meet further budget cuts raises fundamental concerns regarding our effectiveness, maintaining independence and ability to realise the institutions purpose first envisaged in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement.

A priority this year is to make certain the restoration of our powers to initiate strategic own motion legal challenges, without a victim. The case on termination of pregnancy before the Supreme Court in 2018 identified an error in the understanding of the law which the government has recognised and committed to repairing through legislation at the first opportunity. This is of vital importance to our operation, and any failure or delay in resolving the matter in 2019 would have serious consequence that further undermines our standing as a National Human Rights Institution.

At the end of 2018 we published our Annual Statement. The Chief Commissioner noted the backdrop of the absence of devolved government and the stark implications of the impasse for protecting and promoting human rights were laid bare. Northern Ireland is failing to keep pace with

the rest of the United Kingdom and Ireland on key human rights and equality provisions. There is little sign of this altering any time soon. This year our Annual Statement will reflect the fact that we must not continue with an ever mounting pile of unsatisfactory or non-existent responses by government. 2019 cannot be business as usual.

Dr David Russell
Chief Executive
April 2019

BUSINESS PLAN 2019-20

This Business Plan sets out the Commission's work for the year April 2019 to the end of March 2020. It is based on five priorities agreed in our Strategic Plan 2019-22. Each priority is one of substantive public interest, where we believe a real and lasting impact can be made to benefit the lives of people in Northern Ireland.

Priority 1: Building a culture of human rights

- 1) Provide secretarial support and assist the Northern Ireland Business and Human Rights Forum, to meet regularly and deliver its programme of work for 2019-2020 (March 2020).
- 2) Hold a joint event with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to mark the 20th anniversary of both institutions (October 2019).
- 3) Facilitate a forum that meets regularly, in partnership with the Equality Commission Northern Ireland, providing an opportunity for the Commissions and faith communities to share their views on broad areas of equality and human rights (March 2020).
- 4) Develop a series of products to promote human rights through visual arts, film and animation (March 2020).
- 5) Develop a partnership with sport governing bodies, including the Northern Ireland Commonwealth Games Council, Irish Football Association, Gaelic Athletics Association, Ulster Rugby and Odyssey Trust/Belfast Giants to establish a forum on sport and human rights (March 2020)
- 6) Development and launch of a 'Charter on Human Rights and Sport' alongside sports governing bodies (April 2019).
- 7) Deliver a programme of engagement with post primary education providers in Northern Ireland (March 2020).
- 8) Develop and run events to mark Culture Night (September 2019) and Refugee Week (March 2020) and highlight other annual occasions, such as Belfast Pride Festival.

- 9) Engage in and support the Northern Ireland Human Rights Festival (December 2019).
- 10) Deliver an annual human rights lecture (September 2019).

Priority 2: Protecting human rights as a consequence of leaving the European Union

- 11) Establish, in partnership with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, dedicated mechanisms to ensure no diminution of rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity as set out in that part of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement entitled Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity, in accordance with Article 4 of the Northern Ireland/Ireland Protocol of the 'Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community' (March 2020).
- 12) Work in partnership with other National Human Rights Institutions and domestic equality authorities in the United Kingdom regarding the human rights implications of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union, including the provision of advice to government on relevant Westminster legislation (March 2020).
- 13) Work in partnership with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission to deliver a programme of work that addresses the human rights implications of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union on the island of Ireland (March 2020).
- 14) Provide advice to government on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, including in the context of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union (March 2020).

Priority 3: Poverty, health and well-being

- 15) Conduct and publish a 12 month review of the Commission's travellers' accommodation investigation (July 2019).

- 16) Commission and publish a cumulative impact assessment to analyse the human rights impacts of tax, welfare and spending policies, including a consideration of a new mitigations package for Northern Ireland (November 2019).
- 17) Scope a potential initiative on homelessness and human rights (March 2020).
- 18) Produce an information booklet on practical human rights for prisoners to be made available in prisons (November 2019).

Priority 4: Meeting domestic and international human rights standards and good governance

- 19) Conduct progress reviews of the 2018 Annual Statement on Human Rights content (September 2019), publish and publicly launch the 2019 Annual Statement on Human Rights (December 2019).
- 20) Engage in international treaty monitoring and, in particular:
 - engage with the Committee against Torture's examination process (July 2019);
 - submit a follow up response to the United Kingdom mid-term update on the 4th Universal Periodic Review and engage with United Nations Human Rights Council (March 2020).
- 21) Provide advice to the Secretary of State and Westminster Parliament on any legislation introduced regarding the Stormont House Agreement and the implementation of mechanisms that aim to address the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict (March 2020).
- 22) Publish an analysis of the human rights of children who go missing whilst in the care of the state, with a particular focus on the balance between deprivation of liberty and the duty to protect children from harm, including inhuman and degrading treatment (June 2019).
- 23) Continue to develop and deliver human rights training for the Northern Ireland Civil Service, in partnership with the Executive Office and the Centre for Applied Learning, including delivery of

online training and the review and delivery of at least two direct training sessions (March 2020).

- 24) Scope general human rights training for public authorities (March 2020).
- 25) Work in partnership with the Department of Finance to support the implementation of the human rights Procurement Guidance Note for government departments, to include the delivery of a training session for Departmental staff (March 2020).

Priority 5: Protecting human rights in a digital age

- 26) Commission and publish research on human rights in a digital age, to include the role of National Human Rights Institutions (February 2020).
- 27) Scope the opportunity for partnership projects with the other National Human Rights Institutions in the United Kingdom and Ireland (July 2019).

Core activities

In fulfilment of and in compliance with its statutory obligations and the strategic objectives for 2019-22 the Commission has identified the following core activities to be delivered for the year April 2019 to the end of March 2020:

- 28) Relocate the Commission to new premises, subject to resources (March 2020).
- 29) Deliver a minimum of three Commission community engagements across Northern Ireland, to include Mid Ulster Council (June 2019) Lisburn and Castlereagh Council (October 2019) Mid and East Antrim Council (March 2020). One of these or an alternative engagement may be delivered in partnership with Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission through the Joint Committee.
- 30) Provide advice to government on proposed legislation and policies affecting the protection and promotion of human rights in Northern Ireland (March 2020).

- 31) Provide assistance to individuals through weekly advice clinics (March 2020).
- 32) Exercise the Commission's powers to support and initiate litigation (March 2020).
- 33) Review the Commission's corporate processes and develop an operational manual (September 2019).
- 34) Work in partnership with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, to deliver a programme of work promoting the implementation of the United Nations treaty body concluding observations for Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (March 2020). This function is carried out under the Commission's mandate as the Independent Monitoring Mechanism.
- 35) Provide secretariat support for the Joint Committee with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (March 2020).
- 36) Provide continuing support to the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions; the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions and its working groups on disability, communications, business and human rights, socio-economic rights and legal issues (March 2020).
- 37) Provide continuing support to the advisory group of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions project on 'The Role of NHRIs in (Post) Conflict Situations' (March 2020).
- 38) Finalise and submit the Commission's Equality Scheme, including the Disability Action Plan (June 2019).

BUDGET 2019-20

	Revised 2018-19	2019-20
	Budget	Budget
EMPLOYMENT COSTS		
Staff	£674,5298	
Commissioners	£148,682	
Total	£823,211	
OPERATING COSTS		
Advertising, Publicity and Publications	£33,115	
Auditor's (NAO) Remuneration	£ 15,000	
Building maintenance and expenses	£ 24,900	
Conferences, seminars and events	£9,000	
Insurance	£5,568	
Internal Audit	£8,214	
IT	£19,524	
Legal casework (non-recoverable)	£57,496	
Light and heat	£10,272	
Printing, postage and stationery	£7,200	
Professional fees	£10,740	
Rates	£17,508	
Rentals under operating leases	£38,400	
Rent for car park	£1,020	
Research	£40,000	
Staff training and recruitment	£9,000	
Telephone	£8,832	
Travel, subsistence and hospitality	£30,000	
Total	£345,789	
CAPITAL	£0	
GRAND TOTAL	£1,169,000*	
DEPRECIATION	£ 23,424	

*The Commission's budget was increased in 2018-19 by £70,000 for two years (subject to review) to include additional funding approved by the Northern Ireland Office in support of work conducted in with Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2019-20

In addition to personal development, this plan sets out the main learning and development activities to be undertaken by Commissioners and staff during 2019-20.

Activity	Benefit	Staff
Ensure that all Commissioners and staff have received disability equality training,	Commissioners and staff will increase their understanding of disability rights and access requirements in line with the Commission's Equality Scheme and Disability Action Plan	Commissioners and staff
Training on how to assist members of the public and improve service delivery	To increase staff capacity	Staff

Appendix 1 - Commissioners

Chief Commissioner: Les Allamby

Commissioners: Helen Ferguson
Helena Macormac
Paul Mageean
John McCallister
Eddie Rooney
Graham Shields

Appendix 2 – Staff

