



NORTHERN  
IRELAND  
HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
COMMISSION

**BUSINESS PLAN  
2015-16**

April 2015

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## **Strategic vision**

### **Introduction**

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (the Commission) undertook an extensive process to decide its strategic priorities for the period 2013-2016. In so doing it reviewed every element of the organisation's past activities and current practices. It consulted widely with stakeholders and with the Commission's staff. It reflected deeply on the findings of the review and consultation process. On that basis, the Commission revised its mission statement, affirmed its core principles and identified three pillars of work.

### **How we see ourselves**

The Commission was born out of a recognition that human rights values and standards need to be at the heart of our society if we are to achieve well-being, peace and justice. Northern Ireland must continuously re-affirm its commitment to core human rights and invigorate the work of building a fair society that upholds human dignity. All of us will be measured by how best we seek to honour and respect each other's human rights, especially those of the most powerless in society. The Commission recognises the central role it is called on to play in this vital work.

### **Our Mission Statement**

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (the Commission) champions the human rights of those who live in Northern Ireland. As an "A Status" UN-accredited human rights institution, the Commission is Northern Ireland's human rights guardian and centre of excellence. It holds to account and works in partnership with Government, elected representatives, statutory organisations and civil society. The Commission, established on the basis of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, plays a central role in shaping a society that, as it emerges from conflict, respects the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by upholding human rights and responsibilities.

### **Our principles**

The Commission promotes and abides by the core principles of human rights, including:

**Legality and independence:** An "A Status" UN-accredited human rights institution must operate on the basis of international human rights law, in compliance with a statutory mandate and independently of the State. The Commission works for the promotion and protection of those human rights to which the United Kingdom (UK) is legally committed at the national, regional and international levels and does so on the basis of the mandate

conferred upon it by law and in full conformity with the UN Paris Principles.

**Non-discrimination and equality:** The universality of human rights requires that they can be enjoyed by all people on the basis of non-discrimination and equality, a principle that is reinforced in Northern Ireland by provisions of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. The Commission honours this principle, above all, by affording priority to protecting the most powerless in society by addressing the needs of vulnerable individuals and those who are marginalised.

**The equal status of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights:** Human rights, as recognised in the treaties to which the UK is committed, have equal value and status and must be implemented in an integrated or “indivisible” manner. The Commission respects this principle in its work and promotes full implementation in all engagements with the State and other partners.

**Participation:** Meaningful enjoyment of human rights must be based on participation by the holders of human rights in any processes that may impact on their well-being. The Commission is committed to involving rights-holders in all relevant areas of its activities and it strives to promote broader participation across society.

**Accountability:** The enforcement of human rights requires that “human rights duty-bearers” be held accountable. For this to happen, decision making must be transparent. The Commission honours these requirements in all its own actions. It demands similar standards in public life and calls to account all those with responsibility for the promotion and protection of human rights. The Commission supports existing independent oversight and accountability mechanisms.

**Partnership:** The promotion and protection of human rights requires the commitment of all who live in Northern Ireland, mindful that their rights are balanced by responsibilities. It demands the engagement of Government (central, regional and local), elected representatives, statutory bodies and civil society. The Commission plays a pivotal role in building and sustaining the necessary partnerships. It does so in the context of its role as a National Human Rights Institution with UN-accredited “A Status”. The Commission also recognises the importance of its partnership with the other UN-accredited human rights institutions of these islands.

**Building a culture of human rights:** A goal of the human rights system is to establish societies that embed human rights at their heart – that reflect a “culture of human rights”. A society that honours the culture of human rights is one where human rights values explicitly guide society. The Commission is committed to fostering this culture in Northern Ireland. In so doing it recognises the challenges presented in a society that has

experienced a protracted and tragic conflict and within which community divisions run deep.

### **Equality commitment**

We are fundamentally committed to equality of opportunity in accordance with the Commission's Equality Scheme. We will promote equality of opportunity and good relations within the Commission as well as in our activities. We will strive to comply fully with our statutory obligations and we will liaise closely with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to ensure that we work effectively together.

### **How we do our work**

The Commission bases all of its work on international human rights standards including those of the United Nations (UN) and the Council of Europe. It is a National Human Rights Institution with "A Status" accreditation at the UN. The Commission works in accordance with the UN 'Paris Principles' and has access to the UN Human Rights Council.

The Commission is an independent public body established by the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Its powers and duties are derived from sections 69 and 70 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and sections 14-16 of the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007.

The Commission seeks to fulfil its obligations set down in law and use its powers to better protect the human rights of the people of Northern Ireland. It uses a range of tools to achieve the best outcomes. Much of our work continues year on year, such as litigation, advice to Government on policy and proposed legislation, education and training. This business plan highlights new or significant programmes of work for 2015-16.

The Commission has also worked to ensure that all three strategic aims are mutually supportive and so much of the work we have prioritised under any one heading will be part of the satisfaction of others for example, responding to austerity and advising Government, taking into account the impact of the conflict.

Under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Commission has the following duties:

- to keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness in Northern Ireland of law and practice relating to the protection of human rights;
- to advise the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Executive Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly of legislative and other measures which ought to be taken to protect human rights;

- to advise the Northern Ireland Assembly whether proposed legislation is compatible with human rights standards;
- to promote understanding and awareness of the importance of human rights in Northern Ireland by, for example, undertaking or commissioning or otherwise assisting research and educational activities; and
- to provide advice to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the scope for defining, in Westminster legislation, rights supplementary to those in the European Convention on Human Rights.

In addition, under sections 69 and 70 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Commission has the following powers:

- to give assistance to individuals who apply to it for help in relation to proceedings involving law or practice concerning the protection of human rights;
- to bring proceedings involving law or practice concerning the protection of human rights;
- to conduct such investigations as it considers necessary or expedient for the purpose of exercising its other functions; and
- to publish its advice and the outcome of its research and investigations.

The Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 (sections 14-16 which amended sections 69 and 71 of the Northern Ireland Act) gives the Commission the following additional powers, with caveats:

- to institute, or intervene in, legal proceedings concerning human rights where it need not be a victim or potential victim of the unlawful act to which the proceedings relate;
- to require a person to provide information and documents in their possession, and to give oral evidence, in respect of an investigation; and
- to enter a specified place of detention in Northern Ireland, in respect of an investigation.

## **Resources**

As pressure upon budgets continues the Commission carries out all of its work with seven part time and one full time Commissioner and 13 full time equivalent staff posts. The greatest resource of the Commission remains the people who work in the organisation. A list of Commissioners and the Commission's staff as at April 2015 are at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

The Commission has a core budget of £1,214,764. This is funded by grant-in-aid from Parliament through our sponsor branch, the Northern Ireland Office.

Recognising the growing impact of austerity an ongoing foundation of the Commission's approach to its work is building successful partnerships across all sectors. We remain convinced that this is the most effective way to protect human rights in Northern Ireland.

**Virginia McVea, Director**  
**April 2015**

## **BUSINESS PLAN 2015-16**

This Business Plan describes the work proposed for the incoming year. It aims to focus attention on protecting the most powerless in society by addressing the needs of vulnerable individuals and those who are marginalised.

### **Pillar one: Human rights and good governance**

Human rights need to be embedded at the heart of the executive and legislature, reflected in our basic legal framework and honoured in the operation of all offices of State. The challenges in these regards include the complexity of our constitutional system, the nature of our devolved jurisdiction and the relative newness of many of the governance structures.

**Actions:** The Commission will continue to support the development of a strong indigenous framework for human rights-compliance on the part of the State. It will continue to advise Government in support of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. It will train, monitor, advise and support public servants - including local Government and the Northern Ireland Prison Service - to carry out their functions in a human rights-compliant manner. In particular, it will help develop capacity for rights-based delivery of accident and emergency healthcare services in Health and Social Care Trusts.

**Outcomes:** The Commission will have supported the embedding of capacities for human rights across Northern Ireland's governance structures, at all levels and with a particular focus on the Civil Service through the delivery of a number of training programmes. The Commission will publish its fourth annual statement on human rights in Northern Ireland. It will continue to provide advice to Government on a Bill of Rights process for Northern Ireland. More broadly, the Commission will ensure that UK-wide human rights initiatives take account of the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland and that these do not diminish existing protections.

### **In year targets:**

- (a) Research and publish the 2015 Annual Statement on Human Rights in Northern Ireland (10 December 2015)
- (b) Host an annual human rights lecture (August 2015)
- (c) Secure the future delivery of human rights training for Northern Ireland Civil Service, in partnership with the Centre for Applied Learning and the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (March 2016)



- (d) Publish the human rights inquiry on emergency health care (May 2015)
- (e) Deliver a project on developing an operational human rights-based approach to emergency health care to be piloted by Health and Social Care Trusts (March 2016)
- (f) Maintain Government and stakeholder attention on the need to enact a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland in accordance with the Commission's Action Plan adopted in August 2013 (ongoing)
- (g) Host a roundtable on hate crimes to include the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Public Prosecution Service and the Youth Justice Agency (October 2015)
- (h) Work towards delivery of the recommendations contained within the Commission's report 'Public Procurement and Human Rights in Northern Ireland'. Specifically, (1) work in partnership with the Department of Finance and Personnel, Central Procurement Directorate to support the development of guidance on procurement practices and human rights compliance (2) establish a Northern Ireland business and human rights forum (March 2016)
- (i) To engage in International Treaty Body Monitoring and in particular:
  - Liaise with the Secretariat on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (March 2016)

Submit parallel reports:

to the pre-session working group in advance of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights examination (October 2015). Prepare submissions responding to the list of issues (ongoing)

to the pre-session working group in advance of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights examination (May 2015). Engage with the examination process (July 2015)

to the pre-session working group in advance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (July 2015). Engage with pre-session working group (October 2015). Prepare further submissions in advance of the examination (ongoing)

and engage with Government following submission of state party report on Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Framework Convention for National Minorities (March 2016).

- (j) Work in partnership with Northern Ireland Ombudsman building human rights based approach to human rights and host an international conference on human rights based approaches to the work of Ombudsman (March 2016)

## **Pillar Two: Human Rights and the Conflict**

The legacy of conflict runs deep in Northern Ireland. There remain serious gaps in accountability, justice and inter-community reconciliation. A failure to address division and sectarianism still result too often in violence and other forms of hate crime. Lives continue to be blighted and lost.

**Actions:** The Commission will develop a human rights-based understanding of “transitional justice” in Northern Ireland. In so doing, it will pay particular attention to the situation of victims and survivors and of former prisoners convicted of conflict related offences. The Commission will challenge the racist scourge of sectarianism and all its manifestations and will contribute to the promotion of good community relations. In recognition of the relationship of peace, equality and non-discrimination, the Commission will continue to play its role in combating discrimination including on such grounds as race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity and age.

**Outcomes:** The Commission will develop further tools and advices within the programme begun in 2013 to stimulate a new phase of consideration of how Northern Ireland undertakes a wide-ranging programme of transitional-justice, taking account of international good practice. In so doing, it will ensure that significant advances are made in addressing the particular situation of victims and survivors and of former prisoners convicted of conflict related offences. It will demonstrate how human rights need to be at the heart of good community relations.

Beyond Northern Ireland the Commission will continue to assist the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) with the provision of advices on human rights and post-conflict societies. The Commission’s work on the protection of the human right to culture in post-conflict societies will be developed to ensure dissemination at the United Nations. The Commission will contribute substantially to ensuring that a post-conflict Northern Ireland is a more equal and non-discriminatory society.

## **In Year Targets:**

- (a) Conduct an analysis on human rights obligations and the proposals contained in the Stormont House Agreement (June 2015)
- (b) Develop and deliver training on human rights and community relations with the Community Relations Council (May 2015)
- (c) Produce a research paper analysing human rights standards and issues of public policy related to conflict (September 2015)
- (d) Liaise with Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on post conflict investigations and the implementation of the package of measures adopted by the UK Government and NI Executive (ongoing)
- (e) Scope the possibility of further work with the Commonwealth Secretariat Human Rights Unit on its programme addressing reconciliation and human rights in post conflict societies (by end April 2015)

## **Pillar Three: Protecting Human Rights in a Time of Austerity**

Economic recession and austerity measures have led to unemployment and budget cuts that impact deeply on the enjoyment of human rights. While those who are already at a disadvantage suffer the most, it has to be recognised that recession and austerity impacts the human rights of all the people of Northern Ireland.

**Actions:** The Commission will closely monitor the State's compliance with its socio-economic duties, including that of ensuring an adequate standard of living. It will focus attention on the needs of those who are most powerless including persons with disabilities; children in the care of the State; prisoners; ethnic minorities (including Travellers); and persons in need of health and social care. It will advise Government and its agencies on the achievement of these rights during a time of public spending constraint. The Commission will provide human rights capacity-building support to the State and other actors.

**Outcomes:** The Commission will ensure that legislators and policy decision-makers address economic challenges with the understanding that human rights protection is a priority. It will bring to the forefront of their attention the impact of service delivery change on the most powerless in society by addressing the needs of vulnerable individuals and those who are marginalised. The Commission will support their voices to be heard and those community and voluntary organisations working on their behalf. It will transfer skills to relevant State actors for rights-based socio-economic decision making.

### **In year targets:**

- (a) Provide human rights capacity building and legal advice clinics to members of the public, and representatives of community and voluntary sector organisations. To include three visits outside Belfast (ongoing)
- (b) Work towards delivery of the recommendations contained within the Commission's report 'the Human Rights of Carers in Northern Ireland' (October 2015)
- (c) Develop a participation project using social media opportunities such as facebook, twitter and instagram to identify and publicise key concerns for persons with a disability in Northern Ireland (March 2016)
- (d) Complete a scoping study and determine the viability of conducting a pilot project on the right to access to justice and litigants in person (June 2015)
- (e) Research and publish a report on the rights of persons with disabilities and public appointments in Northern Ireland (March 2016)

### **Corporate**

#### **In year Targets:**

In fulfilment of and in compliance with its statutory obligations and the strategic objectives for 2013-2016 the Commission has identified key organisational and institutional development targets:

- (a) Develop and deliver a Learning and Development programme for staff and Commissioners taking account of the Commission's performance against national and international benchmarks of excellence in order to identify areas for continuous improvement. Develop further tranches of mentoring for staff (ongoing)
- (b) Deliver a pilot project for NHRI senior executive officer development through webinars with international advisors (ongoing)
- (c) Develop further initiatives to include the production of new materials for use on the Commission website and social media networks. This will include introducing webinars to the Commission's media outputs (ongoing)
- (d) Produce corporate administration guidance manuals in the Commission (March 2016) and review the process and production of

the Commission's Annual Statement on Human Rights in Northern Ireland (May 2015)

- (e) Develop and co-ordinate the operation of a new strategic planning process to include a series of community visits throughout Northern Ireland (March 2016)
- (f) In fulfilment of our obligations as the International Monitoring Mechanism for Northern Ireland on the Convention for Persons with a Disability with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to liaise with Health and Social Care bodies to facilitate in appearance before the joint committee to consider the strategic priorities of those bodies in relation to disability (March 2016)
- (g) Develop a new decision making framework for providing advice to Government, taking into account operational capacity and a reduction in public consultation timeframes following the Stormont House Agreement (May 2015)
- (h) Engage with other UK Commissions in relation to legal and policy matters on cross-jurisdictional issues as appropriate and taking account of our Strategic Plan (ongoing)
- (i) Engage with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission in relation to cross-jurisdictional issues as appropriate to include joint meetings and taking account of our Strategic Plan (ongoing)
- (j) Provide continuing support to the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions secretariat and specialist working groups with a particular focus on the accreditation and legal groups (ongoing)
- (k) Develop and pilot a framework for measuring the impact of the Commission in compliance with the Paris Principles and UN best practice (March 2016)

## Budget 2015-16

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
	Budget	Budget	Budget
<b>EMPLOYMENT COSTS</b>			
Staff	£700,000	£655,000	£691,000
Commissioners	£175,000	£165,000	£165,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£875,000</b>	<b>£820,000</b>	<b>£856,000</b>
<b>OPERATING COSTS</b>			
Accountancy Fees	£1,000	£1,000	£1,000
Advertising, Publicity and Publications	£40,300	£20,000	£18,000
Auditor's (NAO) Remuneration	£12,000	£12,000	£15,000
Building maintenance and expenses	£30,000	£20,000	£17,000
Conferences, seminars and events	£8,000	£8,000	£4,000
Insurance	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000
Internal Audit	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000
IT	£30,000	£20,000	£20,000
Legal casework (non-recoverable)	£40,000	£37,000	£50,000
Light and heat	£20,000	£15,000	£15,000
Printing, postage and stationery	£15,000	£12,000	£11,000
Professional fees	£15,000	£10,000	£10,000
Rates	£50,000	£50,000	£22,000
Rentals under operating leases	£115,000	£115,000	£55,000
Research	£81,700	£84,000	£15,000
Staff training and recruitment	£17,000	£12,000	£7,000
Telephone	£14,000	£10,000	£10,000
Travel, subsistence and hospitality	£30,000	£30,000	£28,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£539,000</b>	<b>£476,000</b>	<b>£318,000</b>
<b>DEPRECIATION</b>	<b>£58,000</b>	<b>£58,000</b>	<b>£40,764</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>£1,472,000</b>	<b>£1,354,000</b>	<b>£1,214,764</b>

## LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2015-16

This plan sets out the main learning and development activities to be undertaken by Commissioners and staff during 2015-16 to achieve the objectives set out in this Business Plan.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Staff</b>
Senior Executive Officer development in NHRIs	Following on from our leadership of a potential UN programme of work in this area key learning will be shared with staff with updates from development of a UN project. It is anticipated that this programme will provide further links into other international NHRIs. The outcome of such a programme is improving overall performance within the Commission, international leadership and a sense of fulfilment for staff	Relevant staff
Council of Europe and EU update	As ENNHRI seeks to explore closer links with the EU and in anticipation of its ratification of the ECHR further consideration of the workings of key institutions and their priorities is essential.	Relevant staff and Commissioners
Developments in EU law	To ensure that the Commission is aware of developments at the EU which impact our work	Relevant Staff and Commissioners
Social Media as a tool	Social media training will allow the development of our public facing opportunities for raising awareness of human rights and increase accessibility as well as the quality of our work.	Staff and Commissioners

**Appendix 1 - Commissioners**

**Chief Commissioner:** Les Allamby

**Commissioners:** John Corey  
Christine Collins  
Milton Kerr  
Grainia Long  
Alan McBride  
Marion Reynolds  
Paul Yam



**Appendix 2 - Staff**

