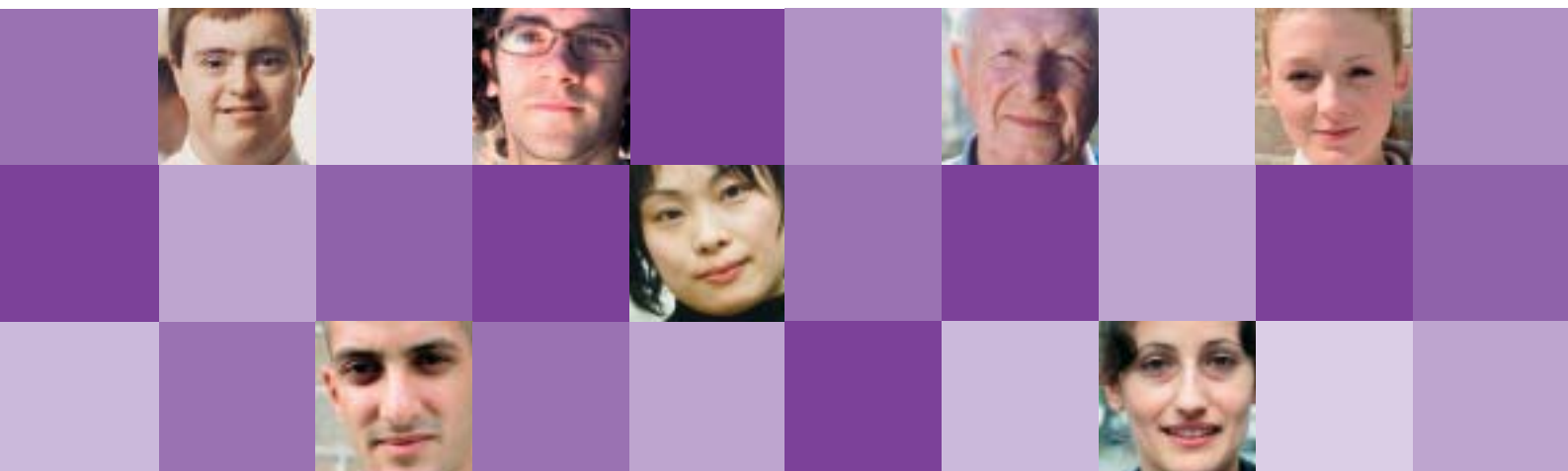




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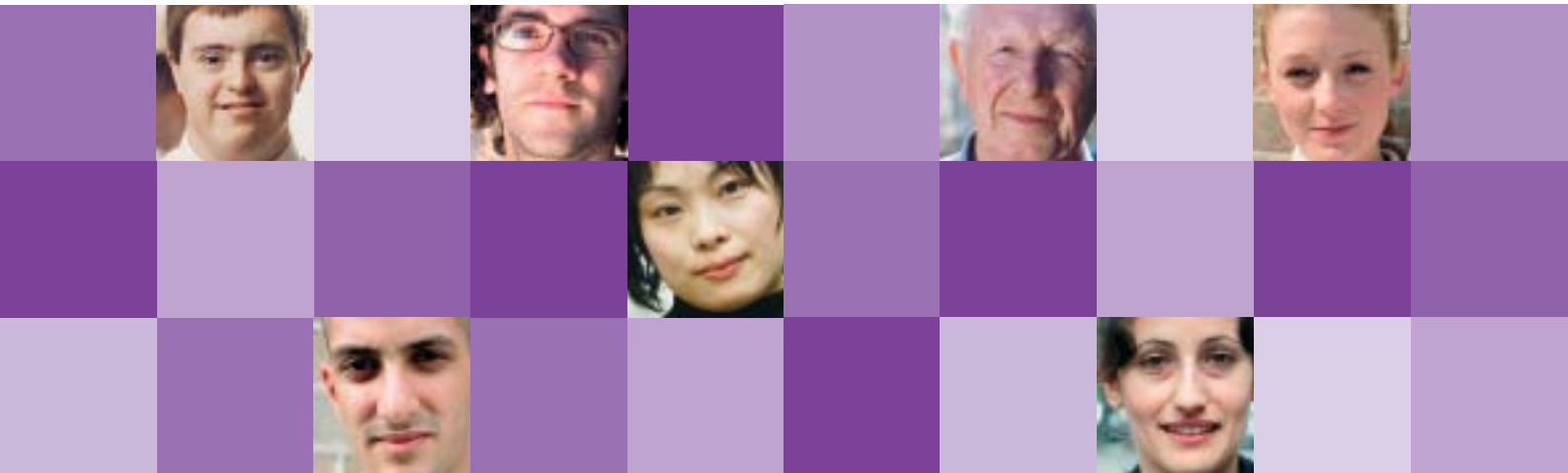


Strategic Plan

2006-2009



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION



Strategic Plan

2006-2009

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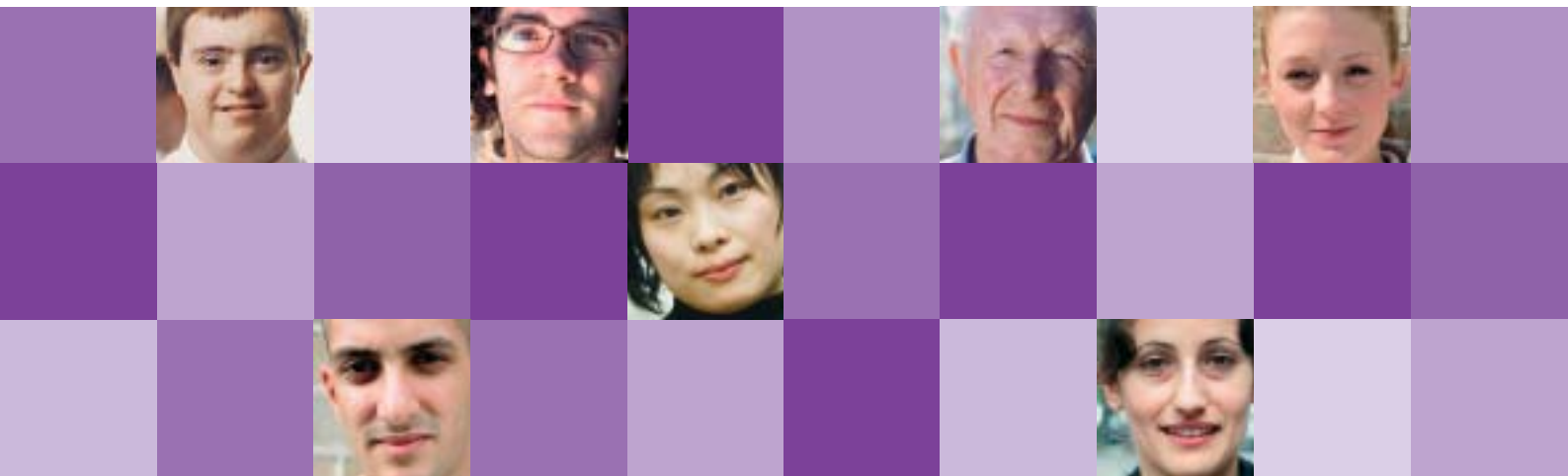
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This document can be made available in languages other than English, in Braille, on audio tape or in large print by request to the Commission's offices.

It is also available on the Commission's website at: www.nihrc.org.

Introduction



Strategic Plan

2006-2009



Introduction

Background

Established on 1 March 1999, through the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (the Commission) is moving into a new phase of consolidation and development as outlined in this, its third Strategic Plan. Based on a significant body of work from the past six years, the plan sets the priorities for the next three years and outlines the thinking of the Commission.

In November 2005, the Commission issued a draft Strategic Plan as a consultation paper distributed widely among interested parties locally, nationally and internationally, and via our website. This document reflects the views of those who made written submissions, attended focus group discussions held in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry, as well as the views of Commissioners and staff.

The plan will govern the work of the Commission through its annual business planning process each year, to secure key objectives and to link those objectives to budgetary allocations. Progress on meeting the targets set will be reviewed quarterly and reported on annually by the Commission. Commissioners are keen to ensure that the plan retains an element of flexibility, to provide the capacity to respond to events and changing demands over the planning period. There is also, inevitably, some overlap among the aims and associated objectives reflecting the strong connections that exist across the various strands of the Commission's powers and duties.

Context

The statutory remit of the Commission is listed in Appendix 3 of this document. These powers and duties are reflected in the core aims of the plan. The Commission will monitor and review compliance of law and practice in Northern Ireland with the Human Rights Act 1998 and with applicable international human rights standards and will use its powers of investigation and litigation strategically to that end. Thematic priorities will be identified to ensure practical outcomes for individuals and groups affected. It will promote and advise on the introduction of a Bill of Rights to Northern Ireland.

There is a need for the Commission to identify a clear and distinct role in an increasingly crowded field of regulatory bodies and to work in partnership where possible for added impact. With the Review of Public Administration recently announced, the shape of the public sector and how it is supported looks set to change significantly.

The Commission has been in discussion with various public sector and local government officials on developing a framework for assessing compliance with the requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998, and has engaged with



individual government departments in preparing guidance and delivering training. It will be important that strong relationships are retained and developed as new structures evolve. There has been a very positive response to the proposals in this plan to work collaboratively with the public sector in promoting human rights standards in the public service, providing an independent and informed perspective.

The creation of a Commission for Equality and Human Rights in Britain and a Scottish Human Rights Commission will have a bearing on how this Commission conducts its business, nationally and internationally. The accreditation of 'Paris Principles' compliant human rights institutions at the United Nations determines the level of access available. Good relations, mutual support and a clear understanding of roles will be important with our new colleagues in this field. Moving from the position of the only statutory human rights body in the UK, it will be important that the Commission consolidates and builds on its current standing and level of representation.

Key to the planning process is clarity on the revised powers of investigation and access to places of detention proposed by the Commission in its 'Review of Powers' document of March 2001. A consultation document from the Secretary of State was published on 16 November 2005 outlining proposed amendments to the governing legislation. Although the consultation period ended in February 2006, it may be some time into 2007 before the necessary legislative changes can be enacted, if agreed. In the interim, contact with Westminster departments will be a priority to ensure that the Commission has a voice in the development of legislation and policy affecting Northern Ireland, in particular on issues such as counter-terrorism proposals and the associated potential for further erosion of civil liberties in the UK. Similarly, should there be a return to devolved administration through the Assembly, the Commission will re-invigorate relations with the various committees, officials and elected representatives to promote human rights standards in their policy and practice.

The Commission has rightly been subject to significant scrutiny and advice in recent years. Further scrutiny will take place in the autumn of 2006, as the Commission undergoes a 'Landscape Review' by government, of its purpose and activities. While we anticipate close engagement with the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) in the planning and operation of this review, it will be essentially an independent scrutiny of the value and particular role of the Commission. We welcome this opportunity to highlight the importance and particular contribution of a human rights agenda to a just and stable society.

In addition, since 1999, three public opinion surveys have been undertaken by the Commission, setting benchmarks and assessing progress, with a fourth scheduled later in 2006. The development at the United Nations of a framework for evaluating National Human Rights Institutions also provides support for a structured review of effectiveness to be undertaken.



Throughout this planning process Commissioners have engaged with and listened closely to the advice of participants, as they seek to give focus to the wide range of demands and human rights concerns that are raised in Northern Ireland. Staff and Commissioners are grateful to those interested groups and commentators who took time to contribute to the consultation process and continued engagement is welcome as the plan is put into effect.

Priorities for action

The core aims described in this document reflect both the statutory functions of the Commission and a consolidation of its work to date. Work to date can be summarised as:

- over 3,000 legal enquiries have been dealt with and over 50 individual cases supported
- approximately 400 consultation responses on legislation and policy have been submitted
- more than 100 publications have been produced including major research and investigation reports
- six years' debate on the development of advice on a Bill of Rights
- critical input to the introduction of human rights education to post-primary schools and the school curriculum
- delivery of a structured training programme in human rights awareness across Northern Ireland
- introduction of new internal structures, enhanced premises and a developing information function, and
- establishment of the Commission as a credible institution in international fora.

Priorities for action in the incoming period are determined in light of commitments evolving from previous work, such as that on women in prison, the Bill of Rights and monitoring the Human Rights Act, and will also be shaped by new issues that have been brought to our attention through casework inquiries or research. Priority will be given to those issues which can best be accommodated in the clear and distinct remit given to this Commission.



Resources

The core resource of the Commission is its Commissioners and staff. Seventeen staff, one full-time Chief Commissioner and nine part-time Commissioners provide the core expertise and output of the organisation. The annual budget is currently £1.475 million, of which some 80 per cent is required for salaries and running costs.

Effectively, the available programme expenditure is relatively little, in the region of £300,000. Commissioners will want to review this model to identify pressures or any possible easements, and when necessary, to seek additional resources, particularly in light of anticipated amendments to the Commission's powers. Additional core resources are proposed in this plan which will have corresponding implications for the annual budget.

The Commission has benefited from the advice of key stakeholders through various processes in the past and from the feedback of several independent reports and three public opinion surveys. A new strategy for managing these relationships and a communication strategy are currently being implemented, which will enhance the opportunity for such constructive feedback and provide an important touchstone for Commissioners as this plan is put into effect.



Vision

Our vision is to help bring about a society in Northern Ireland where everyone is aware of their internationally recognised human rights and those of others and can enjoy those rights in a society which respects diversity and in which they can feel safe and valued.

Mission

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission will work vigorously and independently to ensure that the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland are fully and firmly protected in law, policy and practice. To that end, the Commission will measure the law, policy and practice in Northern Ireland against internationally accepted rules and principles for the protection of human rights and will exercise to the full the functions conferred upon it to ensure that those rules and principles are promoted, adopted and applied throughout Northern Ireland.

Equality Commitment

We are fundamentally committed to equality of opportunity in accordance with the Commission's Equality Scheme. We will therefore strive to promote equality of opportunity within the Commission as well as in the activities we conduct. 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 the two institutions work effectively together.



Values

The Commission is committed to working in accordance with the following key values:

Independence: The Commission is completely independent from any outside influence. We arrive at our conclusions after all the evidence has been fully considered.

Fairness: We provide a proper hearing to any person or group wanting to meet with us. We are objective when assessing evidence, and use internationally accepted rules and principles on human rights as our baseline at all times.

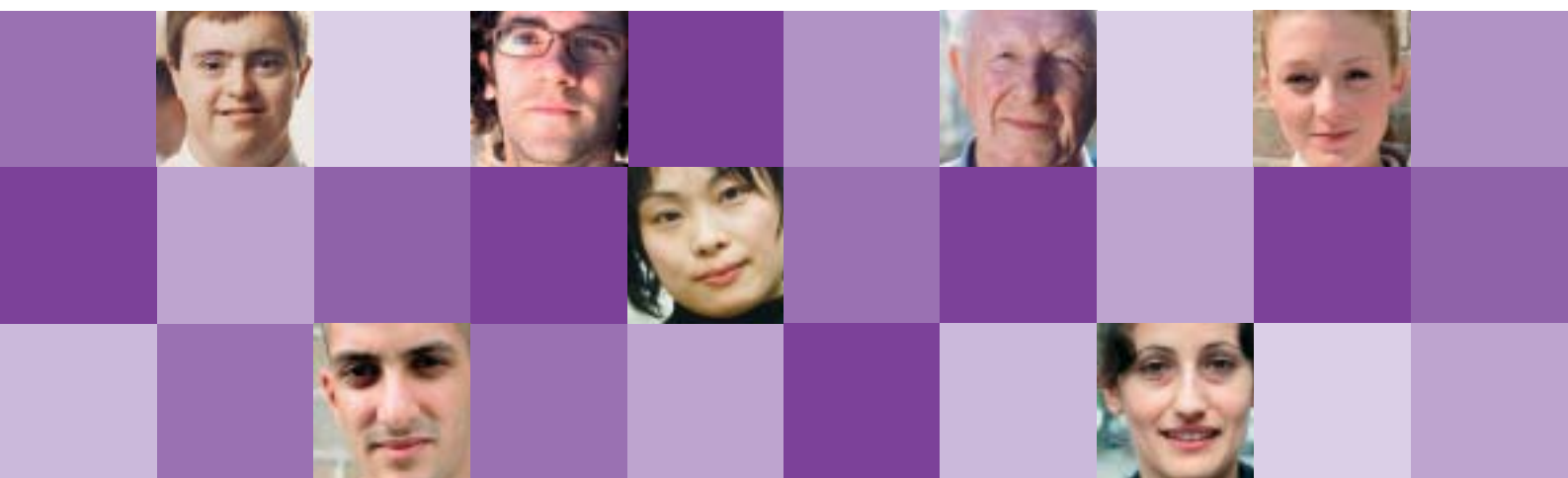
Openness: We welcome visitors to the Commission's offices and undertake to meet individuals and groups at other premises if this is more convenient or suitable. The minutes of Commission meetings and all key documents are published on our website.

Accessibility: The Commission works closely with members of the public. We ensure that all our public events are accessible and our publications are as easy to understand as possible and made available in other formats.

Accountability: We produce an annual report after the end of each financial year. We are answerable to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (the UK Ombudsman) and we will co-operate fully with any investigation that might arise. We maintain a Register of Commissioners' Interests which is available to anyone who wishes to view it.

Participation: We work to ensure that individuals and groups feel that the Commission is their Commission. We strive to ensure that this happens particularly in our work on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and in our education work, but more generally we want to avail of people's expertise in all areas of our work.

Strategic Aims and Objectives



Strategic Plan

2006-2009



Strategic Aims

Under each of the Commission's four strategic aims, which are set out below, we have listed key objectives and performance indicators through which work can be assessed.

Specific targets reflecting the objectives and performance indicators will be detailed in annual business plans. The achievement of the business plans will be monitored quarterly by the Commission and reported to the public in annual reports.

Aim 1: Building a human rights culture in Northern Ireland

The extensive consultation on the Bill of Rights launched in March 2000 and the introduction of the Human Rights Act the following October, have provided the key focus for human rights education and promotion by this Commission. Work is currently underway to develop a human rights impact assessment framework which will help public sector bodies in their policy development and planning processes. The Commission has worked closely with the Department of Education providing guidance on the implications of the Human Rights Act to its practice and is keen to work with other public sector departments in a similar vein.

Following a review of human rights education in Northern Ireland carried out for the Commission by the University of Ulster, the Commission will bring forward proposals and identify the resources necessary to implement a strategy of delivering training and education, monitoring the human rights training provided to public sector bodies and contributing to the development of training and education materials for use by others. This builds on the work already done with the Department of Education and various health and social services trusts and local authorities, and on the monitoring carried out over a period of four years on the human rights training of Police Service of Northern Ireland recruits. The Commission has recently undertaken, in partnership with the Community Relations Council and the Institute of Conflict Research, to provide training in the human rights standards engaged in developing a framework for conflict resolution. The Commission is challenged by the increased alienation and sectarian violence in Northern Ireland and will, in conjunction with relevant partners, seek to develop a framework for dialogue based on human rights standards.

In the past year a communications strategy and a strategy for managing stakeholder relationships have been introduced to the Commission. It is anticipated that these will contribute to increasing public confidence in the work of the Commission and to identifying the relevance of human rights beyond the traditional association with civil and political issues.

There will be an increased focus on working directly with government and the administrations in Westminster and Stormont, and with the relevant committees, such as the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights



at Westminster. The return of a devolved administration will bring with it new challenges and opportunities for the Commission, but in the interim it will be a priority to develop relationships at Westminster as in Northern Ireland. Such contacts also need to be managed and nurtured in Ireland, Europe and internationally, as well as in Britain. Through the network of the Joint Equality and Human Rights Forum, comprising equality and human rights bodies in the UK and Ireland, it has been possible to keep in close contact with the developing Commission on Equality and Human Rights in Britain, which should have a close relationship with this Commission.

Within the constraints of available resources it is hoped to have an increased presence outside Belfast. This outreach work can be achieved in a variety of ways and will require the development of local partnerships in various parts of Northern Ireland. There will be local contact and a regular presence of staff and Commissioners to promote the Commission and its work and engage with the community. Opportunities to take evidence or conduct inquiries in particular areas will be explored.

International partnerships will continue to be given priority. The Commission has benefited greatly from, and contributed significantly to, the developing National Human Rights Institutions network co-ordinated by the United Nations through the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. In addition, networks have developed through the Council of Europe and the British Council in which this Commission has played an active role. Contributing to international treaty body reporting mechanisms is a key function for the Commission, which is useful both in commenting on the government's reports and in submitting independent reports, engaging the voluntary and community sector in this process. The Commission is keen to provide a conduit for information on the impact of the state's legislation, policy and practices to the monitoring bodies, from those most directly affected.



Objectives

1. To develop an inclusive and resourced education and training function to include the direct delivery of training, monitoring of others' and developing materials for human rights training.

Performance indicator(s): the number of training modules developed; number of participants reached (directly or indirectly); evaluation by participants and trainers on effectiveness of events and materials; level and currency of skills and knowledge of trainers within the human rights training network.

2. To seek accreditation for introductory human rights training that can be delivered by a range of organisations.

Performance indicator(s): appropriate levels of accreditation achieved for courses delivered or monitored by the Commission.

3. To introduce to the public sector a human rights impact assessment framework to measure compliance with the Human Rights Act.

Performance indicator(s): the number of public authorities engaging effectively in human rights impact assessment processes.

4. To assist organisations and groups working to reduce sectarian conflict and violence to include a human rights dimension to their dialogue and action.

Performance indicator(s): the level of input from the Commission to the activities of organisations and groups working to reduce sectarian conflict and violence.

5. To promote a strong and clear media message highlighting the value of a Bill of Rights and the universality of human rights.

Performance indicator(s): the quantity and tone of media coverage of Commission activities.



6. To increase the Commission's presence and engagement in communities across Northern Ireland.

Performance indicator(s): the number of meetings, events and Commission activity taking place across Northern Ireland, with particular emphasis on activities outside the greater Belfast area.

7. To develop strategic partnerships with relevant organisations to help promote a human rights culture.

Performance indicator(s): the number of pieces of work involving partnerships or a joint approach with others.

8. To increase public awareness of the Commission and of international human rights standards and their relevance.

Performance indicator(s): the level of awareness and support for a human rights agenda as indicated in a public opinion survey.

9. To implement an agreed public affairs strategy, particularly in relation to the development of a Bill of Rights.

Performance indicator(s): the effectiveness of the implementation of the strategy; the number of public presentations made by Commissioners and staff on behalf of the Commission.

10. To develop resources and support for organisations working in the field of human rights.

Performance indicator(s): target audiences reached; feedback from users on the effectiveness of the resources and support.



Aim 2: Challenging and preventing human rights abuse

The Commission's work on this aim involves the Legal Services, Policy and Research team and the Information, Education and Development team. The range of human rights issues arising in Northern Ireland is very broad and the work of protecting rights and preventing and addressing abuse goes far beyond the responsibility and capacity of the Commission alone. A key theme for this Strategic Plan will be developing and reinforcing partnership work, and encouraging and facilitating other organisations and agencies to address some of the issues that concern us. This might be described as seeking better 'leverage' from the Commission's limited resources, while retaining our independence.

The range of issues varies over time and the Commission needs to retain some flexibility to respond to changing circumstances. At the outset of the planning period, issues of concern to us include monitoring anti-terrorism law; monitoring and commenting on policing and the criminal justice system; identifying a role for the Commission in reducing the ongoing sectarian violence and alienation; contributing to the inquiry process and proposals for dealing with the past and supporting victims; work on hate crime and support to minority and vulnerable communities such as disabled people, older people, people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans, and Travellers; and challenging racism and providing support to migrants. The Commission needs to assess its particular role on these issues in relation to other agencies and organisations working in the field and assess how best to make a contribution.

The Commission will focus on three thematic areas:

- 1. Freedom and Security**
This area includes the exercise of sanctions by the State and the requirement to ensure that all in Northern Ireland are able to live in a society based on justice, freedom and security.
- 2. Violence and Physical Integrity**
This thematic area focuses on protecting the physical integrity of all in Northern Ireland. This is to be achieved primarily through the obligation on the State and its agencies in reducing the incidence of violence, whether by State or non-State actors.
- 3. Equality and Social Justice**
This key area focuses on promoting, through a range of mechanisms (including legal, educational and developmental), a culture where the rights of all are guaranteed without discrimination. Of particular importance in this context, is the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights. Both individual and group rights are included.



The Commission will work in the above areas through the range of mechanisms available to it, including investigations, research, legal services, and legislation and policy functions. In addition, the Commission will, through information, education and development work, contribute to raising awareness of these themes.

Monitoring and promoting compliance with international standards

The Commission's work is based on internationally accepted human rights standards and is broadly aimed at improving the protection, promotion and fulfilment of those rights within Northern Ireland. To that end the Commission will continue to engage with the international human rights systems, in particular the United Nations and Council of Europe systems. This will include contributing to the periodic reporting systems for particular treaties, including, in the first year of the present plan, the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). As in previous years, the Commission's involvement in these processes will include commenting to government on draft State reports; preparing and submitting parallel or 'shadow' reports; facilitating and supporting local interest groups to contribute to the process; attending and lobbying treaty bodies and monitoring how government implements treaty body recommendations.

The Commission is keen to provide a conduit for information on the impact of the State's legislation, policy and practices to the monitoring bodies, from those most directly affected. It will consult and inform relevant Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other civil society organisations, before and after the State report is considered, to promote understanding and awareness of the treaty, the monitoring process and the outcomes.

Within Northern Ireland it will work on these treaties in partnership with relevant rights-based agencies such as the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Core to the implementation of international standards in the domestic courts is of course, the Human Rights Act 1998. The Commission will continue to monitor the jurisprudence, provide training and produce materials to promote its effectiveness. Within the legal sector, there will be useful sharing of experience of the Act in the practitioners' forum, and the Commission will seek to identify cases which illustrate important developments in the application of the Act.

Seeking to influence legislation and policy

The legislation and policy review function of the Commission has to date been largely reactive, that is, responding to draft legislation, policy consultations, treaty monitoring processes and taking up other opportunities to respond to and influence law and practice. The Commission is also able to be proactive,



in identifying and addressing areas where reform of the law could be beneficial.

The intention is to give more attention in the life of this Strategic Plan to proactive work, and to following up on submissions and recommendations. This is likely to mean a reduction in the number of submissions, with a greater focus on ensuring effective outcomes.

The Commission will increasingly work on economic, social and cultural rights, which are equal in importance to – and inextricably linked with – the civil and political rights that have tended to dominate rights discourse in Northern Ireland. Areas that are likely to require greater attention in this context include poverty reduction, access to the highest attainable standard of health, budget analysis (relating public expenditure, whether generally or in specific departmental areas, to human rights obligations), and the rights of linguistic and cultural minorities.

Apart from those occasions when the Commission is statutorily obliged to respond, the several hundred opportunities for comment received in any given year will be prioritised, focussing on those policy areas where the most serious human rights concerns arise.

The Commission's legal work

The Commission is empowered to give legal assistance to individuals, including by way of providing, or funding, legal representation. Since the Commission's creation its work in this area has mainly consisted, firstly, of caseworkers offering advice to individuals who make contact by telephone, letter or email, or via their solicitors, and secondly, of funding litigation via the individual's solicitors. While there is a high demand for advice and funding, it is not necessarily the best way for the Commission to use its limited financial and staffing resources in the legal arena. This planning period is likely to see a realignment of this area of work, with a greater reliance on interventions in the courts, fuller details of which will emerge early in the first year (2006-07).

To reflect the anticipated change from individual support to a more strategic approach, it is proposed to redesignate the 'casework' area as the Commission's 'Legal Department'.

The range of issues presented to the Commission has always been very broad, and the consistent experience has been that only a minority of enquiries present litigable human rights points falling within its specialist mandate. In many cases the Commission has been able to resolve issues through an informal mediation role or through referrals to more appropriate help and support provided by other organisations in the statutory and voluntary sectors. The range of agencies with which the Commission already has working relationships is extensive, and work will continue in developing effective referral and partnership agreements.



Investigations

The Commission will continue to conduct investigations where long-standing systemic problems have been identified. These research exercises typically run over several months and result in a report with policy recommendations; they may involve conferences or other events, and follow-up work including lobbying.

Articles 2 and 3 (the right to life and the right not to be ill-treated, respectively) of the European Convention on Human Rights have provided the focus for several of the Commission's investigations and research reports. These include an examination of the treatment of children and young people and women in detention and the investigation of deaths in hospital, and planned work in respect of suicide and self-harm in prisons. Information guides for migrant workers are being finalised and an investigation into immigration and asylum procedures is at an early stage.

In identifying new areas of research and investigations, it will be important to retain capacity to ensure that previous work is adequately monitored and reinforced. In particular, the Commission will seek to maintain the momentum generated by its work on prisons, and to prepare for the use of anticipated new investigative powers including a statutory right of access to places of detention and powers to demand information and documents. The Commission intends to use these new powers, when granted, in an effective and judicious way, in close co-ordination with other relevant bodies.



Objectives

1. To secure effective outcomes for individuals and groups who seek the support of the Commission in addressing human rights complaints or concerns.

Performance indicator(s): the number, nature and outcome of individual or group complaints or concerns addressed by the Commission.

2. To promote the Human Rights Act 1998 and to increase the consideration given in the courts to applicable international human rights standards.

Performance indicator(s): the nature and outcome of legal interventions; level of engagement with the judiciary and legal professionals through training and networking events.

3. To secure changes in public policy to reflect the Human Rights Act 1998 and international human rights standards.

Performance indicator(s): the level of influence of the Commission as evidenced in changes to public policy.

4. To manage and invest in relationships with other key agencies and stakeholders in the field.

Performance indicator(s): the number of effective referrals made to and from other relevant agencies; frequency and nature of networking fora with identified agencies and stakeholders.

5. To monitor the jurisprudence of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the European Court of Human Rights and other international fora.

Performance indicator(s): the regularity and currency of the Commission's monitoring of Human Rights Act jurisprudence and that of the European Court of Human Rights.



6. To monitor the impact of counter-terrorism measures on individual human rights protections.

Performance indicator(s): the extent to which monitoring activity identifies and highlights potential human rights issues.

7. To use the Commission's powers effectively to investigate key human rights concerns and build on previous investigations and research, and monitor the implementation of recommendations.

Performance indicator(s): the number of investigations carried out; development and implementation of a strategy on visits to places of detention and other institutions; the number of recommendations from investigations which are implemented positively as documented in follow-up research.

8. To introduce a proactive approach to protecting social, economic and cultural rights.

Performance indicator(s): the number of reports, submissions, inquiries (possibly including public hearings), investigations and educational activities undertaken on economic social and cultural rights.

9. To respond to the reporting mechanisms of international treaty monitoring bodies and to build the capacity of those most directly affected to respond effectively themselves.

Performance indicator(s): the number of meetings and events held and publications produced relating to international treaty monitoring procedures; quality of input and publications; outcomes achieved.

10. To identify and develop cross-border pieces of work with the Irish Human Rights Commission through the Joint Committee.

Performance indicator(s): the number and outcomes of Joint Committee projects.



Aim 3: Building support for a Bill of Rights and working in partnership with others for its implementation

The history of the consultation process to date is well known and has involved very many people from a variety of backgrounds and interests across Northern Ireland and beyond. International advice and the encouragement and reflections of individuals have ensured that the Commission's work is informed by best practice from elsewhere.

Both popular and political consensus on what the Commission's advice might contain and the best mechanism to secure such consensus provide a core challenge to the Commission. There has been considerable debate among human rights commentators and others in civil society on the Bill of Rights project. During the incoming year it will be a priority for the Commission to engage with as many different perspectives as possible. The Commission supports the concept of creating a 'round table' of political parties and civil society as a means of achieving such consensus.

The Bill of Rights in Schools project has produced excellent core materials that are now available in all post-primary schools. There is an opportunity to adapt these materials to ensure that young people in the informal education sector also have access to the debate. Ensuring the effective participation of children and young people in the development of the Bill of Rights proposals continues to be important and the Commission will continue to work with colleagues in the office of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People and with the children's sector to develop partnerships.

Partnerships with various sectoral organisations, as well as with the Human Rights Consortium, have been helpful to the work of the Commission in the past and will continue to be so. The benefit of international experience and individual experts will continue to inform Commissioners' thinking. The major challenge remains, however, to engage all of the political parties and identify the relevance and importance of a Bill of Rights to Northern Ireland. It is hoped that this can be achieved and advice submitted to the Secretary of State within the period covered by this Strategic Plan.



Objectives

1. To encourage public confidence in and support for the concept of a Bill of Rights.

Performance indicator(s): the level of popular support for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland as indicated by public opinion survey.

2. To work to promote a Round Table of political parties and representatives of civil society as a way of achieving political consensus on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

Performance indicator(s): the extent of political party engagement with the Commission in support of a Bill of Rights.

3. To secure relevant information and advice from domestic and international sources in submitting advice to the Secretary of State.

Performance indicator(s): the level of engagement with domestic and international sources of expertise on the nature and contents of a Bill of Rights.

4. When appropriate, to submit advice to the Secretary of State on a Bill of Rights.

Performance indicator(s): the timing and impact of the advice given.

5. To develop extensive political engagement in Northern Ireland and at Westminster with the Bill of Rights process.

Performance indicator(s): the level of Commission engagement with politicians locally and at Westminster on the development of legislation to develop and enact a Bill of Rights.

6. To co-ordinate, in partnership with political parties and others from civil society, an effective lobby to maintain momentum for the implementation of advice when submitted.

Performance indicator(s): the number and range of organisations working to promote a Bill of Rights in Northern Ireland.



7. To secure a strong and inclusive Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, with wide public and political support.

Performance indicator(s): the number of recommendations in the Commission's advice accepted by government and progress in the development of legislation to enact a Bill of Rights.



Aim 4: Ensuring a strong and effective Human Rights Commission

The Commission has recently introduced a revised organisational structure with a new tier of management. Expanded and more accessible premises and enhanced operational systems have made a significant contribution to the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation. It is proposed to work towards, and achieve the Investors in People (IiP) Standard which provides a framework for the continuous improvement of staff, Commissioners and the effectiveness of the organisation. The government Landscape Review of the Commission, scheduled to take place in the autumn of 2006, provides another opportunity to assess progress, as does the development of specific guidelines by the United Nations on evaluating National Human Rights Institutions. The Commission has undertaken public opinion surveys every two years and will continue to do so, giving the opportunity to check achievements against previous baselines.

Compliance with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act, the Data Protection Act, the Disability Discrimination Act and the commitments of the Commission's own Equality Scheme involve considerable investment of staff time. Building on specialisms that have evolved in the administration team, it is anticipated that support to Commissioners and staff will be enhanced during the period of this Strategic Plan.

Resources remain a key issue in determining the extent of possible development of the Commission's information systems and services. Ideally, all of the Commission's resources should be as accessible and current as possible. The website is currently under reconstruction and the library is being catalogued and expanded. Relationships with other information banks are considered an important way of sharing resources, as is developing a staffed and user-friendly library facility within the Commission.

The Joint Committee of Representatives of the two Human Rights Commissions on the island of Ireland meets quarterly, alternating between Dublin and Belfast. Its work is co-ordinated through three sub-committees, on a charter of rights for the island of Ireland; on research and international work; and on racism and immigration. Consideration is being given to securing dedicated staff and resources for the Joint Committee to pursue, more vigorously, a common agenda of human rights concerns in both jurisdictions.

International partnerships will also continue to be given priority. The Commission has benefited greatly from, and contributed significantly to the developing National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) network, co-ordinated by the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights at the United Nations. During the life of this Strategic Plan, the Commission will play its part in new European co-operation initiatives through the European Group of NHRIs. In addition, networks have developed through the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth and the British Council in which this Commission will continue to play an active role.



Objectives

1. To co-operate fully with and give due regard to a Landscape Review by government.

Performance indicator(s): the relevance of the terms of reference of the Landscape Review to evaluating a National Human Rights Institution; the level of co-operation between the Commission and government in devising, implementing and responding to the Landscape Review.

2. To review the effectiveness of the organisation using guidance provided by the United Nations and other expert groups.

Performance indicator(s): level of satisfaction of users of services provided by the Commission; standing of the Commission in respect of international benchmarks for an NHRI; the accuracy of information provided by the Commission.

3. To implement and keep under review the Communications Strategy recently developed by the Commission.

Performance indicator(s): the level of press and media coverage of the Commission.

4. To implement a strategy to encourage stakeholder confidence in the Commission and its work.

Performance indicator(s): the perception of the Commission in relation to its values as indicated by those individuals and groups who interact with the organisation.

5. To enhance working relationships with the governments and administrations at Stormont, Westminster, Dublin, the Scottish and Welsh administrations, the Council of Europe, the United Nations and other bodies internationally.

Performance indicator(s): the level of communication, meetings and general contact with government administrations in the UK and Ireland, the Council of Europe, the United Nations and other bodies internationally.



6. To maintain an effective partnership with the Irish Human Rights Commission and secure sufficient resources to ensure the effective operation of the Joint Committee of Representatives of the two Human Rights Commissions on the island of Ireland.

Performance indicator(s): the level of communication, meetings and general contact with the Irish Human Rights Commission; the level of resources devoted to Joint Committee work.

7. To build on and develop international networks among national human rights institutions and international NGOs.

Performance indicator(s): the level of communication, meetings and general contact with other national human rights institutions and international NGOs.

8. To ensure that effective Memoranda of Understanding operate with relevant bodies in Northern Ireland and that the relationship with the sponsor department is monitored and regularly reviewed.

Performance indicator(s): the level of use of the various Memoranda of Understanding as effective working documents.

9. To secure sufficient resources, and manage them effectively, to achieve the Commission's mandate.

Performance indicator(s): level of resourcing; observance of all due propriety in management of resources; to become recognised as an Investor in People.

10. To enhance the ICT capacity of the Commission in order to promote its work effectively.

Performance indicator(s): the level of use of information provided through the website; more efficient ways of working using ICT.

11. To maximise the use of the Commission's information resources, including the reference library.

Performance indicator(s): the level of use of information provided through the library.



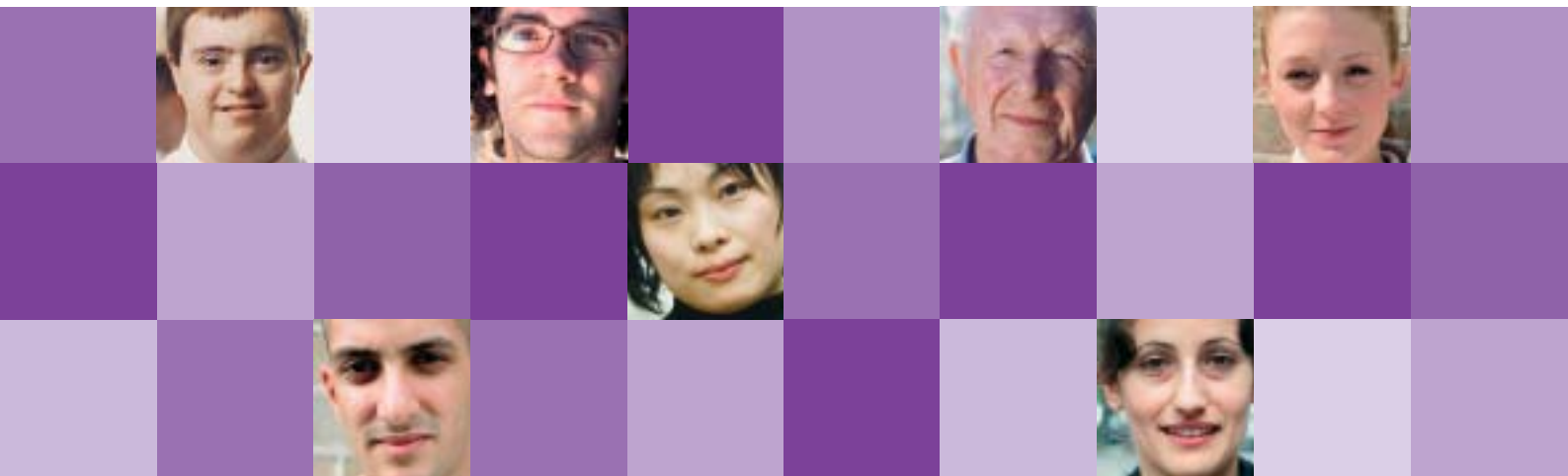
12. To comply with all statutory requirements placed on a public body.

Performance indicator(s): implementation of the Commission's Equality Scheme; development of a second Scheme that will focus on mainstreaming equality as well as complying with the statutory duty; respond to Freedom of Information requests within 20 working days; collection and maintenance of data under Data Protection Act requirements; exemplary compliance with anti-discrimination legislation; adherence with health and safety requirements.

13. To review and implement a programme for interns and volunteers.

Performance indicator(s): number of interns and volunteers contributing to work of the Commission; mutual levels of satisfaction with the internship/volunteering programme.

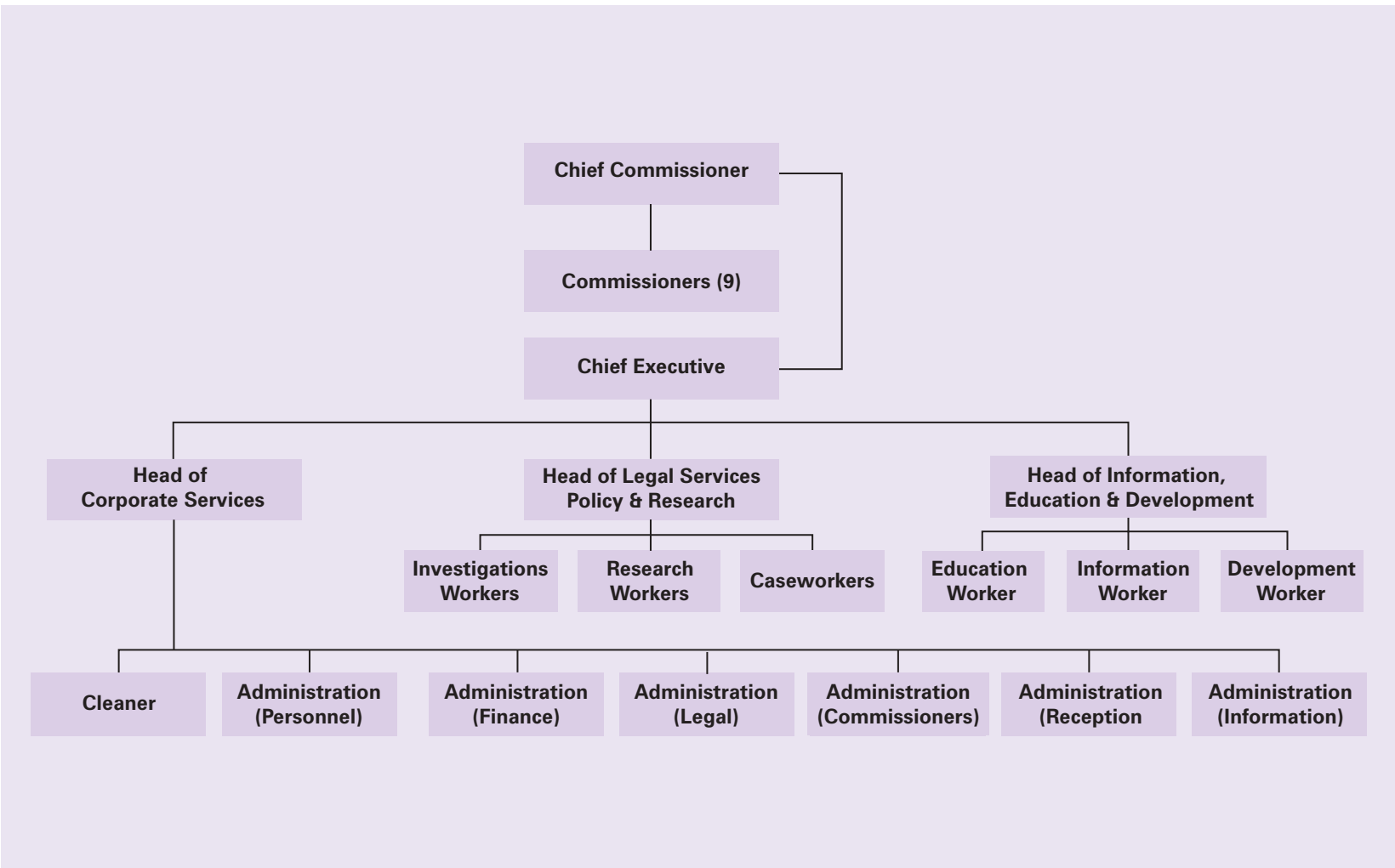
Appendices



Strategic Plan 2006-2009



Appendix 1 Organisation Chart





Appendix 2

Commissioners

Chief Commissioner

Monica McWilliams

Monica McWilliams was appointed full-time Chief Commissioner for Human Rights in Northern Ireland in June 2005. Previously, she was Professor of Women's Studies and Social Policy at the University of Ulster and served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly in Northern Ireland from 1996 to 2003. She was the co-founder of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition. She was elected to the Multi-Party Peace Negotiations which led to the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

Monica has published two books on domestic violence in Northern Ireland. She has received honorary degrees from Lesley College, Massachusetts and Mount Mary College, Milwaukee and is a graduate of Queen's University Belfast and the University of Michigan.

Commissioners

There are nine other Commissioners who work part-time for the Commission (approximately one day per week). They are:

Jonathan Bell

Jonathan Bell is a graduate of Queen's University with a BA (Hons) Psychology (1991) and Master of Social Work (1996). He also holds a Diploma in Social Work – CCETSW 1996. Jonathan was a councillor for Craigavon Borough Council during 1997-2005 and was elected to Ards Borough Council in 2005. He is a member of the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, a Director of the Local Government International Bureau and professionally practices as Senior Practitioner in an adolescent social work team.

Thomas Duncan

Thomas Duncan was Headmaster of the Royal School Armagh between 1988 and 2002 and Deputy Headmaster of Dalriada School, Ballymoney from 1974 until 1988 where he also acted as Head of Science. His main qualifications include MA (NUU) – Education Administration, DASE (NUU) – Education Administration and BSc (Hons) (QUB) – Chemistry.

He has fulfilled a number of public roles which include acting as the Chairman of Armagh Together, Armagh Marketing Initiative, Armagh District Scout Council, the Northern Ireland Boarding Schools Partnership and Armagh Rotary Club. He is also a member of the Armagh Diocesan Board of Education, Secretary of the Friends of St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh and Executive Officer of the 1608 Royal Schools, which celebrate their 400th Anniversary in 2008.

His interests include travelling, golf, theatre and sport.



Christine Eames

Lady Eames was formerly World President of the Mothers' Union from 1995 to 2000. She is a law graduate with an MPhil in Medical Ethics and currently chairs the Human Rights Committee of the Mental Health Review Team, on behalf of the Commission. A Central Trustee of Christian Aid in Ireland and worldwide, Christine has an active interest in cross-community work and young people.

Lady Eames was appointed as a part-time member to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission in December 2001. She was awarded an OBE in the 2006 New Year's Honours List for services to the community in Northern Ireland.

Colin Harvey

Colin Harvey is Professor of Human Rights Law and Director of the Human Rights Centre, School of Law, Queen's University Belfast. From 2000 to 2004 he was Professor of Constitutional and Human Rights Law, School of Law, University of Leeds and Co-Convener of the Human Rights Research Unit. He was a member of the Northern Ireland Higher Education Council 2002 to 2006. Colin is also on the Advisory Board of the British Institute of Human Rights and the Steering Group of the UK section of the International Association of Constitutional Law. He was Refugee Co-ordinator for Amnesty International (Irish Section) 1998 to 2000 and a member of the Executive of the Committee on the Administration of Justice 1999 to 2000.

He is on the editorial board of *Human Rights Law Review* and *The Journal of Civil Liberties* and is the Case Editor for the *International Journal of Refugee Law*. He has published extensively in academic and more popular formats, on issues of human rights law and politics. His publications include: *Seeking Asylum in the UK: Problems and Prospects* (2000), *Human Rights in the Community: Rights as Agents for Change* (2005), *Sanctuary in Ireland: Perspectives on Asylum Law and Policy* (2004) (with Ursula Fraser), *Human Rights, Equality and Democratic Renewal in Northern Ireland* (2001), 'The Right to Seek Asylum in the European Union' (2004) *European Human Rights Law Review* 17-36; 'Framing Refugee Protection in the New World Disorder' (2001) *Cornell International Law Journal* 257-320 (with Professor James Hathaway).

Alan Henry

Alan Henry was Head of Human Resources, Royal Mail from 1988 to 2003.

He is currently a Civil Service Commissioner, an Independent Assessor for the Office of Public Appointments and an Assessor for the National Patient Safety Authority. He is also a lay panellist for the Office of Industrial Tribunals.

Alan was formerly a Lay Schools Inspector for the Department of Education and a Commissioner of the Equality Commission.

Alan is also a principal in a human resources consultancy practice.



Ann Hope

Until recently (2005) Ann Hope was Advisory Services Officer with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions where she had responsibility for gender equality and for progressing work on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, Single Equality legislation and the proposed Bill of Rights.

Her background is in adult and community education and prior to working with Congress, Ann worked as a tutor organiser with the Workers' Educational Association where she taught trade union studies and women's studies. An active trade unionist all her working life, Ann has held many positions in the trade union movement at Branch, Regional and National levels and was President of Belfast and District Council of Trade Unions.

She has served on a number of public bodies including the Board of Prison Visitors for Maghaberry Prison, the Health and Safety Agency, the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland, of which she was Deputy Chair, and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. Currently she serves on the Board of the Women's National Commission, the government's official independent advisory body on women and is a Governor of the Pensions Policy Institute. She was a founder member of Democratic Dialogue and was its chair for five years. She was a member of the former Northern Ireland Women's Coalition.

She holds a Masters in Education, a BA in History and Politics and a Diploma in Trade Union Studies.

Kevin McLaughlin

Kevin McLaughlin is a freelance trainer and consultant on disability issues. He currently sits as a user/community representative on the Mid-Ulster Local Health and Social Care Group. Kevin is also a member of the Ofcom Consumer Panel and, when sitting, the Civic Forum.

A graduate of the University of Ulster and Queen's University, Belfast, he also holds an MA in Disability Studies from the University of Leeds.

Kevin was appointed as a part-time member of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission in December 2001.

Eamonn O'Neill

Eamonn O'Neill was a school teacher for 30 years in St Malachy's High School, Castlewellan and Vice Principal for the last ten of those years. An elected councillor to Down Council from 1977 to the present, he has held all the major positions in the council.

Eamonn was a long time member of the Northern Ireland Housing Council and was appointed to the Board of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive from 1995 to 1998, and reappointed to the Board from November 2005.



He was also a member and past chairman on two occasions of the East Border Region from May 1977 until May 2005. He was elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly and appointed chairman of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure 1998 to 2003. Eamonn also serves as a member of the Eastern Health and Social Services Council.

Eamonn has been the chairman and vice chairman of the Down District Policing Partnership from 2002 to the present and was Northern Ireland chairman and then national chairman of the Association of Public Services Excellence in 2003. In addition, he founded and has chaired the local regeneration group Castlewellan Regeneration Ltd from 1991 to the present.

Geraldine Rice

Since 1995, Geraldine Rice has been a self-employed trainer and consultant to the hospitality industry, and a trainer in food hygiene for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Geraldine was elected as an Alliance Party councillor in 1989 and is still serving in that capacity as Alderman and most recently as Deputy Mayor for Castlereagh Borough Council. Having been a board member of Clanmil Housing Association since 1998 and elected chair in 2004, she has served as chair of the finance committee and a Director of Clanmil Properties and Clanmil Ireland (both of these positions are voluntary). She has also been a member of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland. Geraldine currently serves as a board member of the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland and is a member of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland.

Her qualifications include Member of the British Institute of Cleaning Science MBICSc, registered trainer with the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, Accredited Trainers Certificate with the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, ECDLC Certificate in Computer Skills, OCR Certificate in Counselling Skills and a University of Ulster Certificate in Counselling.



Appendix 3

Statutory Authority

Extract from the Northern Ireland Act 1998

Functions of the Commission

69. (1) The Commission shall keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness in Northern Ireland of law and practice relating to the protection of human rights.
- (2) The Commission shall, before the end of the period of two years beginning with the commencement of this section, make to the Secretary of State such recommendations as it thinks fit for improving –
- (a) its effectiveness;
 - (b) the adequacy and effectiveness of the functions conferred on it by this Part; and
 - (c) the adequacy and effectiveness of the provisions of this Part relating to it.
- (3) The Commission shall advise the Secretary of State and the Executive Committee of the Assembly of legislative and other measures which ought to be taken to protect human rights –
- (a) as soon as reasonably practicable after receipt of a general or specific request for advice; and
 - (b) on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate.
- (4) The Commission shall advise the Assembly whether a Bill is compatible with human rights –
- (a) as soon as reasonably practicable after receipt of a request for advice; and
 - (b) on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate.
- (5) The Commission may –
- (a) give assistance to individuals in accordance with section 70; and



- (b) bring proceedings involving law or practice relating to the protection of human rights.
- (6) The Commission shall promote understanding and awareness of the importance of human rights in Northern Ireland; and for this purpose it may undertake, commission or provide financial or other assistance for-
 - (a) research; and
 - (b) educational activities.
- (7) The Secretary of State shall request the Commission to provide advice of the kind referred to in paragraph 4 of the Human Rights section of the Belfast Agreement.
- (8) For the purpose of exercising its functions under this section the Commission may conduct such investigations as it considers necessary or expedient.
- (9) The Commission may decide to publish its advice and the outcome of its research and investigations.
- (10) The Commission shall do all that it can to ensure the establishment of the committee referred to in paragraph 10 of that section of that Agreement.
- (11) In this section –
 - (a) a reference to the Assembly includes a reference to a committee of the Assembly;
 - (b) “human rights” includes the Convention rights.

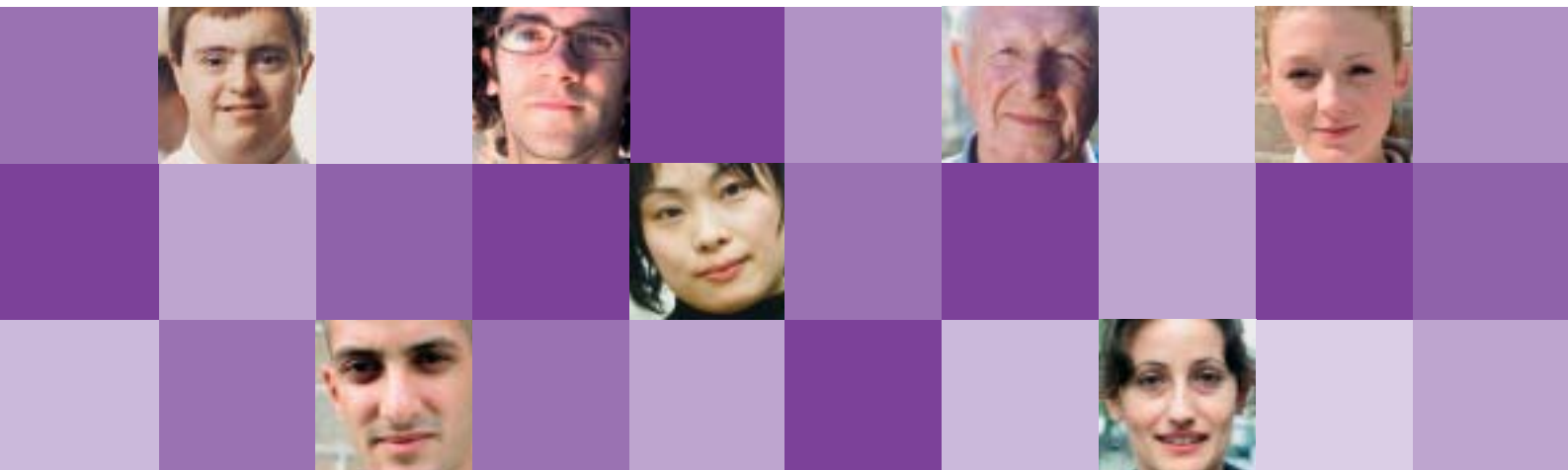
Assistance by the Commission

70. (1) This section applies to–
- (a) proceedings involving law or practice relating to the protection of human rights which a person in Northern Ireland has commenced, or wishes to commence; or
 - (b) proceedings in the course of which such a person relies, or wishes to rely, on such law or practice.



- (2) Where the person applies to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission for assistance in relation to proceedings to which this section applies, the Commission may grant the application on any of the following grounds–
 - (a) that the case raises a question of principle;
 - (b) that it would be unreasonable to expect the person to deal with the case without assistance because of its complexity, or because of the person's position in relation to another person involved, or for some other reason;
 - (c) that there are other special circumstances which make it appropriate for the Commission to provide assistance.
- (3) Where the Commission grants an application under subsection (2) it may–
 - (a) provide, or arrange for the provision of, legal advice;
 - (b) arrange for the provision of legal representation;
 - (c) provide any other assistance which it thinks appropriate.
- (4) Arrangements made by the Commission for the provision of assistance to a person may include provision for recovery of expenses from the person in certain circumstances.

Protecting and promoting your rights



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