



## Charity Commission: partnership strategy

Our partnership strategy co-ordinates and signposts to combined resources of the commission and charity sector organisations.

### Where we enter into partnerships

Partnerships are driven by our regulatory priorities, particularly by promoting compliance, accountability and self-reliance. We aspire to an impact in these areas beyond what we have previously been able to achieve.

Our partnership work operates across a spectrum of activities and relationships, from one-off engagements to significant long-term collaborations. In between these extremes lies a range of interactions, reflecting the focus and capacity of our partners.

We look at ways to highlight, support and (where appropriate) promote our partners' support services and activities. We are developing a new range of services and approaches to help our partners.

We are currently piloting the partnership arrangements with a small number of organisations. Until the pilot is finished we will be unable to handle unsolicited requests from organisations wishing to become partners. However, we will welcome expressions of interest as soon as our partnership initiative is fully up and running.

We also hope our partnerships will inspire opportunities for collaboration among sector actors beyond the confines of the partnership strategy to address issues that other bodies are better able to manage than the Commission.

#### **Please note that:**

- **Our partners are not the only organisations which may be providing useful support to charities.**
- **The word "partner" is not used in the legal sense where partners are subject to a contract or agreement. It is used to indicate an organisation with which we are cooperating in certain areas of work but where there is no legal agreement or arrangement between the Commission and the organisation in question.**
- **Although we may, where appropriate, support or even endorse our partners' products (like quality standards or trustee guidance), partnership does not mean that we are approving or endorsing the partner organisation itself or any member or service user of that organisation.**
- **The relationship we have with a charity which is our partner does not affect our powers to regulate it or to intervene to protect its assets or beneficiaries.**

We actively manage all partnerships and they are subject to a [partnership agreement](#).

Our partnership work comprises three main strands:

1. Encouraging other support for charities
2. Endorsing quality assessment systems
3. Our review programme

## 1. Encouraging other support for charities

We give support, in different ways, to umbrella bodies and other intermediary bodies providing advice, support and guidance to their members and the wider sector.

We strongly recommend that charities consider the benefits of belonging to groupings of bodies similar to themselves, or of subscribing to the services of support organisations.

Trustees will frequently need access to advice, guidance and other support to help them make well-informed decisions, to comply with their legal requirements, and to help them deliver the right kind and quality of services. There is a huge range of support provided by organisations that can help charities and the people who run them.

The Charity Commission works in partnership with a number of these organisations. Most, but not all, of these organisations are charities themselves. Broadly speaking, these organisations may take the form of:

- ‘umbrella bodies’ - these represent and/or coordinate the activities of their members (usually charities having the same purpose), and often provide a range of membership support services
- capacity-building and support bodies - these tend to provide services to charities more generally (either locally or nationally) and can cover either wide or specialist areas of advice, guidance or other support

Our partners provide services that complement our own and that cover topics that we cannot. Our partnership with them does not mean that they are the only organisations providing useful support. Nor does it mean that we endorse these organisations. Partnership means that we and our partners have agreed to collaborate to help them deliver certain services. In some cases we may support or even endorse their products if they are particularly useful.

## 2. Endorsement of sector-led quality standards

We endorse sector-led quality assessment schemes that raise governance and service standards among charities.

We recommend you use quality assessment systems as part of your charity's continual improvement process, helping you make sure that:

- any products or services your charity produces are fit for purpose, and/or
- your charity is run effectively
- We believe that quality systems can make a significant contribution to an effectively-run charitable sector.
- We actively encourage service commissioners and funders to consider the importance of quality systems when awarding contracts, grants and funding to charities.

There are various quality standards and assessment products available to charities. Some of these cover all aspects of a charity's governance. Others focus on specialist or technical areas, like the provision of advocacy services or helplines.

[@!2 link to separate PDF file attachment on GOV.UK: quality assessment systems – detailed guidance]

Many of the charitable sector bodies which offer these products collaborate through the Accreditation Providers' Forum (APF). We encourage and support the APF's work in raising awareness of quality assessment.

[Accreditation Providers' Forum - website](#)

### About the systems we endorse

We only endorse systems which:

- are produced by and for the charitable sector
- cover the legal requirements for charities
- cover all the activities of a charity (not just part of them)
- are consistent with our guidance [Hallmarks of an effective charity \(CC10\)](#)
- include independent assessment
- include site visits

Our [endorsement](#) typically lasts for 4 years, in which the organisation operating the system can use our endorsement logo in its promotional material. We can withdraw our endorsement if a system fails to meet our criteria.

#### Organisations and systems we currently endorse

- [ACRE \(Action with Communities in Rural England\)](#)  
Good Practice Quality Standard - available to member organisations
- [Age UK](#)  
Organisational Quality Standards version 1 - available to member organisations
- [Charities Evaluation Services](#)  
PQASSO Quality Mark 3rd edition - available to any voluntary & community organisation
- [Community Matters \(National Federation of Community Organisations\)](#)  
VISIBLE Standards 2011 - available to any voluntary & community organisation
- [CTA \(Community Transport Association UK\)](#)  
The CTA Quality Mark - available to member organisations
- [Home-Start UK](#)  
Quality Assurance System 2014 - available to member organisations
- [Mind \(The National Association for Mental Health\)](#)  
MQM (Mind Quality Management) - available to member organisations
- [UK Community Foundations](#)  
Quality Accreditation (QA3) - available to member organisations
- [YMCA England \(National Council of YMCAs\)](#)  
Insync 2010 - available to member organisations

### 3. Our review programme

We work with partners to promote free consultancies for individual charities as a way of providing better support to the sector as a whole.

Following our strategic review in 2011, we believe that the charitable sector has a vital role in strengthening its own governance. Find out how we are developing a series of projects with key partners as part of a review programme.

#### About the review programme

The programme is aimed at encouraging charities to help strengthen themselves. Each project consists of two parts:

- individual charity reviews assessing a particular topic of governance
- an analysis of the combined findings of those reviews presented in a report to the Commission

The programme will produce a number of benefits for stakeholders of the charitable sector. These include:

- promoting the sector's self-reliance in improving its own governance
- raising awareness of general good governance and particularly risk management
- using a range of expertise to develop governance for the sector
- bringing together bodies with relevant expertise to target guidance and advice in key areas

At the same time as helping themselves, charities taking advantage of these reviews will be helping the Commission identify how the charitable sector can be better supported in improving performance in key areas of governance. The lessons learnt from the reviews can help the Commission and other providers of support to the sector in developing their policies and guidance.

The Commission is planning a small number of initial projects to help develop the review programme. Each project will focus on a separate topic through the reviews.

#### Free consultancy

What's new about this initiative is that it is not the Commission which is undertaking the reviews.

Each review will be a service provided free by someone with expertise in the project theme. This might be someone from a particular profession, such as an accountant or lawyer, or someone with experience of working within the sector, such as a senior charity employee or an adviser from a charity support organisation. Each charity that's reviewed will get a report assessing how they're doing in a specific area of governance.

## Not a statutory inspection

We want charities to feel free to take part in these review projects without looking over their shoulders to see if we are scrutinising them.

Although we set the agenda for each review, the Commission won't be involved in the reviews. We won't even know which charities are involved in the reviews. The selection process will be undertaken by, or on behalf of, the reviewers, and will be a private arrangement between each reviewer and the charity being reviewed. The reviewers will not be acting as our agents. The reviews will not be part of our statutory functions.

## Working in partnership

On each project we will work with a partner who will help us to shape the agenda, and to identify potential reviewers. The partner will be one or more organisations with particular expertise or knowledge important to the charitable sector. The partner organisation may also provide administrative support for the reviewers, including co-ordinating the selection of charities for the reviews.

## Benefits for the reviewed charities

Participating charities will have access to practical tools:

- a free, confidential, consultation looking at a specific key area of their governance
- bespoke suggestions for enhancing that area of governance
- the opportunity to incorporate assessment processes into the management of their charity

## Benefits for the project partners

The bodies partnering us on the project will have opportunities to:

- (where applicable) promote the participation of their members in a structured review process
- engage better with the Commission to identify new or improved products to meet the sectors' needs

## Benefits for the reviewers

The experience of reviewers will be enriched, making practical contributions to the well-being of the sector: through the individual assessment and advisory opportunities; and by serving as an expert panel for the Commission, interpreting and commenting on the trends and needs identified through the reviews.

## Benefits for the sector

The Programme gives the sector:

- practical examples of the benefits of governance assessments and risk management
- better signposting of relevant information and guidance from Commission and other providers
- opportunities to suggest programme topics addressing important issues of the day

## Pilot projects

### **Review of financial controls and risk awareness**

This project was run in partnership with the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW), and the reviewers have now delivered their findings. You can download the report from the ICAEW website:

- Findings from the ICAEW and Charity Commission pilot project (PDF)

We recommend this report to trustees as a valuable contribution to their discussions about financial controls and risk management.

- Commission's Response to the Review of Financial Controls and Risk Awareness - January 2013 (PDF)

### **Review of the governance of newly registered charities**

This project is run in partnership with the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA)