



**Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta
an Duine agus Comhionannas**
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

Customer Service Charter

November 2022

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Purpose

This Customer Charter describes the level of service a customer can expect from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. This Customer Charter outlines the arrangements which have been put in place to facilitate Quality Customer Service. This Charter is based around a continuous four-step cycle of:

1. Consultation with customers/stakeholders
2. Commitment to service standards
3. Evaluation of performance
4. Reporting on results

Who we are

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is Ireland's national human rights institution and national equality body. Our work is determined independently by the fifteen members of the Commission who were appointed by our Head of State, President Michael D. Higgins and account directly to the Houses of the Oireachtas.

We are supported by the Director/Accounting Officer and staff of the Commission.

Our Vision

Our vision is of an inclusive Ireland where human rights and equality are respected, protected and fulfilled for everyone, everywhere.

Our Mission

Our mission is to build a just and inclusive society that protects and promotes human rights and equality in Ireland.

Mandate

Our founding legislation, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014 sets out our mandate to protect and promote human rights and equality. In addition, we are

required to encourage the development of a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding in the State.

Our work ranges from operating at the policy level to review the effectiveness of human rights and equality law, policy and practice in the State and within public bodies, to working with communities and civil society to monitor and report on people's real-life experiences of human rights and equality in practice. Our legal powers include giving practical help, including legal assistance, to give people an understanding of the means by which to vindicate their rights. We also intervene as *amicus curiae* in the Superior Courts in cases relevant to human rights or equality rights. Whether addressing individual concerns, engaging with government or public bodies on policy and practice issues or raising awareness with public audiences on human rights and equality, our mission is to build a just and inclusive society that protects and promotes human rights and equality in Ireland.

Our Values

Our values define how we approach our work, how we work as a Commission and how we engage with people living in this state. We believe that our values are key to our culture, and critical to our performance as an organisation.

Non-Discrimination and Equality

We commit to supporting people who face the greatest barriers to justice as part of human rights and equality protection for all.

Respect

We build respect and trust by valuing the contribution and initiative of everyone within our organisation and those we work with. Respecting the trust placed in us, we conduct our work to the highest professional standards.

Independence

We value our independence and act, where others cannot always do so, in furtherance of human rights, equality and intercultural understanding. We take action based on the highest quality evidence and robust decision-making.

Accountability

We are fully committed to the values of openness, transparency and accountability to the people and to the Oireachtas.

Participation

We recognise the personal autonomy and self-determination of all rights holders and duty bearers. We are committed to hearing and learning from others' perspectives.

Responsive

We are responsive to opportunities to advance our mission, and we ensure that our governance, resources, and ways of working support this approach.

Collaborative

We collaborate across and beyond the organisation so that we act promptly and effectively.

Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 provides that a public body shall, in the performance of its functions, have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services, and protect, promote and fulfil the human rights of its members, staff and the persons to whom it provides services.¹

We, as a public body, recognise that service provision is a core function of our organisation and that the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty applies to it on an ongoing basis. In line with our obligations under Section 42 we will assess how we provide services to the public from an equality and human rights perspective in each strategic planning cycle, identify issues and actions and publish this assessment in our strategic plan. We will also report on progress and achievements on these actions in our annual report.

What we do

Our mission is to build a just and inclusive society that protects and promotes human rights and equality in Ireland.

In our Strategy Statement 2022 – 2024 we set five strategic objectives as follows;

1. Economic Equality – We will seek greater economic equality in housing, employment, income for and for carers
2. Justice – We will defend access to justice and the rule of law in the international protective system, in the courts and in the use of public powers.
3. Respect and Recognition – We will promote the eradication of racism, ableism, ageism and sexism through the public understanding and State action.
4. Futureproofing – We will respond to crises that threaten rights and equality, including the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change.
5. Public Sector duty- We will encourage, report and enforce the compliance of public bodies.

¹ Further information on the Duty is available at <https://www.ihrec.ie/our-work/public-sector-duty/>

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The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission has a range of distinctive competencies and strengths on which we will build as we implement this Strategy.

Collaboration and participation

‘Nothing about us’ is a mantra that remind us to constantly listen to and meaningfully involve those who are most affected by the issues we address. Over the lifespan of this strategy we will:

- Seek, include and value lived experience a crucial expertise that inform our work.
- Work in an inclusive way and apply the power networks. We have productive relationships with a range of stakeholder, nationally and internationally. These relationships help in developing and progressing a shared approach to issues and opportunities.
- Work with stakeholders to frame issues to addressed and, where appropriate, support implementation of policy change.
- Actively engage with our stakeholders to communicate the role, remit and ambitions of IHREC and maintain high levels of participation in all areas of activities.

Our people, our culture and our communications

The culture of an organisation can support its strategy or work against it. Our people are core to the success of IHREC and the pursuit of our mission. Over the lifespan of this strategy, we will;

- Place a high priority on the continued development of our people in the line with our organisational need.
- Devote time to understand our stakeholders’ requirements and deliver our messages to them in the most effective was possible.
- Support the achievement of desired outcomes by getting our messages to the right people in the right way and at the right time.
- Constantly ask “how and we do this better”?

Appropriate resources and governance

Over the lifespan of this strategy, we will;

- Establish long-term vision setting as an ongoing activity
- Work to ensure the appropriate resources and system are in place to deliver on our roles and responsibilities and support organisational growth, including those area where additional expertise is needed.
- Develop an informed workforce, financial and capital models that meet the needs of our changing organisation and which ensure we have sufficient resources to deliver our functions.
- Ensure our organisational structure supports the delivery of our strategic objectives and our statutory functions.

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What we do not do

The Independence of IHREC is set out in the legislation² and is in line with international best practice for national human rights and equality bodies³. To effect this independence IHREC does not report to any Minister but rather reports directly to the Oireachtas in an Annual Report⁴ and through the Director acting in his role as Accounting Officer.⁵ In line with these principles of independence we do not respond to Parliamentary Questions through the Department of the Minister to which it is asked but rather respond directly in writing to the Dáil Deputy who asked the question.

Our Customers

Our customers are all persons living in Ireland in order to protect and defend their human rights and ensure equality of treatment. They would include persons that may be affected by unfair discrimination and persons experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

² Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act (2014) Section 9(2).

³ UN Paris Principles; UN General Assembly 1993.

⁴ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act (2014), Section 30.

⁵ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act (2014), Section 21 & 21.

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We also recognise our internal IHREC customers who are our colleagues working within IHREC.

In order to achieve this IHREC engages with a variety of individuals and bodies including;

- Individuals or groups of people whose rights have been violated or who face barriers to justice or are experiencing poverty or social exclusion
- Civil society organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's), rights-holder groups, area based community groups and communities of interest and Trade Unions and Employer Organisations, and other groups engaging on human rights and equality issues
- Organisations who are in receipt of grant aid from IHREC in relation to specific human rights and equality projects
- Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission, Northern Ireland
- Public Bodies⁶ to encourage and advise in relation to best practice human rights and equality provision
- The Minister⁷ may request a submission on human rights, discrimination or equality issues from IHREC
- International bodies such as
 - the United Nations,
 - the Council of Europe
 - European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
 - European Network of Equality Bodies (EQUINET),
 - European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI),
 - Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).

People whom our work affects

Our work includes meeting and working with a wide range of organisations and groups e.g. representative organisations for minorities or sections of the community that experience discrimination, civil society organisations - and public bodies. Our work also includes presenting information at seminars and conferences.

We talk to people whom our work affects and this helps guide our work. The people whom our work affects include;

- Organisations who provide services to minority groups or people who frequently are subject to discrimination or suffer injustices

⁶ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act (2014), Section 42

⁷ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act (2014), Section 31

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- Employers' groups, trade unions, community and voluntary sector groups, individual enterprises, and community networks
- Public bodies who provide services to people living in Ireland.

Our Governance

We have a Commission with 14 members and a Chief Commissioner appointed by the President of Ireland.

We also have a Director who acts as Accounting Officer directly responsible for the propriety, efficiency and effectiveness of the expenditure provided by the Exchequer. The Director also reports to the Commission.

Our Teams

The staff of the IHREC work across 5 Teams;

- Policy and Research
- Strategic Engagement
- Legal
- Corporate Services
- Anti-Human Trafficking National Rapporteur

Policy and Research Team

The Policy and Research Team works on the development of policy statements and policy positions, legislative observations and international reporting, and the development of research and data to support the evidence base for human rights and equality.

Strategic Engagement Team

The Strategic Engagement Team works on communications and public affairs, public awareness and engagement with civil society and the broader public including through delivery of the grants schemes, and other supports for education and training and leads the Commission's programme of work on the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. The

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Team also administers the Commission's human rights and equality grants scheme and leads on the organisation of events, conferences and awareness raising initiatives

Legal Team

The Legal Team works on the litigation and legal enforcement functions of the Commission, including amicus curiae interventions, legal assistance to individuals, own name proceedings and equality reviews and provides legal information to individual members of the public through our 'Your Rights' information service.

Corporate Services Team

Our Corporate Services Team work on recruitment, human resource management, staff learning and development, finance, governance, risk and compliance, facilities management as well as information technology.

Anti-Human Trafficking National Rapporteur

IHREC has been designated as Ireland's independent National Rapporteur per the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive (2015) and the UN Palermo Protocol (2005). A small unit was established in 2021 to develop policies and procedures in order to fulfil these responsibilities.

Our commitment to customers

We are committed to developing, promoting, and providing a high quality customer service to our customers and staff. We do this by having regard to the 12 Guiding Principles for Quality Customer Service guided by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (See Appendix 1) and our statutory obligation under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 (Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty).

Our commitment to accessibility

We are committed to ensuring that all persons can access our services with ease and in particular we;

- Make sure that people with disabilities, when dealing with us, will be supported and assisted, if and when required, as part of IHREC commitment to reasonable accommodation



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- Carry out an access audit on our building every 3 years and try to fix any problems that we see during those audits, as far as practicable
- Quickly respond to customers who tell us about accessibility problems in the Green Street building, services, or publications including electronic publications and other communications such as audio-visual tools etc.
- Ensure we choose accessible venues for our events
- Deliver and update, when necessary, the template for our corporate style. This template makes our written correspondence and publications more accessible by specifying formats, fonts, line spacing, and other details
- Depending on the nature of the event we communicate about it via email, twitter, website and newsletter
- Provide information in alternative formats to suit the needs of people with hearing, vision, and intellectual impairments, on request wherever practicable and appropriate
- Provide sign language interpreters or speed-text facilities where requested at our events, when people request them before the event (subject to availability from external service providers)
- Arrange for the refreshment and hygiene requirements of assistive animals at our events, when people ask us before the events
- Meet our obligations under the Disability Act 2005 to provide accessible information and services and an accessible building
- Use plain English, where possible.

Access Officer

Any persons with disabilities seeking information or advice relating to accessing the services of the Commission can contact our Access Officer by email at accessofficer@ihrec.ie or by phoning us on 01-8589601 and asking for our Access Officer, or writing to us.

Events

Any persons attending events at the IHREC premises can request additional assistance including Irish Sign Language, dietary requirements, and use of the loop system for hearing. Changing Places facilities are also available. Requests for assistance can be made directly by phone to the organisers of the events, in writing or at: <https://www.ihrec.ie/accessibility>.

Meetings and visits

We will;

- Meet and greet you in a timely, courteous and fair manner
- Make sure our receptionist knows the location of our meetings and the availability of staff members to escort visitors as required
- Make a suitable meeting area available for business meetings
- Accommodate your accessibility requirements, when you have told us about those requirements before your visit. We can provide sign language interpreters for our meetings for people who request them before the meeting (subject to availability of external providers).

Phoning IHREC

We will;

- Make sure that phone calls will be answered when we are open, from 9:00-13:00 and 14:00 -17:00, from Monday to Friday and where this is not practical, on certain occasions, that a voicemail system will be in place
- Try to answer calls to our reception promptly
- Answer all calls politely
- Transfer calls to a member of staff who can help you
- Inform you before transferring your call to another staff member
- Identify ourselves when we answer a phone call that our reception staff have transferred
- Try to phone you back within three working days, if the staff member that you need to talk to is unavailable
- Make sure that our voicemail facility works when staff are unavailable to answer phone calls
- Make every effort to assist callers. In the event that we cannot assist in the request made for any reason, we will inform the caller as to why we cannot assist in this request and politely inform the caller that we cannot assist further
- Terminate calls after informing the caller that we are going to terminate the call, where the caller is abusive or impolite to our staff
- Tell you which organisation can help you, if you have a query that we do not deal with.

Written correspondence including email

We will;

- Acknowledge all general enquiries within 5 working days
- Either reply to you fully within 15 working days, or tell you when we can reply fully to you
- Refer enquiries to a member of staff who can help
- Make sure that when you email a staff member who is away from the office for more than a working day, you will receive an “out of office” email that names a member of staff who can help you or a relevant team email address that can help you
- Reply in the same way that you contacted us, or reply in the way that you ask for. For example, we will normally phone you back if you have phoned us, and email you back if you have emailed us.

Correspondence through Irish

We will fulfil our obligations under the Official Languages Act 2003 by;

- Conducting business through Irish when requested
- Writing back to you in Irish if you write to us in Irish, and either reply fully within 15 working days, or tell you when we can reply fully to you
- Replying immediately if you wish to speak in Irish, or ask another member of staff to reply to you in Irish.

Our Annual Report is available in Irish and English, as the Official Languages Act, 2003 requires.

Freedom of Information

Our Freedom of Information Officer deals with requests made under the Freedom of Information Acts. You can contact our Freedom of Information Officer at foi@ihrec.ie or by phoning us on 01-8589601, or by writing to us. You can read more about the Freedom of Information @ www.foi.gov.ie.

Data Protection

We obtain limited personal information about guest speakers and those who attend our events or use our services, such as contact details, bank details for any reimbursements, or details of reasonable accommodation required.

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We may also obtain personal information about participants in research, which is then anonymised for any further processing and analysis.

We hold personal information in relation to our staff and our Commission Members.

In gathering and storing this personal information we ensure that;

- We will get personal information fairly and openly
- We will only use personal information for the reasons that it was given to us
- We will protect personal information against unauthorised access or loss
- We will keep personal information accurate and up-to-date, and change it when asked
- We will keep personal information only as long as necessary.

You can ask us for a copy of the information that we have about you, by emailing dpo@ihrec.ie.

You can read more about data protection @ www.dataprotection.ie.

IHREC website

Our IHREC website (<http://www.ihrec.ie>) has information about;

The structure of IHREC

Our publications, our policy, standards and research projects

Minutes of Commission and Committee meetings

Our services

Our work and functions

Public awareness campaigns

Upcoming IHREC events/ conferences/ seminars

Recent press releases

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Contact and feedback

We welcome feedback about the quality of our services. We provide feedback forms at our seminars, conferences, and workshops: when we get feedback it helps us to improve our services and our performance.

In line with good practice for Customer Service Charters⁸, IHREC are committed to a continuous four-step cycle of:

1. Consultation with customers/stakeholders
2. Commitment to service standards
3. Evaluation of performance
4. Reporting on results

Our complaints procedure

Customer complaints are a positive opportunity to improve our services.

If you are not satisfied with our services (as described in the “What we do” section), you can complain to our Complaints Officer by emailing info@ihrec.ie and marking for the attention of the Complaints Officer or by phoning us on 01-8589601, or writing to us.

When we get a complaint, we;

Send it to the most relevant Team that should deal with it

Designate a trained complaints officer to deal quickly with the complaint

Log the complaint and our response

Send the complaint to our Corporate Services Team, if the person who complained is not satisfied with our response, so that they can deal with it.

⁸ Customer Charter Initiative and Guidelines (DPER, March 2019)

Contact the IHREC

Address:

16-22 Green Street

Dublin 7

D07 CR20

Email: info@ihrec.ie

Phone: 01-8589601

Phone lines are open Monday to Friday 9am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm.

Freedom of Information requests

You can contact our Freedom of Information Officer by email at foi@ihrec.ie or by phoning us on 01-858 9601, or writing to us.

Data Protection requests

You can ask us for a copy of the information that we have about you, by emailing dpo@ihrec.ie or by phoning us on 01-858 9601, or writing to us.

How to give feedback

You can give us feedback by emailing info@ihrec.ie or by phoning us on 01-858 9601, or writing to us.

Acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge the assistance of the National Disability Authority whose template we used in framing this policy.

Appendix 1: 12 Guiding Principles of Quality Customer Service (QCS)⁹

In their dealings with the public, Public Service organisations will take into account the following 12 Guiding Principles of QCS:

1. Quality Service Standards

Publish a statement (Customer Charter) that outlines the nature and quality of service which customers can expect, and display it prominently at the point of service delivery.

2. Equality/Diversity

Ensure the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation, and accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality for the groups covered by the equality legislation (under the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller Community).

Identify and work to eliminate barriers to access to services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and for those facing geographic barriers to services.

3. Physical Access

Provide clean, accessible public offices that ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards and, as part of this, facilitate access for people with disabilities and others with specific needs.

4. Information

Take a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely and accurate, is available at all points of contact, and meets the requirements of people with specific needs. Ensure that the potential offered by Information Technology is fully availed of and that the information available on public service websites follows the guidelines on web publication. Continue the drive for simplification of rules, regulations, forms, information leaflets and procedures.

5. Timeliness and Courtesy

Deliver quality services with courtesy, sensitivity and the minimum delay, fostering a climate of mutual respect between provider and customer. Give contact names in all communications to ensure ease of ongoing transactions.

6. Complaints

Maintain a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints about the quality of service provided.

⁹ Customer Charter Initiative and Guidelines; DPER March 2019; <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/a2c52c-customer-charter-initiative-guidelines/>



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7. Appeals

Similarly, maintain a formalised, well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to use system of appeal/review for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to services.

8. Consultation and Evaluation

Provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the customer in relation to the development, delivery and review of services. Ensure meaningful evaluation of service delivery.

9. Choice

Provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery including payment methods, location of contact points, opening hours and delivery times. Use available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access and choice, and quality of delivery.

10. Official Languages Equality

Provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually and inform customers of their right to choose to be dealt with through one or other of the official languages.

11. Better Co-ordination

Foster a more coordinated and integrated approach to delivery of public services.

12. Internal Customer

Ensure staff are recognised as internal customers and that they are properly supported and consulted with regard to service delivery issues.