

OSCR

Scottish Charity Regulator

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(Seasons) Greetings from David Robb

Here we are again, dusting down the decorations, digging out the de-icer, and ... gearing up to issue thousands of Annual Return forms and reminder letters!



That's our experience at the Regulator, given that December is the second most popular month for charities' accounting year ends – and coincides with the 9 month deadline reminder letters being issued for those charities with March year ends who haven't yet sent in their returns and accounts. But,

as you'll read below, and increasingly hear from us, that's already changing as we see 80% of Scotland's charities signed up for our online services. Plus, from 1 April 2016 we'll be moving to 100% online, so if you haven't already taken the necessary steps, you need to do so now!

Fortunately, it's very easy – [visit our Online Services page and sign up](#). I can't stress strongly enough that working with us online is the way to go. It's secure, efficient, and saves money for your charity. You can submit your returns and accounts in minutes, 24/7, and avoid postal disruption – such as we can often see at this time of year.

This is part of our wider agenda to implement our new system of Targeted Regulation. What does it mean? Well, simply, we will aim our resources and effort at those areas that require our attention. It will mean less 'volume' and more 'focus' as we identify from our experience the types of issues and charities that present greater risk or impact on public confidence. It means that we'll encourage and provide more transparency for the public, in publishing charity accounts online. And it means that smaller, uncomplicated charities will find it easier to engage with us.

We have adjusted [our proposals in the light of feedback](#) that we

received during our consultation last year. We're already building the technical infrastructure to support our plans – so please keep an eye out for developments and for our announcements in the coming weeks.

It's been a productive year overall for us, too – as you can see from our [Annual Review](#) which has been published since the last OSCR Reporter. This is full of useful stats and information on our work and provides a snapshot of our activity.

But as a Regulator, we want to move beyond simple 'output' to showing the public and the sector the impact that we make. Focusing more on the difference we make and the results we achieve is common to other public bodies. Like them, we remain committed to showing charities and the wider public the importance of regulation – the right sort of regulation – supporting trust and confidence in charities and their work. And, in the wake of some adverse media coverage in recent months, that is all the more important.

Finally, please may I take this opportunity to thank you for your interest and co-operation throughout the year, and on behalf of everyone here at OSCR to wish you and yours every happiness for the festive season.

David Robb

'Tis the Season for ... Safer Giving



Now that the festive advertising has begun, it's a timely opportunity for us to flag up some planned activity for this month.

Christmas and New Year represent a key

time for charitable giving by the public and we'll be highlighting some simple checks that can be made to give reassurance that such generosity is going to good causes.

[Read our check list from last year.](#)

This is also an opportunity for you to remind the public about the importance of giving with confidence, and in doing so to highlight your charity's status and information on the Register.

We'll be issuing our campaign very shortly, so keep an eye out and please pass on our Top Tips as well as our Seasonal good wishes to the sector!

Trustees' Week success

Another seasonal campaign – at least, an annual event – is **Trustees' Week**, which this year ran from 2 to 8 November. We played a full part in celebrating and promoting the contribution of those running the country's charities – and encouraging more people to take part!



We took part in sector events including a brilliant event in Airdrie with well over 150 charity trustees and, in partnership with **Volunteer Scotland**, produced **new videos** on the subject, to add to **those we produced last year**. Trustees' Week is a real opportunity for all of us to celebrate the commitment of the 183,000 people who run charities. If you're thinking about becoming a charity trustee, make sure that you understand your legal duties – check our **guidance on charity trustee duties**.

And you don't have to wait until the next Trustees' Week to offer your time and expertise – you can **find out more here**, including a matching service for new recruits and charities!

Get ready for Targeted Regulation



As promised in our consultation and in earlier issues of OSCR Reporter, we are now developing the technical framework to make Targeted Regulation a reality.

Our new approach, as the name suggests, will see us focusing our activity and resources on those areas that most deserve it. This will see improved transparency for the public – we're already publishing links to charity accounts on individual Register entries, so if you already publish your accounts

online, please send your link to us at info@oscr.org.uk and we'll set it up!

From the New Year, you'll be hearing more specific details about our new approach and procedures and what that means for you. We'd urge you to alert your colleagues and encourage them to sign up for

OSCR Reporter and follow us on Twitter, to ensure that they are also kept up to speed on the latest news developments.

In the meantime, if you do one thing, please **sign up your charity for our online services!** It's worth noting that we intend to have **only** online submissions from 1 April 2016. Over 80% of charities have registered for our online services – if your charity hasn't, then now is the time to do so! Registering is quick and easy – and our online services make reporting to the Regulator much more efficient for you and us. You can find further information, such as Frequently Asked Questions, [here](#).

Do you promote your charitable status?

Remember, charity law makes clear that you have to highlight your charitable status to the public. This means stating clearly that you are a charity, and publish your Scottish Charity Number on certain documents, including your website if you have one. **You can find further information here.**



To be helpful, we've just produced a **new Registration Logo** that you can use on your charity's website. It's in a format that your website designers will find easy to use, and it should link to your charity's entry on the Register to provide transparency for the public.

We'll be actively promoting this new facility over the next few weeks. There are some **terms of use** governing the reproduction of the logo and the way in which it can be used, but these are straightforward and we hope that you'll find the new logo useful.

Ready, set, go! New social media guidance



Social media is now a recognised means of communication and is widely used in the charity sector. It's a great way to interact with your stakeholders and to highlight your work, your achievements and your views.

But it's understandable that some are wary about taking those first few steps – which is why we've teamed

up with Ross McCulloch at **Third Sector Lab** to produce some easy to read fact sheets that should demystify the process.

[Read our social media guides here.](#)

The guides take you through the basics of a social media strategy, with guidelines and advice to protect your organisation, staff and volunteers. You'll get an overview of why good content creation and maintenance matters, and links to resources and good practice examples at the end of each guide.

And, of course, once you're up and running remember to follow us on Twitter!

Don't risk your charitable status



We're coming up to one of our busiest times of the year in issuing Annual Returns and reminder letters to charities. It's a timely reminder of our procedures and monitoring requirements. The information that we publish on the Register – including whether submissions are late – gives the public and potential funders transparency about your charity.

We're about to issue over 5,000 reminder letters to charities with a March or April 2015 financial year end date. There are also around 300 charities with year end date of 31 December 2014, that are about to be listed by us as non-submitting in the next two weeks.

If your charity falls into this category, please make sure that you submit your returns and accounts to us as soon as possible. Remember, persistent failure to provide us with the information we need ultimately risks your charitable status.

We're here to help. If you are having difficulty in meeting our requirements, email us at info@oscr.org.uk. You can also make the process even easier by joining the 80% of Scotland's charities already [signed up for our online services](#).

Annual Review published

Since the last OSCR Reporter, we've published our latest Annual Review, setting out our impact and achievements over the year 2014-15.

[Read our Annual Review here.](#)



Drawing on information from our **Annual Report and Accounts** that were laid before Parliament in the Summer, the Review is designed as an easy to read reference, highlighting key facts and figures.

Key highlights include:

- granting charity status to 752 new charities
- giving consent to 792 proposed changes to charities
- handling 337 concerns about charities, and
- approving 170 applications to reorganise charities.

Aside from simple volumes, we have also worked with other public and charity sector bodies to support charities in meeting their legal duties and in ensuring continued efficiency and effectiveness.

For example:

- working with charities and bodies such as SCVO to develop guidance on charity campaigning in the independence referendum and the UK General Election
- updated guidance on meeting the charity test
- some 77% of charities registered for OSCR Online, achieving efficiencies for the sector and the regulator.

Our work and impact, set out in our latest Review, demonstrates how we reinforce the public's confidence in charities and their work – so please feel free to share it far and wide.

We want your views!



You've still got time to tell us what you think about our draft updated guidance on charity trustee duties – our consultation ends on 18 December.

Guidance for Charity Trustees has been updated in light of our experience over the past nine years, and aims to support those running the country's 24,000 charities in meeting their legal duties.

[Read the draft guidance here.](#)

Key features of the updated guidance include a less formal tone, illustrative examples, and web-based sections that allow users to navigate easily between areas of particular interest to their own organisations.

Guidance for Charity Trustees was last updated in September 2010. Since then, we have conducted over 2,000 inquiries into charity governance and produced **Who's in Charge**, a guidance document summarising issues of independence and control in charities. We have also conducted high-profile governance reviews which have informed the updated guidance.

The updated guidance focuses more clearly on what's expected of charity trustees, and highlights some of the common issues and challenges facing those that run charities. While the underlying principles haven't changed, what we've tried to do is set out in a more straightforward way what charity trustees must consider, so that they meet legal requirements, ensuring that their charities are well-run and contributing to a thriving third sector.

[Respond to the consultation here.](#)

New water scheme – apply now to save money



Good news – following our last item in OSCR Reporter about the **Scottish Government's Water Exemption Scheme**, applications for 2016-17 can now be submitted.

These should be passed to your Licensed Provider as early as possible to avoid unnecessary bills.

On 1 April 2015, the new Water and Sewerage Exemption Scheme was introduced by the Scottish Government for charities and community amateur sports clubs. Charities must have annual incomes under £200,000 to qualify in full, or under £300,000 for partial exemption. In addition, they cannot be a retail outlet or hold a permanent alcohol license.

You can find **further information about the Scheme, including frequently asked questions, here**. If you haven't yet applied for the 2015-16 scheme, these must be submitted to Licensed Providers by 31 March 2016.

New guidance planned for village halls planned

We continue to receive applications from village hall charities looking to amend or update their constitutions, or to change legal form to become incorporated. This can be difficult depending upon individual circumstances, and we find that many would benefit from advice or supporting guidance.



So, we've teamed up with the Third Sector Interfaces to draw up some guidance that will hopefully help village halls in considering the potential issues and following the process that best suits them – you may remember that we recently ran a survey asking for views and experience in this area. This greatly informed our thinking, so thank you if you contributed!

We've found that many village halls are governed by Trust Deeds and that trustees often don't have the power to make the changes they want to see. A possible solution is to seek our **consent to reorganise** but it's likely that village halls will need help, as their applications may, for example, require them to submit legal documents such as a Deed of Variation or a Supplementary Trust Deed.

We're still working on the new guidance, which should be available early in the New Year, and hope to give you an update in the next OSCR Reporter.

OSCR website finds favour



Believe it or not, it's a year since we launched **our new website!** The good news is that feedback from the sector is very positive, and this is supported by increased traffic, with 551,330 user sessions. From surveying our site users, we found:

- 75% of respondents believe, overall, that the new website is 'very good' or 'good'
- Users found it easier to find OSCR online (74%) and searching the Register (72%), the two most popular reasons for visiting the site
- Some 37% of users say they will visit the website more often.

We're also grateful for suggestions on how the site can be improved further – some 25% of those responding to our survey did so, with the most popular ideas including improvements to the Search facility and the layout of the Register. And if you have any suggestions, please let us know! You can contact us at communications@oscr.org.uk

A new mediation service

It's not unheard of for those running charities to disagree over the best approach, the organisation's priorities and future direction, or see a clash of personalities. While we don't typically become involved in charities' internal disputes, we recognise that such situations can arise – and can impact on the group's effectiveness and even future existence.

The Scottish Government is promoting an initiative called the Scottish Mediation Network. This offers a useful resource where disputes have arisen or there are relationship difficulties between board members, committee members, employees or volunteers.

An independent mediator can help those involved to work out and express what their issues are, and then explore the options available for moving forward. The **Scottish Mediation Third Sector Project** provides support and low cost mediation tailored to the needs of the sector.

Anyone in the third sector can phone the Scottish Mediation Network for advice on whether an issue is appropriate for mediation. If it is, and both parties are happy to participate, SMN will arrange for a professional, accredited mediator to conduct a mediation at a low cost depending upon the size of the organisation. Organisations with an income of under £50,000 p.a. may be eligible for pro-bono mediation at no cost.

For more information on Third Sector Mediation please click [here](#) or phone the Scottish Mediation Helpline on 0131 556 118 and quote 'Third Sector'.

Are you following us on Twitter?



If you do, you may have noticed a substantial increase in our activity over the past few weeks. Now that we've found our feet, we're increasingly using Twitter as a means of highlighting our work and priorities, as well as sharing useful or interesting third sector information.

If you don't – why not? Twitter is widely used in the Third Sector and

it's a great way of making new connections and sharing ideas and best practice.

We've got over 2,300 followers and look forward to welcoming you if you haven't followed us already! Follow us @ScotCharityReg.

Scotland's charity regulator: OSCR is the independent registrar and regulator of Scotland's 23,000 charities

www.oscr.org.uk | info@oscr.org.uk | General enquiries: 01382 220446 | Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) 2nd Floor, Quadrant House, 9 Riverside Drive, Dundee, DD1 4NY |

Follow us on twitter @ScotCharityReg

OSCR Online makes it easier for charities to report to OSCR, and improves transparency for the public. For more information, or to register, visit www.oscr.org.uk

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