

## **Certify us!**

How do you prove you're a charity? Donors, government departments, and grant-makers often expect documentary evidence; American foundations are notably hot on it. A registration number alone is meaningless (and could be false), and the Charity Commission website shows your Register entry separately from the (partial) explanation of what registration means.

At present your best proof is a copy of the Commission's original letter confirming registration. If you're not on the Register, because you're in Scotland or Northern Ireland, or exempt or too small, there's the similar letter from the Inland Revenue. But these letters don't *look* suitable. Often years old and addressed to your founders, they explain registration to trustees and administrators rather than the public at large.

By contrast, if you're a company, you'll have a certificate, copyable and displayable on your wall. Similarly with any professional registration or compulsory insurance. Couldn't the Commission and Revenue do this too?

How about a printed Charity Registration Certificate, electronic copies downloadable, showing name, number, contact address, Chief Commissioner's signature, and a bullet list of what registration means – that you're charitable in law, have trustees, can receive tax-exempt donations, must issue annual accounts and reports, and are subject to supervision and investigation? And what it *doesn't* mean – ie it's not a guarantee of efficiency, effectiveness, or good management. Ideally the Certificate would be reissued each year when your Annual Return is filed, showing the date, 10 months after the financial year-end, when the next accounts are due. For small charities, increasingly off the Register under the Strategy Unit proposals, the Inland Revenue could provide a one-off certificate that they're charitable for tax purposes.

This simple idea would prove charitable status for interested parties, and make it easily visible for the public and charities themselves.

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