The recent revelations about the governance of Console have come as another shock to the Charity and Community & Voluntary Sector and many of you may be concerned about the negative impact these shocking abuses will have on both your individual organisation and the wider sector. It is extremely disturbing, especially after all the good work done in recent years on good governance and committing to openness and transparency.

Over the past two weeks The Wheel has been working with the media and behind the scenes with the Charity Regulator and other key actors to limit the collateral damage to the sector from this extremely particular case that went undetected for far too long.

In light of all of this, The Wheel have been articulating the following key messages in the media and to key stakeholders:

         no generalisations should be made to the sector as a whole as a result of this very particular case - it is always unfair to generalise in this way

         no trustees should privately benefit from their work as a trustee, and employees, or people paid to do regular work for charities, should never be trustees, company directors or board members

         all charities should have completed their registration process with the Charity Regulator and submitted their first annual report, and those that haven't are in breach of legal requirements

         all charities should adopt the Governance Code for Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations (see [www.governancecode.ie](http://thewheel.cmail2.com/t/i-l-krtudlk-biiydkkyk-r/))

         all fundraising charities should ensure that they comply with the Statement of Guiding Principles for Fundraising by Charities ([www.ictr.ie](http://thewheel.cmail2.com/t/i-l-krtudlk-biiydkkyk-y/))

         The Charity Regulator should quickly set a financial reporting standard for charities and we believe that standard should be the Statement of Recommended Practice for Financial Reporting by Charities (the SORP)

         Funders need to review the adequacy of their reporting protocols, policies and procedures.

The requirements above relating to the Governance Code, Fundraising Principles and SORP are known as the Triple Lock for Charities, and we believe that when applied with the full powers of the Regulator, they will sustain public trust and confidence in charities.

Irish Rural Link would like to reassure members that we are registered with the Charity Regulator and comply with Governance Code for Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations with all accounts available to view on Charities Regulator Authority (CRA) <https://www.charitiesregulatoryauthority.ie/> and Companies Registered Office (CRO) websites <https://www.cro.ie/>

There remain a number of other issues that sector and statutory stakeholders will need to address to avoid a repeat of this situation. Although - as reported in the High Court today - "a tactical web of deceit" is the cause of this crisis in Console, there are issues that will need to be addressed if we are to learn all the lessons:  the extent to which funders and regulators act in a timely manner on concerns; apparent shortcomings in the adequacy of audit procedures; the lack of clarity as to where responsibility lies for investigating concerns. There is now a need to understand these issues and identify any corrective actions necessary. The Wheel will be working to develop proposals to address these issues and others raised by recent developments.

There are some positive changes that have emerged from these recent developments: the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice has commenced Part IV of the Charities Act which will equip the Charity Regulator with the investigative powers it needs to take pre-emptive action (currently it can only act if a concern has been brought to its attention). The Regulator has also requested that statutory funders, such as the HSE, develop a memorandum-of-understanding with it to ensure funders inform the Regulator of any concerns.

The Wheel have called on the Minister to ensure that sufficient resources are made available to the Regulator to enable it to fully implement its new investigative powers. They have also asked the Regulator to expedite the setting of the financial reporting standard needed for consistent financial reporting by charities and to ensure a mechanism is put in place to monitor and drive compliance by charities with the fundraising principles.

The Wheel developed a toolkit which we recommend you review. The toolkit includes concrete steps to maintain high levels of trust in your organisation and tips for dealing with media queries.  The Toolkit for Protecting Your Organisation’s Reputation, which you can download here:

[https://www.wheel.ie/sites/default/files/ProtectingYourReputation2016\_0.pdf](http://thewheel.cmail2.com/t/i-l-krtudlk-biiydkkyk-j/)