



Research and analysis

Research with trustees: 2025

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Applies to England and Wales

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Prepared for the Charity Commission for England and Wales by BMG Research

Note: Where tables show year on year data, (+) indicates a significant increase in 2025 and (-) shows a significant decrease in 2025. Where tables show 2025 data amongst different subgroups, (+) indicates significantly higher than Total and (-) indicates significantly lower than the total.

Executive summary:

Trustees' confidence

Trustees report strong confidence in their role, both at an overall level (99% 'very' or 'fairly' confident) and for different aspects of it – though there is room for improvement in areas such as managing finances (89%) and safeguarding (91%). There are clear variations in findings dependent on length of experience. Those with more experience show stronger confidence in several aspects of their role.

The two areas of confidence that have seen significant increases are identifying and dealing with conflicts of interest (87% to 89%), and managing finances (87% to 89%), both areas where confidence has been low historically (93% to 95%).

Trustee knowledge and experiences

Trustees' awareness of their overall responsibility for their charity (e.g. decision making, financial oversight) is also strong in most cases – though there is still a knowledge gap in some areas, for example in understanding of the joint responsibility to send the right information to the Commission (57%). Generally, knowledge is stronger amongst those who use Commission resources.

Understanding of decision-making principles is also consistently good – however there is some confusion about areas related to conflicts of interests and personal views, for example just 41% say trustees should never make decisions based on personal views.

Nearly half (47%) said they also spend time together socially – this relationship-building is seen as beneficial for effective decision making and trustee retention.

While few in the survey said they had experienced negative behaviours (e.g. 2% saying they had seen bullying behaviour), the focus groups drew this out in detail, highlighting that tensions are often due to personality clashes, and can be detrimental to having meaningful discussions and charity progress in general.

Perceptions of the Charity Commission

Trustees' confidence in the Charity Commission's ability to uncover and deal with wrongdoing are stable and high (85% confident in the ability to uncover wrongdoing; 92% confident that wrongdoing will be dealt with appropriately).

Perceptions of the Commission's focus are broadly positive though trustees believe it should focus more on enabling charities to be more effective and on identifying and dealing with wrongdoing.

Three quarters of trustees who have had direct interaction with the Commission (74%) believe they were treated fairly; only 2% said unfairly.

Trustees' use of Charity Commission guidance

Nearly half (46%) of trustees report using Charity Commission guidance at least once a year. More common sources of information include speaking to colleagues (58%) or reading their own charity's guidance (54%).

The main reason for not using the Commission's guidance more is trustees' impression that they don't need regular guidance (70%) and this is particularly pronounced in those with more than 10 years' experience (76%). On the other hand, those with less experience are more likely to say they don't know that the Commission provided guidance, or they don't know how to find what they need.

While usage of 5-minute guides has grown this year (9% to 12%), awareness remains level at 33%. Over a third (36%) say their charity uses any codes, standards or governance tools, with 30% saying they use the Charity Governance Code.

Charity Campaigning

Fewer than a quarter (22%) of trustees say their charity campaigns, with campaigning more common amongst charities with larger incomes (35% of charities with income over £500k) and certain causes (45% of trustees in human rights/equality and diversity charities campaign).

The most common reason given for not campaigning is a lack of relevance to the charity's purpose (80%). Very few say they do not know how (3%) or understand the rules on campaigning (3%).

Banking

In comparison to 2024, fewer trustees reported banking issues for their charity though it remains a problem for many charities (38% down from 42%), and problems with updating contact details and signatories remain the most prevalent issue (30%). There are variations by banking provider, with over half of those who bank with Barclays experiencing any issues (58%).

Cost-of-living

Nearly half of trustees said their charity had made changes as a result of the cost-of-living crisis in the last 12 months (46%), with a range of changes indicated. Looking ahead, over half (55%) anticipate any adaptations, with finding new sources of funding the most likely expectation (34%).

Trustee Role

Nearly all trustees say they are confident in their role as a trustee, but fewer trustees with less than five years' experience are very confident

Trustees experience level	Total confidence	Very confident	Somewhat confident
Total	99%	63%	35%
Less than one year	96% (-)	35%(-)	61% (+)
One to five years	99%	56%(-)	43%(+)
Five to ten years	98%	67%	32%
More than ten years	99% (+)	72%(+)	27%(-)

Confidence in different areas of trustee work is high, though slightly lower amongst new trustees

Stated confidence in different trustee areas

Trustee areas	Total confidence	Very confident	Somewhat confident	Not very confident	Not confident at all
Managing finances	89%	54%	36%	7%	1%
Safeguarding	91%	61%	30%	4%	0%
Identifying and dealing with conflicts of interest	95%	53%	42%	3%	0%
Reporting information	97%	68%	29%	2%	0%
Making decisions	99%	72%	27%	1%	0%
Delivering your charity's purpose	99%	79%	20%	1%	0%

Total confidence amongst trustees of different experience levels

	Managing finances	Safeguarding	Identifying and dealing with conflicts of interest	Reporting information	Making decisions
Less than one year	78%(-)	93%	94%	96%	97%
One to five years	87%(-)	92%	95%	96%	99%
Five to ten years	89%	92%	94%	96%	98%
More than 10 years	94%(+)	90%	95%	98%(+)	99%

There has been a small increase in confidence in handling conflicts of interest and managing finances of interest in the past year

Stated total confidence in different trustee areas vs. 2024

	2024	2025
Delivering your charity's purpose	99%	99%
Making decisions	99%	99%
Reporting information	96%	97%
Identifying and dealing with conflicts of interest	93%	95%(+)

	2024	2025
Safeguarding	92%	91%
Managing finances	87%	89%(+)

Significant increases in 2025:

- trustees with less than one year of experience are more confident on delivering their charity's purpose (99% vs. 95%)
- trustees with one to five years of experience are more confident on identifying and dealing with conflicts of interest (95% vs. 92%)
- however, improved confidence does not necessarily correspond to increased competence, as detailed later in this report

Most trustees are confident in their ability to protect their charity and beneficiaries from wrongdoing and harm, with growth in the numbers saying 'very confident'

Confidence in ability to protect charity and beneficiaries from wrongdoing and harm, by trustee experience:

	Very confident	Somewhat confident
Total	60%	38%
Less than one year	40%(-)	57%(+)
One to five years	53%(-)	44%(+)
Five to ten years	62%	35%
More than ten years	67%(+)	32%

Confidence over time:

	Confident total	Very confident	Somewhat confident
2021	98%	62%	36%
2022	98%	63%	34%

	Confident total	Very confident	Somewhat confident
2023	98%	63%	35%
2024	97%	56%	41%
2025	98%	60%(+)	38%(-)

Most trustees know what they should always do when making decisions, but they are less sure about basing decisions on personal views or recognising conflicts of interest

Trustee awareness of things trustees should do:

	Trustees should always do this	It depends	Trustees should never do this
Listen to different views and perspectives	99%	1%	0%
Make sure they have all the information they need	98%	2%	0%
Understand potential costs and what the charity can afford	97%	3%	0%
Follow what it says in the charity's governing document	95%	5%	0%
Ask questions even if they are challenging or awkward	95%	5%	0%
Decide what is relevant to that decision	93%	7%	0%
Keep a record of decisions and any objections	93%	7%	0%

	Trustees should always do this	It depends	Trustees should never do this
Speak up if they disagree with the majority	90%	10%	0%

Trustee awareness of things trustees should not do:

	Trustees should always do this	It depends	Trustees should never do this
Support a decision that benefits another organisation they are involved in	12%	44%	44%
Make decisions based on trustees' personal views	11%	47%	41%

'Make decisions based on trustees' personal views': More respondents this year think they should always do this.

2024:

- 7% said always
- 53% said never
- 40% said it depends

Trustees' understanding of their responsibilities has remained mostly stable this year, though this understanding ranges across types of responsibility

Answered 'the board of trustees are jointly responsible':

	2024	2025
Making the important decisions in the charity	90%	92%
Ensuring that all of the charity's activities help to achieve the purposes for which it was set up	90%	91%

	2024	2025
Ensuring the charity protects its reputation and relationships with supporters and service users*	*	89%
Checking and approving the charity's annual accounts and trustees' report	83%	83%
Ensuring the charity's governing document, policies and procedures are fit for purpose and are being followed	79%	81% (+)
Making sure the charity's resources are kept safe, properly used and accounted for	77%	79%
Managing conflicts of interest so that they don't wrongly influence trustee decisions	69%	71%
Keeping up to date with relevant Charity Commission guidance	69%	70%
Making sure the charity sends the right information to the Commission at the right time	55%	57% (+)

The only areas to see significant improvement relate to the responsibilities of sharing the right information with the Commission (57%) and ensuring the charity's governing document, policies and procedures are fit for purpose (81%).

Those who use the Commission's resources are better informed about their legal responsibilities than those who don't

Answered (correctly) 'the board of trustees are jointly responsible'

	All trustees	Uses CCEW resources less than once a year/Never	Uses CCEW resources at least once a year
Making the important decisions in the charity	92%	90%	93%
Ensuring that all of the charity's activities help to	91%	89%	93%

	All trustees	Uses CCEW resources less than once a year/Never	Uses CCEW resources at least once a year
achieve the purposes for which it was set up			
Ensuring the charity protects its reputation and relationships with supporters and service users	89%	88%	91%
Checking and approving the charity's annual accounts and trustees' report	83%	79%	88%
Ensuring the charity's governing document, policies and procedures are fit for purpose and are being followed	81%	79%	85%
Making sure the charity's resources are kept safe, properly used and accounted for	79%	75%	84%
Managing conflicts of interest so that they don't wrongly influence trustee decisions	71%	67%	76%
Keeping up to date with relevant Charity Commission guidance	70%	64%	76%
Making sure the charity sends the right information to the Commission at the right time	57%	53%	63%

Those who do use CCEW resources at least once a year are consistently more likely than average to be correct, while the reverse is true of those who use CCEW resources less than once a year or never.

Other findings:

- 9% said the treasurer is responsible for checking and approving the charity's annual accounts and trustees' report
- 9% said the Chair is responsible for ensuring the charity's governing document, policies and procedures are fit for purpose and are being followed
- 9% said the treasurer is responsible for making sure the charity's resources are kept safe, properly used and accounted for
- 21% said the Chair is responsible for managing conflicts of interest so that they don't wrongly influence trustee decisions
- 11% said the Chair is responsible and 9% said the Secretary is responsible for keeping up to date with relevant Charity Commission guidance
- 14% said the Chair is responsible and 12% said the Secretary is responsible for making sure the charity sends the right information to the Commission at the right time

Most trustees report experiencing a range of positive situations in their role, with far fewer recalling any difficulties

Experiences of the following situations as a trustee:

Trustee experiences	Those who have experienced
Trustees have focussed on the big picture [strategy]	64%
Trustees' different perspectives brought clarity to an issue	57%
Trustees spent time together socially as well as in business meetings	47%
Trustees have focussed on operational detail	44%
Trustees worked through a difficult and controversial decision	34%
We were unable to give sufficient time to some issues	15%

Trustee experiences	Those who have experienced
One trustee inappropriately dominated discussion	4%
Trustees became adversarial due to disagreement on an issue	3%
I have seen bullying behaviour	2%
Trustees disagreed over personal or political views on issues that affected our charity	2%

Those under 50 years old are more likely to have experienced one trustee inappropriately dominated discussion (7%)

Relationship-building out of work is seen as important for trustees to improve discussions and effectively solve issues

Focus Groups:

As seen in the survey, trustees in focus groups reported spending time together outside of official trustee duties. This might be because a charity is based in a local community so trustees know each other anyway, or it could be driven by intentional 'socials' throughout the year.

Broadly trustees praise the positive impact this relationship building has, including:

- being beneficial for retaining of trustees
- useful for decision making processes as people become more comfortable understanding and speaking with each other candidly
- helpful if things go wrong – they can talk about issues more effectively
- creates a welcoming environment helps newer trustees feel accepted

Some trustees offered examples of when creating strong non-working relationships can have downsides:

- boards of trustees could become exclusive and less welcoming
- could be perceived as a 'clique' and new/younger trustees may not feel involved

Quotes:

“It’s absolutely essential.”

“Knowing how to challenge...exploring who is in favour [of decisions] and who is against, all relies on knowing one another.”

“Our trustees are scattered around the world, so we do a lot of online chatting to ensure a common understanding.”

“Some of us are quite close and others are more distant... feels a little odd.”

Conflicts amongst trustees occur and are detrimental to charity progress, but can be difficult to resolve

Focus Groups:

Instances of conflict or tension amongst trustees are not unheard of, and while it is noted that debates and differing opinions are beneficial, some disagreements are more serious.

- tension is often due to a personality difference between trustees, if someone new comes in who dominates or doesn’t align with the communication style of others
- differing opinions on processes between longstanding and new trustees can lead to tension
- there can also be a lack of understanding of responsibilities (for example trustees not knowing if they are responsible for hiring/firing) leading to conflict

Trustees described the impacts of these clashes in detail, mentioning things such as:

- an obstacle in decision making, and subsequently the progress of the charity
- loss to charity income through wasted time and inaction
- barrier to recruitment
- people may resign or refuse to work with others

Trustees also shared examples of conflict resolution:

- a conflict between trustees may resolve itself in time, with one trustee experiencing one party of a conflict resigning and the subsequent return

to effective running

- trustees mentioned the difficulties involved in trying to remove trustees – even where there are clear reasons, and that creating a better process for this would help
- there was only one mention of the Charity Commission being helpful in handling inter-trustee conflict – so there is room here to explore what more the Commission can do
- using an external professional mediator can be effective, but one trustee mentioned an instance of a mediator giving up
 - hiring external professionals may not be an affordable option to many charities

Further ideas for minimising conflict amongst trustees include effective inductions including clarity on roles and responsibilities, training on effective governance, and an improved understanding on trustees' different skills and time constraints.

The Commission and Charities in Society

Confidence in the Charity Commission's abilities to uncover and deal with wrongdoing remain at a high level, in line with 2024

Confidence in the Charity Commission's abilities over time:

	Confident/Very confident in the Charity Commission's ability to uncover wrongdoing and harm when they occur in other charities	Confident/Very confident that instances of wrongdoing and harm once uncovered will be dealt with appropriately by the Charity Commission
2020	74%	90%
2021	85%	95%
2022	86%	94%
2023	87%	95%

	Confident/Very confident in the Charity Commission's ability to uncover wrongdoing and harm when they occur in other charities	Confident/Very confident that instances of wrongdoing and harm once uncovered will be dealt with appropriately by the Charity Commission
2024	85%	92%
2025	85%	92%

Analysis:

Generally, most trustee groups have a similar level of confidence in the Charity Commission's ability to uncover wrongdoing. Those more likely to be confident include:

- trustees who said their charity mainly operates in England (89%)
- trustees under 50 (90%)

The only group more likely to be confident in the Charity Commission's ability to deal with wrongdoing appropriately when uncovered are:

- those aware of the 5-minute guides (94%)
- trustees who say their charity mainly operates in Wales (99%)

Trustees feel the Commission is focusing the right amount on giving advice to ensure charities comply with the law but also think it should focus more on helping charities be more effective

Trustees were asked to allocate 100 points across these five areas to show their perceptions of what the Commission focuses on, and what they think it ought to focus on.

For example, a trustee thinking the Commission ought to focus on all of these equally would allocate 20 points to each.

Where the Charity Commission ought to, and does, focus its work (1-100 mean)

	Ought to focus on (mean)	Actually does focus on (mean)
Identifying and dealing with wrongdoing	28.50	26.47
Enabling charities to be more effective	22.02	16.96
Giving charities advice and guidance to ensure they comply with the law	22.53	22.22
Informing the public about charities	10.72	12.04
Keeping a public register of charities up to date	16.24	23.30

Focus groups:

Trustees were positive about the Commission and saw it fundamentally as a regulator. They agree that it's helpful for them as trustees to find out more about other charities, for example if they are doing any collaborative work. They appreciate the level of guidance that is there if you search for it.

Some trustees mention the perception that the Commission has an 'impossible role' in needing to cater to all types of charities, and that there could be improvements in some areas related to smaller charities, such as considering differing resource capabilities.

Quote:

"Different scales of charity face very different problems and very different ability to resolve them."

Trustees feel that charity law is (rightly) the main influence on the Commission, and that the media and politicians have more influence than they should

How the Charity Commission is /should be influenced by other factors (1-5 mean):

	Is influenced by (mean)	Should be influenced by (mean)
The media	3.20	1.82

	Is influenced by (mean)	Should be influenced by (mean)
Politicians	3.32	1.98
Charities	3.33	3.86
The public	3.04	3.26
Charity Law	4.60	4.73

Focus groups:

The Commission is seen as largely trusted and instilling confidence in the charity sector as a whole.

Trustees believe it has the right ambitions and broadly live up to being 'fair, balanced and independent'.

Opinions differ in terms of the balance the Commission should strike between support and regulation with some thinking it is overly harsh, and some thinking support should come from other organisations.

Quotes:

"I feel like they are not on our side and are determined to catch me out."

"They are there as regulators rather than a supportive body."

Charity Commission Support

Trustees who have interacted with the Commission are more likely to think it acts fairly, though many answer 'don't know'

How fairly the Charity Commission acts by subgroups:

	Very fairly	Somewhat fairly	Neither fairly nor unfairly	Somewhat unfairly	Very unfairly	Don't know
Total	22%	24%	9%	2%	1%	42%

	Very fairly	Somewhat fairly	Neither fairly nor unfairly	Somewhat unfairly	Very unfairly	Don' know
Those who have had any form of interaction with the Charity Commission	26% (+)	25%	9%	2%	1%	37% (-)
Those who have had no interaction with the Charity Commission	20% (-)	23%	10%	2%	0%	44% (+)
Charity income:						
£0 - £10,000	23%	21%(-)	11%(+)	2%	1%	42%
Charity income:						
£10,000 - £100,000	23%	25%	8%	2%	0%	42%
Charity Income: £100,000 - £500,000	19%	28%(+)	8%	3%	1%	41%
Charity Income:						
£500.000 +	22%	26%	8%	4%	2%(+)	39%

Three quarters (74%) of trustees who had contact with the Commission around permission, advice, or other regulatory contact felt they were treated fairly

How fairly charities have been treated by the Charity Commission:

	Very fairly	Somewhat fairly	Neither fairly nor unfairly	Somewhat unfairly	Very unfairly	Don't know
2024	56%	14%	12%	1%	1%	16%
2025	59%	16%	11%	1%	1%	13%

Why did you say that? (of those who said 'unfairly' in 2025)

"No real communication only a reiteration of legal jargon which did not help to solve the problem."

"Processes are slow and opaque."

The most common sources of information trustees use are colleagues or other trustees, and their own charity's guidance. Following these is the use of Commission resources

What sources of information trustees have used at least once a year:

Source

A colleague or another trustee	58%
Reading my own charity's guidance	54%
Charity Commission guidance direct from its website	40%
Charity Commission Guidance found through a search engine	34%
Other guidance or information found through a search engine	29%
Another charity or advisory body	16%

Source

A friend or family member (expert)	16%
Phoning or emailing the Charity Commission	9%
A friend or family member (non-expert)	7%
Other	5%
Net: Any Charity Commission	46%

More likely to have used the Charity Commission (direct from its website or through a search engine) at least once a year:

- those in charities with income £10k-£100k (51%), £100k-£500k (59%) or over £500k (57%)
- those who have been a trustee between one and five years (49%)
- trustees under 50 years of age (58%)
- those who say they are a Chair (53%) or Treasurer (57%)

Codes for this question were changed significantly in 2025, so it is not possible to compare significance for most answers. For those where we have marked significance, there could still be some impacts due to the changing order of codes or presence of new codes in 2025.

Significantly lower than 2024:

- a colleague or another trustee (2025:62%)
- another charity or advisory body (2024:20%)
- a friend or family member (expert) (2024:21%)

This change in the question has also suggested that more people are using Commission guidance than we previously thought – many people who might have previously answered ‘looking on the internet’ might now say they found Charity Commission guidance through a search engine.

All information sources are deemed broadly helpful by at least three quarters of those that use them, with over nine in ten finding Charity Commission’s guidance helpful

How helpful trustees have found each source of information:

	Total	Very helpful	Fairly helpful
A colleague or another trustee	97%	52%	45%
Reading my own charity's guidance	97%	50%	47%
Another charity or advisory body	96%	62%	33%
Charity Commission guidance direct from its website	96%	44%	51%
Charity Commission Guidance found through a search engine	93%	32%	61%
A friend or family member (expert)	92%	38%	54%
Phoning or emailing the Charity Commission	89%	46%	42%
Other guidance or information found through a search engine	85%	15%	70%
A friend or family member (non-expert)	76%	17%	59%

Though the overall number of those who don't use Commission guidance has fallen, more trustees are saying they don't think they need regular guidance, and fewer are citing a lack of knowledge as a reason for not using the Commission

Why the Charity Commission has not been used more as a source of information:

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
I don't think I need help and guidance that regularly	51%	50%	57%	58%	70%
I didn't know that the Charity Commission provided help and guidance	20%	19%	14%	16%	12%

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
I don't know how to find what I need	11%	14%	8%	12%	8%
I don't use the internet very much	5%	8%	5%	5%	6%
I don't think the help and guidance provided by the Charity Commission is clear enough	6%	6%	4%	7%	5%
I don't think there is enough help and guidance provided by the Charity Commission	4%	4%	3%	5%	4%
Other	14%	11%	11%	8%	9%

Those with more experience cite lack of need as their reason for not using the Commission for guidance more often, whilst less experienced trustees are more likely to not know what's available

Why the Charity Commission has not been used as a source of information, by trustee experience:

	Total	Trustee for less than one year	Trustee from 1 to 5 years	Trustee for 5 to 10 years	Trustee for more than 10 years
I don't think I need help and guidance that regularly	70%	51%(-)	71%	65%(-)	76%(+)
I didn't know that the Charity Commission provided help and guidance	12%	17%	16%(+)	14%	6%(-)
I don't know how to find what I need	8%	15%(+)	8%	10%	6%(-)

	Total	Trustee for less than one year	Trustee from 1 to 5 years	Trustee for 5 to 10 years	Trustee for more than 10 years
I don't use the internet very much	6%	2%	6%	4%	8%(+)
I don't think the help and guidance provided by the Charity Commission is clear enough	5%	4%	5%	5%	5%
I don't think there is enough help and guidance provided by the Charity Commission	4%	3%	4%	4%	4%

Analysis:

Trustees with more experience cite a perceived lack of need as their reason for not using the Commission for guidance, whilst less experienced trustees are more likely to say they don't know what they need, how to find it, or that they didn't know the Commission provided guidance.

Those in smaller charities (income under £10k) are also more likely to say they don't think they need regular guidance (73%).

Awareness of the 5-minute guides has remained level, but usage has increased in the last year

Awareness and use of the 5-minute guides:

I had not heard of them	65%
I had heard of them, but have not used them in the past year	21%
I had heard of them, and have used them in the past year	12%
Don't know	2%

Trend in awareness and use of the 5-minute guides:

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Used in past year	5%	9%	9%	12%(+)
Aware	23%	33%	31%	33%
Unaware	75%	65%	66%	65%

Just under a half of trustees are aware of the Welcome Pack. The newer the trustee, the more likely they are to have heard of the Welcome Pack

Awareness of the Welcome Pack for new trustees:

Aware	45%
Yes, and I received this myself	28%
Yes, I am aware, but I have not received it myself	16%
I am not aware of this	50%
Don't know	5%

Analysis:

Trustees who are more likely to be aware of the Welcome Pack are:

- those with a charity income of £100k-£500k (52%) or over £500K (56%)
- trustees with less than 1 year experience (58%) or one to five years' experience (50%)
- trustees with any interaction with the Charity Commission (49%)

Trustees more likely to be unaware are:

- trustees in Wales (60%)
- trustees with over 5 years' experience (54%)
- trustees in a charity with income under £10k (54%)

Charity Campaigning

Less than a quarter of trustees say their charity campaigns. It is more common amongst larger charities, and those whose purpose relates to human rights.

As a charity, do you undertake any campaigning activities?

Yes	22%
No	74%
Don't know	5%

Those who undertake campaigning, by charity income and purpose

Income over £500k	35%
Income £100k-£500k	26%
Income £10k-£100k	20%
Income under £10k	19%
Human rights/Equality and diversity	45%
Disability	36%
Education (research/other)	35%
The advancement of health or saving of lives	34%
Environment/conservations	32%
Education/training (adult)	30%
Economic/community development/employment	28%
The prevention or relief of poverty	26%

Arts/culture/heritage

18%

Over 90% of trustees whose charity campaigns are confident in being able to follow the rules of campaigning

Confidence in understanding and following the rules of campaigning:

Total confidence	91%
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Very confident	35%
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Somewhat confident	55%
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Not very confident	9%
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Analysis:

Generally, most trustee groups have a similarly high level of confidence in their ability to understand and follow the rules of campaigning.

However, those less likely to be confident include:

- those who have not heard of the 5-minute guides (88%)
- those who have been a trustee for less than a year (81%)
- trustees under the age of 50 (80%)

However, focus groups uncovered a lack of agreement around the definition of campaigning, and emphasised the need for clearer guidance

Trustees in focus groups were vocal about their confusion at exactly what 'campaigning' means.

Various trustees mention activities they do which they think might be campaigning, including:

- lobbying and talking to government about importance of their purpose
- spreading awareness of their cause e.g. speaking at events

- advocating for their cause and those affected by it

Some of those say they have colleagues where campaigning is their whole role, and they are well informed. However, others are less confident.

Quote:

“We had to talk to quite a few people about what it meant and how we should go about it.”

Trustees acknowledged the useful guidance from the Charity Commission in the run up to the general election, but beyond that they think the Commission needs to be clearer in the information, suggesting a lack of awareness or understanding of the Commission’s definition.

Quotes:

“If the Charity Commission wants to regulate it [campaigning] they need to be clear about what it is.”

“This is an example if when you read the [Charity Commission’s] guidance, and it isn’t always clear.”

Thinking about campaigning in the charity sector as a whole, trustees identify both benefits and drawbacks-including potential reputational damage.

Quote:

“In the long run you gain from it, but in the short run you might lose some supporters.”

There was a consistent agreement about the need for charities to maintain their values if they were to undertake campaigning.

Of the three quarters who do not campaign, the main reason for this is that campaigning is not relevant to their charity’s purpose

Reasons for not campaigning:

Campaigning is not relevant to our charity’s purpose	80%
We do not consider campaigning the best current use of resources	27%
We do not have enough resources to campaign	19%
We do not have the relevant skillset	7%

We do not understand the rules on campaigning	3%
We do not know how to campaign	3%
We are a new charity and have not yet started campaigning	1%
None of the above	5%
Other	4%

Focus groups:

Echoing the survey, trustees in focus groups who said their charity doesn't campaign said that a key reason is the lack of relevance for their charity's purpose.

Quote:

"We're a sports club charity, so there's not much point!"

Another trustee explained that their charity is new and so does not yet have the capacity to campaign, though it is something they would like to do in future. This lack of resource was echoed by others who would want to campaign if they could.

As mentioned, it became clear from focus groups that there is a clear understanding gap around what exactly is considered campaigning. Therefore, it's possible that proportions who said they campaigned in the survey actually do not, and vice versa.

Quote:

"We do go to talk about our stuff in government...it's lobbying...is that campaigning?"

Banking

Two out of five trustees say their charity has encountered a banking issue in the past year, though this has fallen since 2024

Charity has encountered any of these banking issues in past year:

	2024	2025
Summary: Any	42%	38%(-)
Issues with updating contact details or signatories	32%	30%
Difficulty opening a new account with a bank	18%	13%(-)
Difficulty complying with identity requirements	15%	13%(-)
Difficulty understanding what the bank requires	14%	11%(-)
Information being lost by the bank	7%	7%
Account being frozen/being blocked out	6%	5%
I do not have awareness of this side of the charity	14%	16%
No, none of the above	44%	47%

Those more likely to have had any of these banking issues:

- charities who use Barclays (58%)
- charities with income between £10k-£100k (40%)

The number of trustees who report banking issues in their charity is most prevalent amongst Barclays users

Any banking issues (by banking provider used):

Total*	38%
Barclays	58%
Santander	48%
Metro Bank	46%
Other	44%
HSBC	42%
Co-operative Bank	42%

Lloyds	40%
NatWest	40%
CAF Bank	34%

*Total includes those who said they don't know who their banking provider is.

Cost of Living Impacts

Nearly half of trustees say their charities have made a change in the last year, with finding new funding sources and using more financial reserves most common

Ways in which charity has adapted in last 12 months in response to cost-of-living crisis:

Summary: Any	46%
Found new sources of funding	18%
Used more of our financial reserves than we had planned	17%
Stopped some services or activities	11%
Changed our activities	10%
Adapted staff pay or salaries	8%
Formed new partnerships or joint working arrangements	7%
Adopted new technology	7%
Changed working patterns or employment arrangements	7%
Other	5%
Reduced the size of our workforce	4%

Adapted our recruitment processes	3%
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Sold an asset, such as land, equipment or a building	2%
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Those who are more likely to say 'any' include

- charities with income £100k-£500k (70%) or over £500k (73%)
- those with 8-10 or more than 10 people on the board of trustees (53%; 56%)
- charities in the North of England (51%)

More than half anticipate changes in the coming year, including a third who expect to seek new sources of funding

Expected changes in the next 12 months:

Summary: Any	55%
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Find new sources of funding	34%
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Form new partnerships or joint working arrangements	14%
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Use more of our financial reserves than we had planned	14%
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Change our activities	11%
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Stop some services or activities	10%
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Adopt new technology	10%
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Change working patterns or employment arrangements	7%
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Adapt staff pay or salaries	7%
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Adapt our recruitment processes	4%
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Other	4%
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Reduce the size of our workforce	3%
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We may have to close	3%
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Sell an asset, such as land, equipment or a building	2%
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Those who are more likely to say ‘any’ include:

- charities with income of £10k-£100k (59%), £100k-£500k (77%), or over £500k (78%)
- those with 8-10 or more than 10 people on the board of trustees (63%; 64%)
- charities in the North of England (61%)

Appendices

Appendix 1: Background and Methodology

Background and Methodology:

Background

For several years the Charity Commission has carried out research to monitor the progress of its impact measures, feeding into overarching strategic objectives. In 2023 BMG Research were commissioned to be the research partner for the Commission for the next three years, and as part of this, conduct their annual survey of trustees. This report represents the second year of BMG’s research.

Research Objectives

To understand trustees’ knowledge of their own role and duties as well as their attitudes to governance, and to establish how they view and engage with the work of the Commission.

Methodology

The Charity Commission sampled a selection of 24,000 trustees to invite, via email, to take part in the online survey. This sample was designed to be representative of the spread of registered charities in England and Wales by annual income.

Fieldwork dates

Fieldwork took place between the 3rd February and 24th February 2025.

Completes

The survey achieved 2,511 completes.

Weighting

While the sample was originally chosen to reflect the spread of registered charities in England and Wales, weighting by income was applied to correct any imbalance.

Qualitative Fieldwork:

Following the quantitative survey, two focus groups were conducted with trustees with the aim of exploring further into topics touched on in the quantitative research.

Participants were recruited from the pool of those who had completed the survey, and who had opted in to being contacted about further research. From this selection of trustees, participants to invite to focus groups were contacted.

These took place virtually using Zoom, between 10th and 14th March, and lasted 90 minutes each.

Each group comprised of trustees of different charity sizes, different lengths of trustee experience, and each group contained at least three trustees whose charity had experienced banking issues.

In total 22 trustees participated in the qualitative research: 12 in the first group and 10 in the second.

Comparability Over Time:

It is important to note that the survey contents, and its administration underwent a number of changes in the period from 2023-2024. These changes were necessary to improve the relevance and robustness of the data collected, and to facilitate a new research partner.

Throughout this report comparisons are made to previous waves where there have been no substantial changes to the question wording or routing. However, these comparisons should be treated as indicative only as there is likely to be some impact on the data from the changes detailed below. In the transition from 2024-2025, methodology remained the same, but some questionnaire changes were made.

Significance testing has taken place where questions are unchanged in terms of base, content and format, though there might be other impacts such as order effects.

These changes include:

- a number of new questions: These have been added to reflect the current needs of the Charity Commission. As new questions have been added at various points throughout the survey there is a risk that responses to existing questions could have been impacted by the presence of the new questions. Some questions from previous waves have also been removed from the survey
- some small changes to existing questions: These changes have been made to improve the quality of the data collected and include changes such as adding in 'don't know' options to allow trustees to answer more accurately. Direct comparisons to previous years data for questions have not been made
- a change in research partner: BMG was commissioned as a new research partner in 2023. Sampling and weighting has been kept as consistent as possible based on Charity Commission's information

Appendix 2: sample breakdown

Annual income of charity (used for weighting):

£0-£10,000	41%
£10,001-£25,000	15%
£25,001-£100,000	18%
£100,001-£500,000	14%
£500,001-£1,000,000	2%
£1,000,001-£5,000,000	3%
£5,000,000+	1%
Don't know/new charity	6%

Charity's main area of operation:

London and South East	20%
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England	16%
North of England	15%
South and South West of England	12%
The Midlands	11%
UK and overseas	10%
Across all of the UK	7%
Wales	4%
Overseas	3%
England and Wales	2%

Charity sector:

Education/training (children and young people)	29%
Arts/culture/heritage	19%
General charitable purposes	19%
Education/training (adult)	17%
The prevention or relief of poverty	16%
Religious activities	16%
The advancement of health or saving of lives	15%
Recreation	15%
Disability	11%
Other charitable purposes	10%
Environment/conservation	8%
Economic/community development/employment	7%
Education (research/other)	5%
Accommodation/housing	5%

Human rights/Equality and diversity	5%
Amateur sport	5%
Overseas aid	4%
Animal welfare	2%

Charity activity:

Provides grants or other funding to individuals or organisations	34%
Provides services	32%
Other charitable activities	29%
Provides buildings, facilities or open space	27%
Provides advocacy/advice/information	17%
Provides human resources	8%
Acts as an umbrella or resource body	6%
Sponsors or undertakes research	4%

Role in charity:

Trustee	85%
Chair	18%
Board or Management Member	17%
Treasurer	15%
Secretary	10%
Other	6%
Vice Chair	3%

Length of time as a trustee:

Less than one year	6%
One to five years	32%

Five to ten years	25%
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More than ten years	38%
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Number of people on board of trustees:

3 or fewer	21%
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4 to 7	53%
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8 to 10	17%
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11 to 15	6%
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16 to 20	1%
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Over 20	*
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Don't know	1%
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