

# Public trust and confidence in charities in Northern Ireland

---

Snapshot report 1: summary of findings



## **The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland**

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is the regulator of charities in Northern Ireland, a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Communities.

### **Our vision**

To deliver in partnership with other key stakeholders in the charitable sector “a dynamic and well governed charities sector in which the public has confidence, underpinned by the Commission’s effective delivery of its regulatory role.”

Further information about our aims and activities is available on our website [www.charitycommissionni.org.uk](http://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk)

### **Equality**

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is committed to equality and diversity in all that we do.

### **Accessibility**

If you have any accessibility requirements please contact us.

# Contents

<b>Section 1: Introduction</b>	4
1.1 Methodology	
<b>Section 2: Overall trust and confidence in charities</b>	5
2.1 Findings	
2.2 Trust and confidence in context	
2.3 Support for charities	
<b>Section 3: Drivers of trust and confidence in charities</b>	10
3.1 Findings	
3.2 Key driver analysis	
3.3 Increasing trust and confidence	
<b>Section 4: Overall perceptions of charities</b>	14
4.1 Findings	
<b>Section 5: Public understanding of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland</b>	16
5.1 Findings	
<b>Conclusion</b>	18

## Section 1: Introduction

In October 2015, the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (the Commission) contracted Ipsos MORI to conduct research to explore the public's views of the charitable sector in Northern Ireland. This is the first time the Commission has carried out such research. In future years, we hope to use this research as a 'benchmark' against which to chart trends over time.

Given the challenging times some charities have faced recently, this research, which explores public trust and confidence in charities, is crucial for the sector as a whole. We hope that charities across Northern Ireland can use the findings to gain further insight into trust and confidence levels in charities, and what drives trust and confidence, informing and assisting them in shaping their own future planning.

This document provides a short overview of the key findings taken from the research. The full report from which this information is taken, including in-depth analysis of the findings and details of the methodology and questions asked, is available in the *Research* section of the Commission's website. Further short reports, each providing a 'snapshot' focused on specific findings, will also be published on our website.

We would like to thank those members of the public who gave their time to participate.

### 1.1 Methodology

There were two key elements to this research: an initial qualitative scoping exercise and a subsequent quantitative phase.

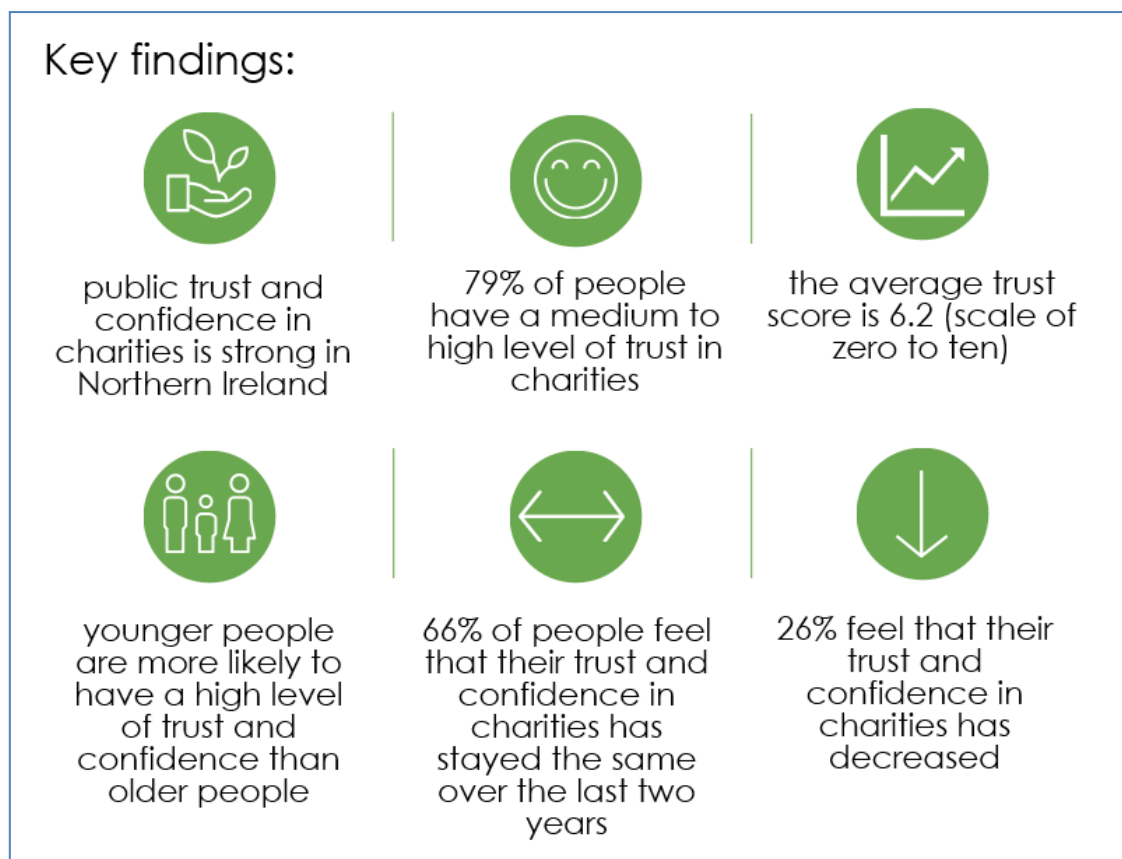
#### Qualitative phase

- Four focus groups were conducted with 29 members of the general public between 10 and 12 November 2015. Two groups were conducted in Belfast, one in Derry/Londonderry and one in Newry. The groups comprised a range of men and women from different age groups and socio-economic backgrounds.
- Eight depth interviews were carried out with a range of senior employees from charities in Northern Ireland.

#### Quantitative phase

- A series of questions were added to Ipsos MORI's Northern Ireland omnibus, which is a monthly, multi-client survey, comprising a representative sample of the population aged 16+.
- 1,016 interviews were conducted with a representative sample of the population of Northern Ireland.
- Fieldwork for the omnibus ran between 20 January and 8 February 2016.

## Section 2: Overall trust and confidence in charities



The public was asked to rate their overall level of trust and confidence in charities. A scale of zero to ten was used, where zero means that people do not trust charities at all and ten means that people trust charities completely. Trust ratings were grouped as follows:

- scores eight to 10 indicate high levels of trust
- scores five to seven indicate medium levels of trust
- scores zero to four indicate low levels of trust.

Participants were also asked whether their level of trust and confidence in charities had increased, decreased or stayed the same over the two years prior to the research.

### 2.1 Findings

Public trust and confidence in charities is strong in Northern Ireland. The average trust score for charities in Northern Ireland is 6.2 out of ten. The comparable figure in England and Wales is 5.7, down from 6.7 in 2014. Comparison with figures in England and Wales and Scotland is available at section 2.2 below.

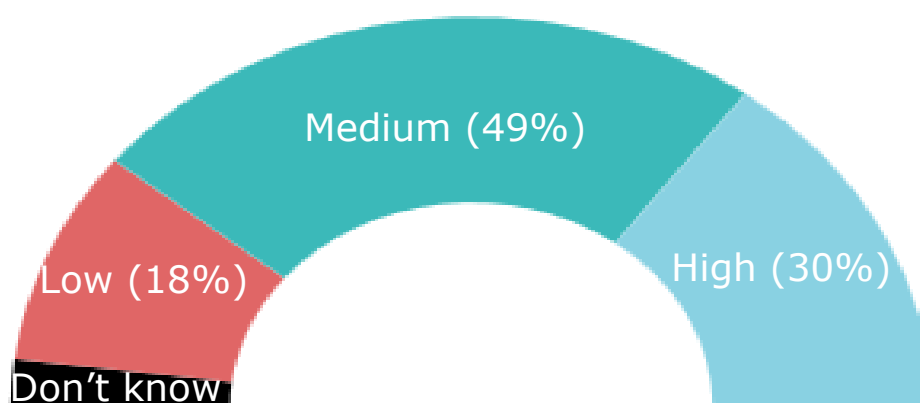
79% of the public in Northern Ireland have a medium to high level of trust in charities (30% high and 49% medium). A smaller proportion of the population (18%) have a low level of trust and confidence in charities. High levels of trust and confidence in charities are more typical among participants aged 16-34 compared to over 55s.

Across the group discussions, levels of trust and confidence in charities varied, with scores ranging between one and 10. Those who have higher levels of trust and confidence tend to give charities the 'benefit of the doubt.' Perceptions of trust and confidence are generally affected by negative stories in the media.

### What do people trust charities to do?

53% of people have a high level of trust that charities will have a positive impact on the causes they represent, while almost half, 48%, trust charities to do what they say that they will. Similar proportions display high levels of trust that charities are well managed (46%) and that charities ensure the funds and/or donations they raise will be used properly (45%).

### How much trust and confidence do you have in charities in Northern Ireland?



### Reported changes in levels of trust and confidence

Two thirds of the public, 66%, say that their trust and confidence in charities has stayed the same over the last two years, while 26% feel that it has decreased. Younger people are more inclined to claim that their levels of trust in charities have remained similar to two years ago, while over 55s are more likely to say that their levels of trust have decreased. A small proportion, 6%, say that their trust and confidence in charities has increased over the last two years.

During the group discussions, many indicated that their trust in charities has decreased in recent years. This was mainly attributed to the negative media stories that have emerged around chugging<sup>1</sup>, aggressive fundraising techniques and the salaries of some senior members of staff in charities. In addition,

<sup>1</sup> *Approaching people in the street seeking subscriptions or donations to a particular charity*

participants feel some charities' fundraising methods are often too frequent and invasive, particularly when fundraisers call at their door in the evening.

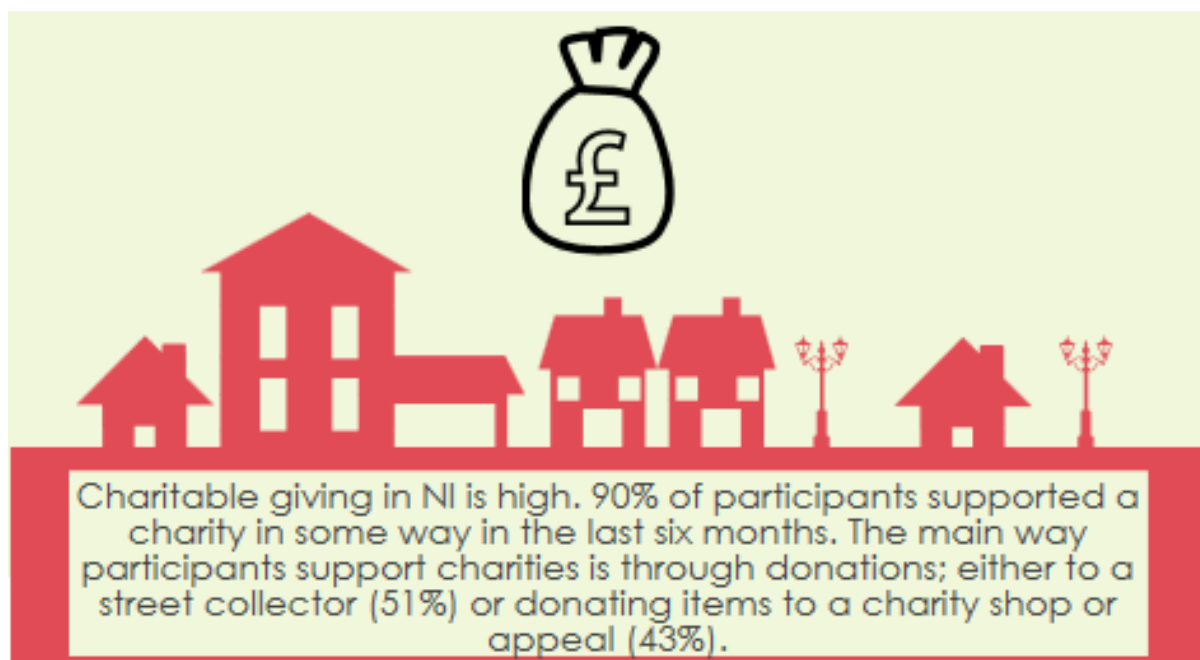
### Reasons for a decrease in trust and confidence

Negative stories reported in the media featured as a core reason why participants reported that their trust levels had decreased. Almost half, 49%, of those who reported their levels of trust had decreased indicated this was due to media coverage about how charities spend the donations they receive, while 40% claim media stories about charities in general was a reason for decreased trust. 35% said media stories about fundraising practices used by some charities decreased their trust and confidence in the charity sector.

## 2.2 Trust and confidence in context

Charity regulators in England and Wales and Scotland have recently published the findings of their own research. The Charity Commission for England and Wales (CCEW) found the average level of trust and confidence in charities has dropped from 6.7 in 2014 to 5.7 in 2016.<sup>2</sup> In Scotland, the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) published findings that indicate 64% of people rate their trust in the sector as six out of ten or above, down slightly from 2014 when the figure was 68%.<sup>3</sup> This suggests that charities in Northern Ireland enjoy a comparatively strong level of trust and confidence.

## 2.3 Support for charities



Members of the public were asked about the support they give to charities and the factors influencing their support for a charity.

<sup>2</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-trust-and-confidence-in-charities-2016](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-trust-and-confidence-in-charities-2016)

<sup>3</sup> [www.oscr.org.uk/hot-topics/surveys-show-strong-support-for-charities-in-scotland](http://www.oscr.org.uk/hot-topics/surveys-show-strong-support-for-charities-in-scotland)

Overall, charitable giving in Northern Ireland is high, with 90% claiming they supported a charity in some way in the six months leading up to the research. The main way participants support charities is through donations, for example, to a street collector (51%) or through donating items to a charity shop or appeal (43%).

Participants in the group discussions looked at how they support charities financially, either through donations or fundraising. While many claimed they often donate spare change through charity boxes, males tend to be more cautious of doing so than females. When donating in this way, many females in the group discussions claim they do not check which charity the donations are for. However, males would be more inclined to check and would only donate if they recognised the charity. Generally, this only applies when people are donating relatively low sums. When donating large sums of money or registering for regular donations through direct debits, participants claim they would only donate to charities they know.

The cause the charity represents is the main factor that influences the public's support for it with almost three quarters (74%) of people indicating that this affects their decision. A quarter of people are influenced by their awareness of the impact a charity has on the cause it represents. One in ten people (11%) indicate that trust influences their decision.





6.2

## Trust and confidence in charities in Northern Ireland

The average trust score for charities in Northern Ireland is 6.2 out of ten

### Reported change in trust and confidence over last two years



6% increased

66% stayed the same

26% decreased

2% did not know

### Reasons for a decrease in trust and confidence



## Section 3: Drivers of trust and confidence in charities



Members of the public were asked about the factors that are important to them when making a decision on whether to trust charities in Northern Ireland.

### 3.1 Findings

#### Transparency and reporting

The most important factors regarding what is important to the public in terms of trust were identified as donations and funds raised by charities being used properly and that a charity is transparent about how it raises and manages this money, and in how it reports on this. In addition, participants stated that how charities raise their funds or collect donations is important to them.

92% agree that charities should be transparent about how public donations are spent, with the same proportion feeling it is important that charities demonstrate how they benefit the public.

Despite this, fewer than two in five (40%) people know where they can find out information about how charities are run and fewer than one third (32%) know where to find out information about how charities are spending their money.

According to group participants, it is important to them that charities display fewer instances of aggressive fundraising techniques and tackle the perceived problem of 'chugging'. Similar to the quantitative phase, it is important to participants that charities are transparent about how they raise and manage their funds and donations.

### Locality, familiarity and size

Locality and familiarity with a cause are also two aspects that are important to members of the public in influencing their levels of trust.

86% of people are more likely to trust a charity if they believe in what it is trying to do. A similar proportion (85%) would be more likely to trust a charity if they have personal experience of it. 72% said that if they have heard of a charity, they are more likely to trust it. Similarly, participants during the qualitative exercise claimed they would trust a charity more if they believe in what it is trying to do and in the cause that it represents, especially if the cause is relevant and personal to them. In addition, if they have personal experience of a charity they would be inclined to trust it more.

70% of people trust charities more if they are providing services in their local community, while 49% trust charities more if they are based in Northern Ireland. 47% of people indicate that they would trust smaller charities more than larger charities, and this proportion is higher amongst older people.

### 3.2 Key driver analysis

A key driver analysis technique was used to determine key drivers of overall trust and confidence by examining the range of responses given by research participants.

Key factors include:

- an individual's general attitude towards trust (that is, is the person a trusting person in general)
- the perceived effectiveness of charity regulation
- size and location of charities.

### 3.3 Increasing trust and confidence in charities

To increase trust and confidence in charities participants in the discussion groups suggested charities should:

- provide greater openness and transparency about what they do and how they are managed
- feedback this information to the general public
- display information on how they are regulated, similar to banks
- review their fundraising activities
- review salaries and bonuses given to senior employees.


Some practical things that charities could do to maintain and increase levels of trust and confidence include:

- addressing negative stories that are portrayed in the media
- promoting their own regulation by the Commission
- demonstrating local presence
- being transparent and demonstrating that they have effective processes and procedures for running the charity, regardless of its size
- demonstrating the benefit they provide to the public.

# Increasing trust and confidence in charities

How can charities maintain and increase levels of trust and confidence?


This research can assist in determining key drivers of overall trust and confidence by examining the range of responses given by research participants




Address negative stories that are portrayed in the media




Promote their own regulation by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland



Demonstrate a local presence




Be transparent and report on how funds/donations are spent



Demonstrate how they benefit the public

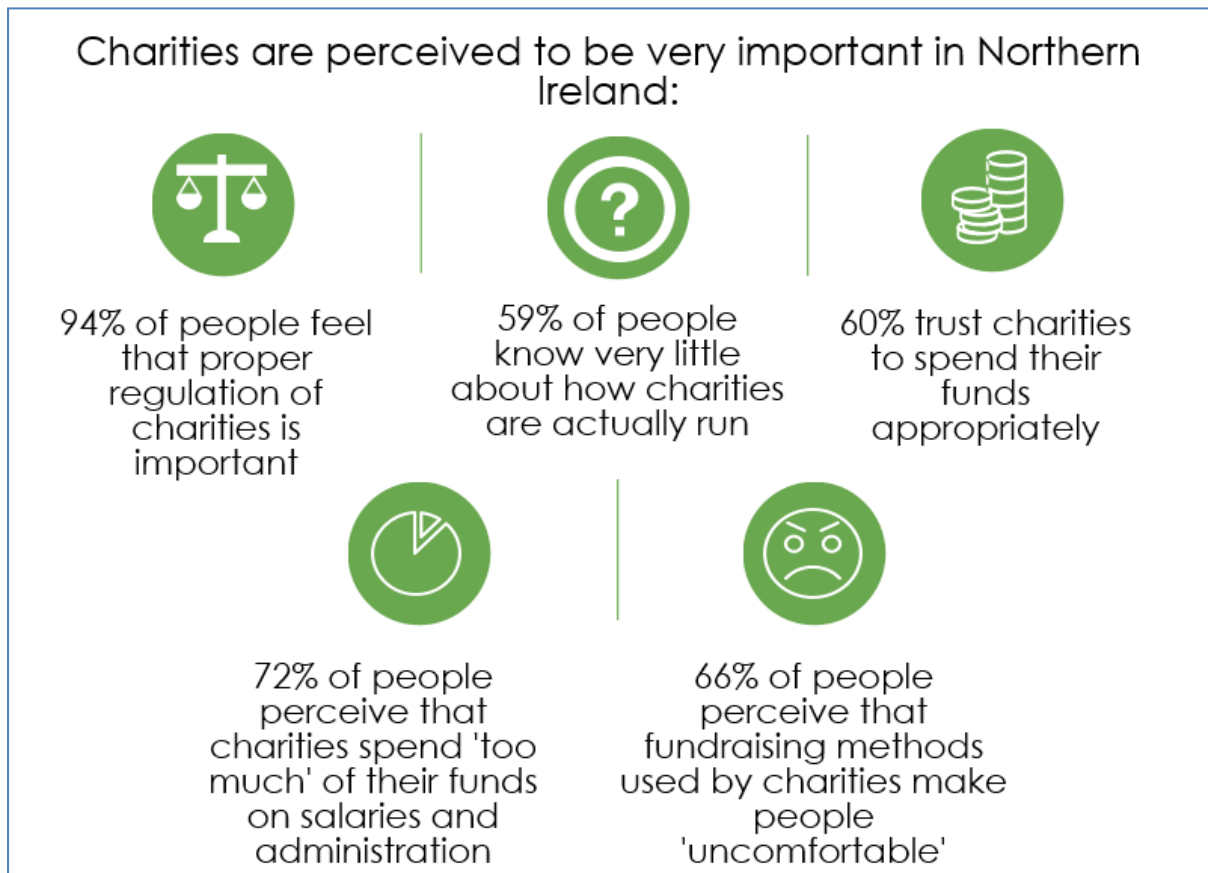


Be transparent about how funds are raised



Do what they say they will

## Section 4: Overall perceptions of charities



Members of the public were asked about their perceptions of the conduct of charities, the importance of charities in society, and on how charities are managed and their activities.

### 4.1 Findings

#### The importance of charities in society

Charities are perceived to be of critical importance in Northern Ireland, with participants in the group discussions commenting on how people in Northern Ireland are reliant on charities to provide services. In addition, participants perceived many services would not exist if charities did not provide them.

#### Perceptions of charities' conduct

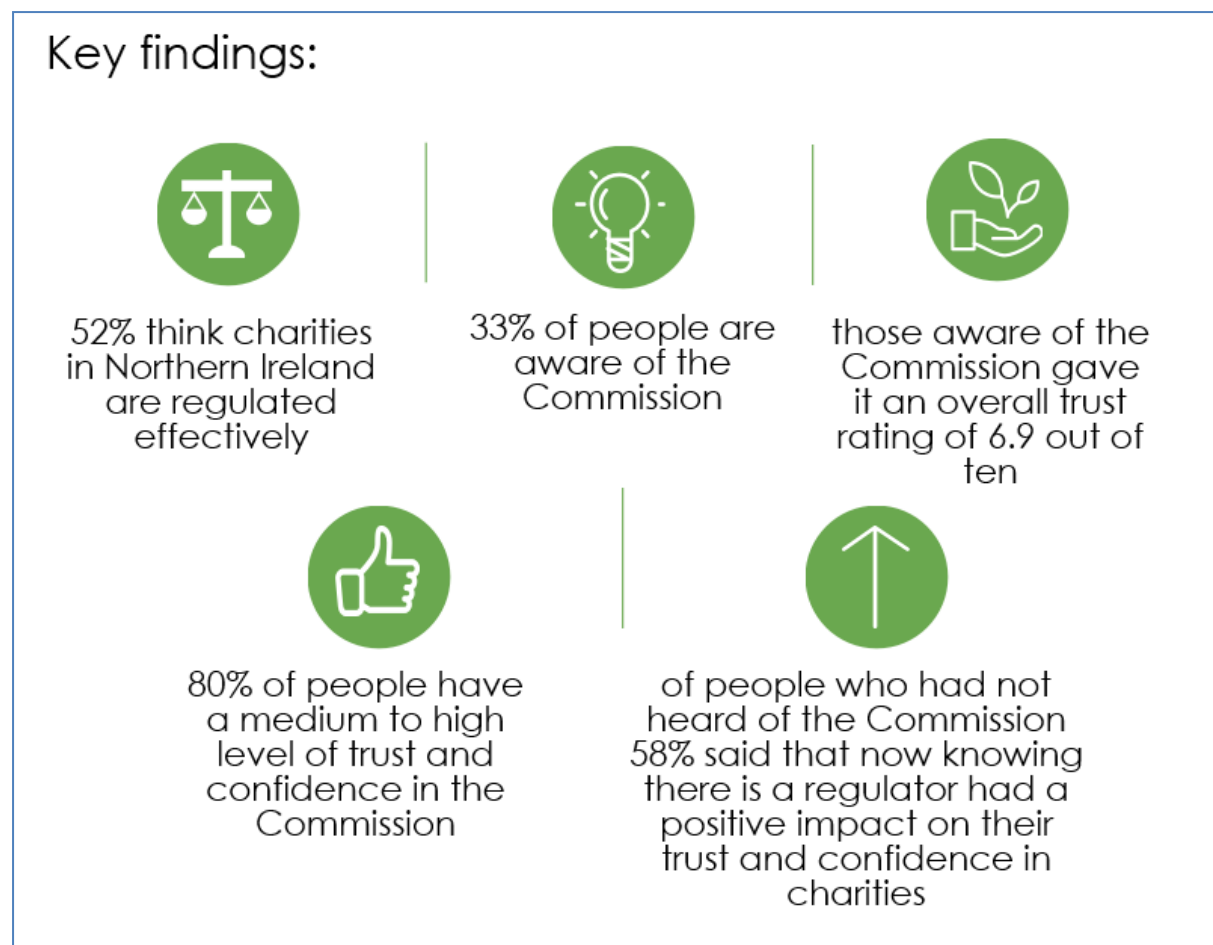
58% of people feel that most charities are trustworthy. Almost all participants (94%) agree that proper regulation of charities is important to them. However, a significant proportion (59%) of people know very little about how charities are actually run.

## Expenditure and fundraising

72% of people indicated that they perceive charities spend too much of their funds on salaries and administration. However, 60% also agree that they trust charities to spend their funds appropriately. 66% of people perceive fundraising methods used by charities make people uncomfortable.

During focus groups, there was discussion regarding remuneration packages that had been mentioned in the media, which it was perceived related to large, international charities. Some suggested that larger salaries may be necessary to encourage the 'best people' to apply for the post, while others felt that a large salary should not be an expectation of a charity worker, as they are working to advance a particular cause.

## Section 5: Public understanding of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland



The Commission is still a relatively new regulator in Northern Ireland, established in March 2009, with charity registration launched in December 2013. The research sought information on awareness of, and attitudes towards, charity regulation.

### 5.1 Findings

#### Effective regulation of charities

Just over half of the population (52%) think that charities are regulated effectively in Northern Ireland. A smaller, but still significant, proportion (21%) perceives charity regulation in Northern Ireland to be ineffective. Generally older participants, that is, those aged 55+, were more likely to express the view that charity regulation is ineffective.

Almost three in ten (28%) people do not know how effective the regulation of charities is in Northern Ireland, a high percentage of the population. Older and middle aged participants are significantly more likely not to know how effectively charities are regulated in Northern Ireland.



## Awareness of the Commission

33% of people in Northern Ireland are aware of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

## Trust in the Commission

Amongst people who are aware of the Commission there is a strong degree of trust and confidence in it. The average score for overall trust and confidence in the Commission is 6.9 out of ten. 80% of people who are aware of it have a medium to high level of trust and confidence in the Commission. 8% of those who are aware of it have a low level of trust in the Commission.



## Impact of awareness of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland

Among those who were not previously aware of the Commission, the existence of an organisation which regulates charities in Northern Ireland is positively received. Over half (58%) said that this new information had either a very or fairly positive impact on their trust and confidence.

Many in the group discussions claimed that they felt reassured knowing there is a charity regulator. A few participants felt the Commission needs to raise its profile in Northern Ireland either through the newspapers, television and social media, while most felt the charities should also have a role in promoting the existence of the Commission, and their regulation by it.

## Conclusion

These are challenging times for charities and we hope that this research, carried out independently of the Commission, will be a valuable tool for charities across Northern Ireland who can use the findings to gain further insight into the factors that drive trust and confidence, informing and assisting them in shaping their own future planning.

For an in-depth analysis of the research findings, and details of the methodology and questions asked, please refer to the full research report, prepared by Ipsos MORI, that is available on the Commission's website.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Commission to discuss this report and share your views. We are keen to hear from anyone with an interest in this report to help identify what information would be most useful, and in what context, for analysis in the future.



**Further information on our activities is available from:**

**Charity Commission for Northern Ireland**

**257 Lough Road**

**Lurgan**

**Craigavon**

**BT66 6NQ**

**[www.charitycommissionni.org.uk](http://www.charitycommissionni.org.uk)**

**Email: [admin@charitycommissionni.org.uk](mailto:admin@charitycommissionni.org.uk)**

**Tel: 028 3832 0220**

**Fax: 028 3832 5943**

**Textphone: 028 3834 7639**

** Follow us on Twitter @CharityCommNI**



**This document is available in large print or other formats on request**