

MATTER OF TRUST: WHAT THE PUBLIC THINKS OF CHARITIES AND HOW IT AFFECTS TRUST

James Noble and Sue Wixley

'Too often charities respond defensively' when faced with 'legitimate questions'.

William Shawcross, Chair of the Charity Commission (16 September 2014)

'We really want to try and keep charities and voluntary groups out of the realms of politics. Some 99.9% do exactly that. When they stray into the realm of politics that is not what they are about and that is not why people give them money. The important thing charities should be doing is sticking to their knitting and doing the best they can to promote their agenda, which should be about helping others.'

Brooks Newmark MP, former Minister for Civil Society (3 September 2014)

Introduction: Why trust matters

NPC is passionate about helping charities, social enterprises and their funders to achieve the greatest impact. We believe that this agenda would be under threat if the public were to lose faith in charities. For this reason, we are committed to understanding public trust in charities and what drives it, and to championing what we believe are the vital ingredients of improving trust in charities—accountability about impact and transparency about spending.

Since our [Mind the gap poll](#)¹ with Ipsos MORI in March 2014, the debate about whether charities benefit from—and deserve—high levels of public trust has thundered on. The charity sector has faced fresh controversies about how Big Society projects were funded², the rights of charities to campaign³ and executive pay⁴. And charities have been urged to respond⁵ to questions about their role, activities and spending.

This paper outlines the headline findings of an online survey carried out on our behalf by Ipsos MORI in mid-October with a representative sample of more than 1,000 adults across Great Britain⁶. We will be releasing more of this data in the coming months. Here we focus on:

- Current levels of trust in charities;
- The drivers of trust: including different mental images people have about charities and how much contact they have with the sector; and
- Understanding different segments of charity supporters and opponents.

How much do people trust charities?

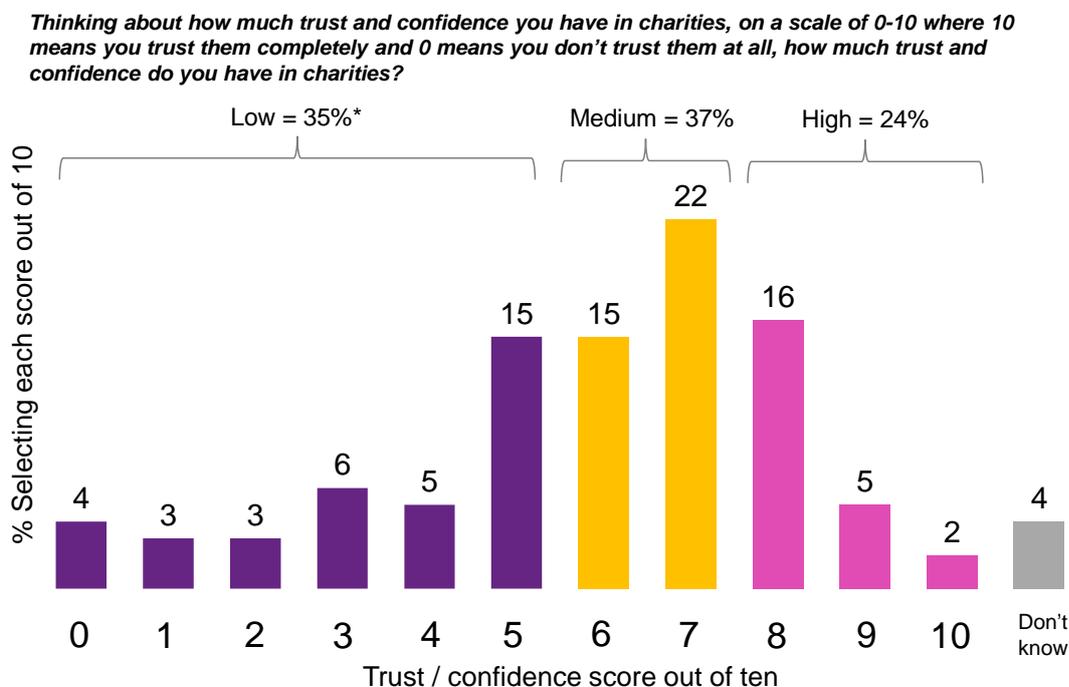
When asked to say on a scale of 0 to 10 how much they trust UK charities, we found a fairly even spread. Over one in three respondents give charities a low score of five or less, including about 10% who give charities very low marks of 2 or less. At the other end of the scale, just under one in four give charities high marks of eight or more, but only a small minority (2%) give charities top marks—ten out of ten.

Over one in three people (35%) have some mistrust in UK charities, however the majority of the population are somewhere in the middle. The most common score is seven out of ten and the average is 5.9.

These findings are slightly more negative than the latest findings of the Charity Commission⁷, whose question we repeated in this survey. It is important not to draw too many conclusions from this as we have used an online methodology rather than face-to-face, which will account for some, if not all, of the difference. Instead, our survey should be seen as a snapshot of how charities are viewed at a point in time.

Over one in three people have doubts about charities

Figure 1. Trust and confidence in charities



Base: All (1,009) * Net scores slightly different to sum of individual scores because of rounding

What type of organisation do people think charities are?

We asked people to choose which words or phrases most come to mind when they think of charities in the UK, and the results illustrate that people have a number of different mental images of the sector. More than three quarters (77%) of people mostly see charities as either national or international organisations, compared to 15% who mostly associate charities with local bodies. A substantial majority of the population also believe that charities are mostly large organisations (67%) and 'not involved in political issues' (67%). Eight in ten think of charities as relying on funding from the public (80%) rather than mainly from Government or business (12%).

Perceptions are more divided about whether charities are run by professionals (41%) vs volunteers (51%) or focus on service delivery (51%) vs awareness raising (41%).

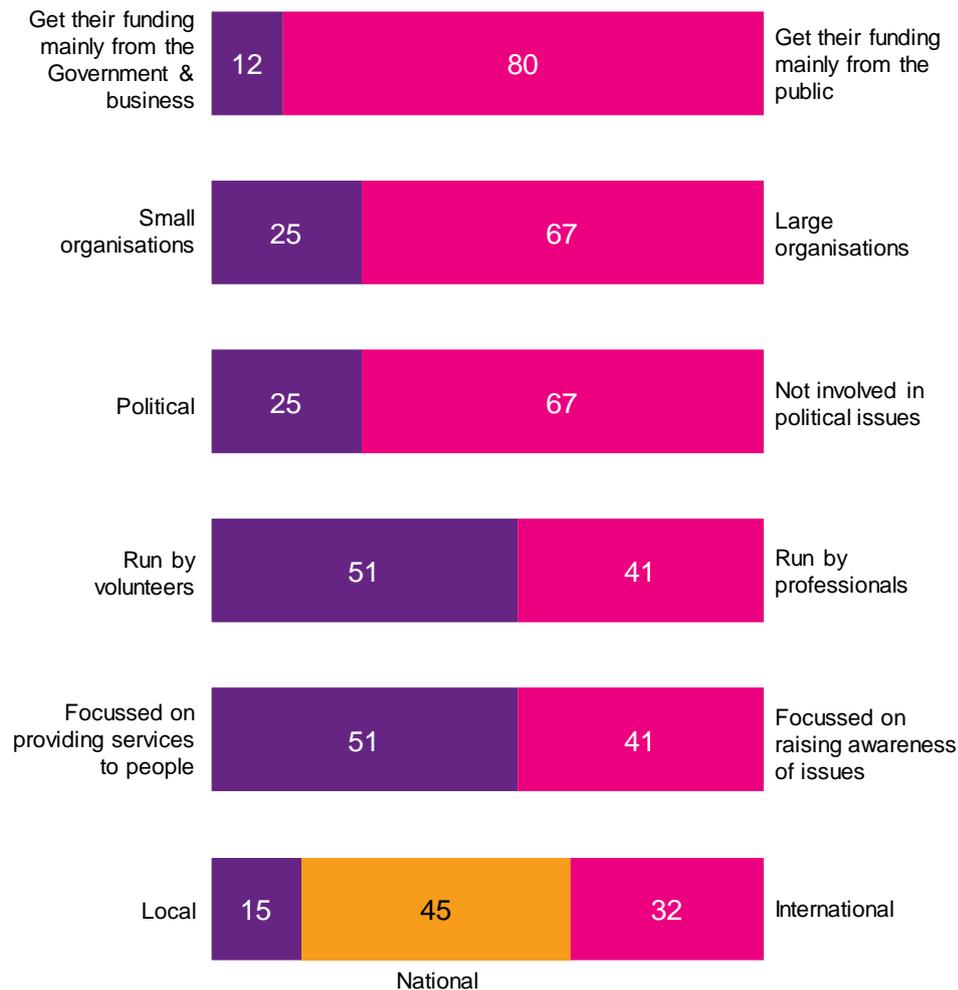
More work is needed to compare these perceptions to reality. But it is worth noting that, while the vast majority of people (67%) mostly think about large organisations when they think of charity, the reality is that only 16% of charities are in fact large, with an income of more than £100k⁸. In contrast, the public perception that charities are mainly run by volunteers (55%) is in line with the reality that some 53% of charities have no employees⁹.

It should be noted that around 8% of respondents did not, or could not answer the question, so each row adds to 92% rather than 100%.

Most people think of charities as national or international organisations not local ones

Figure 2. What people have in mind when they think of charities

When you think about charities, which of the following words or phrases most comes to mind?



Base: All (1,009).

Answers do not = 100% because of 8% saying don't know / other

How do perceptions of charities affect trust?

In this section we look at how peoples' perceptions of charities are linked to trust. Down the side of the chart are the attributes of charities that respondents said 'came to mind', then for each attribute we show the level of trust these respondents have in the charity sector overall.

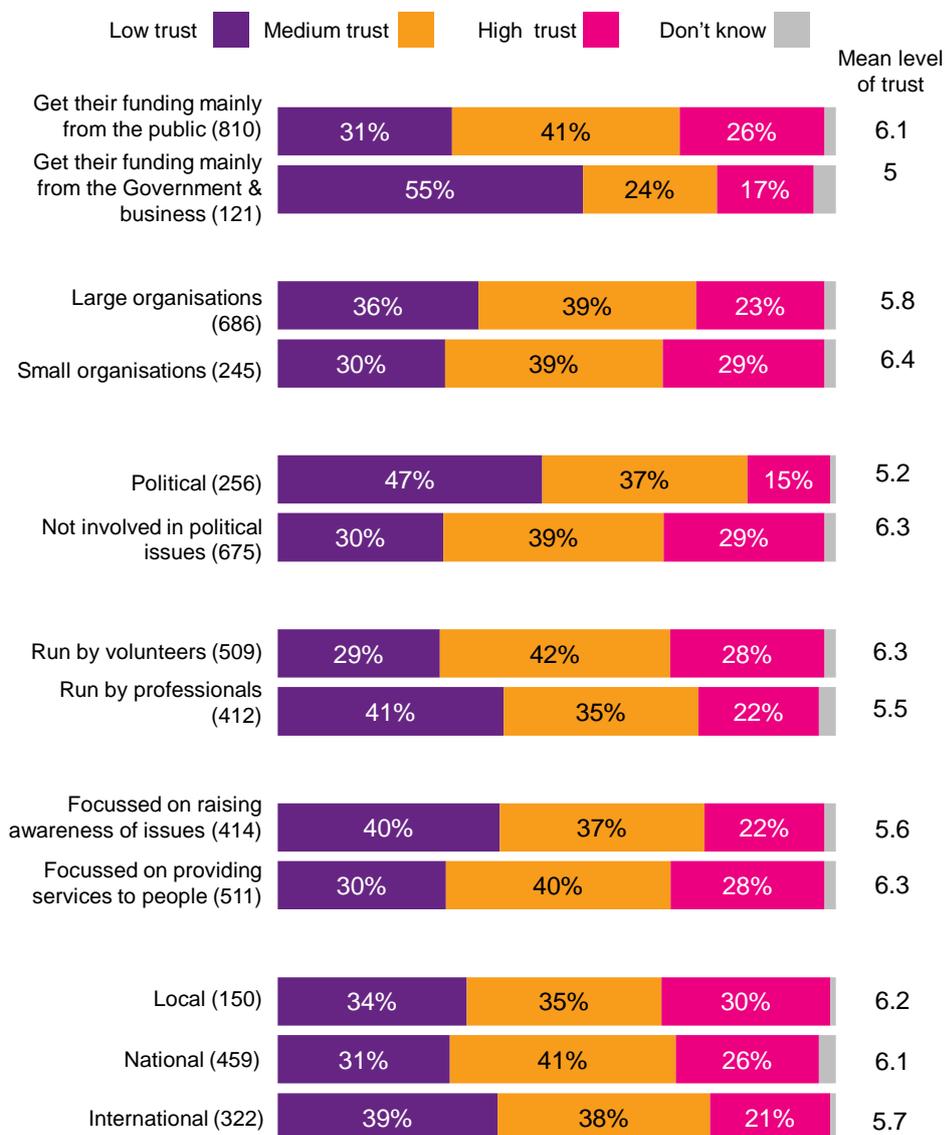
The most mistrusting people are those who think that charities tend to get most of their money from Government/business (55% give charities a low trust rating) and those who think charities are more political (47%). Criticism of charities is also slightly higher amongst those who think they are run by professionals (41%) and focused on raising awareness (40%) rather than service delivery.

Higher levels of trust are found amongst people who mostly associate charities with apolitical, small organisations that use public donations and focus on providing services to people.

People are less trusting of charities they see as political

Figure 3. Factors associated with trust and confidence

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH TRUST & CONFIDENCE



Base sizes shown in brackets

What type of charities are people most likely to donate to?

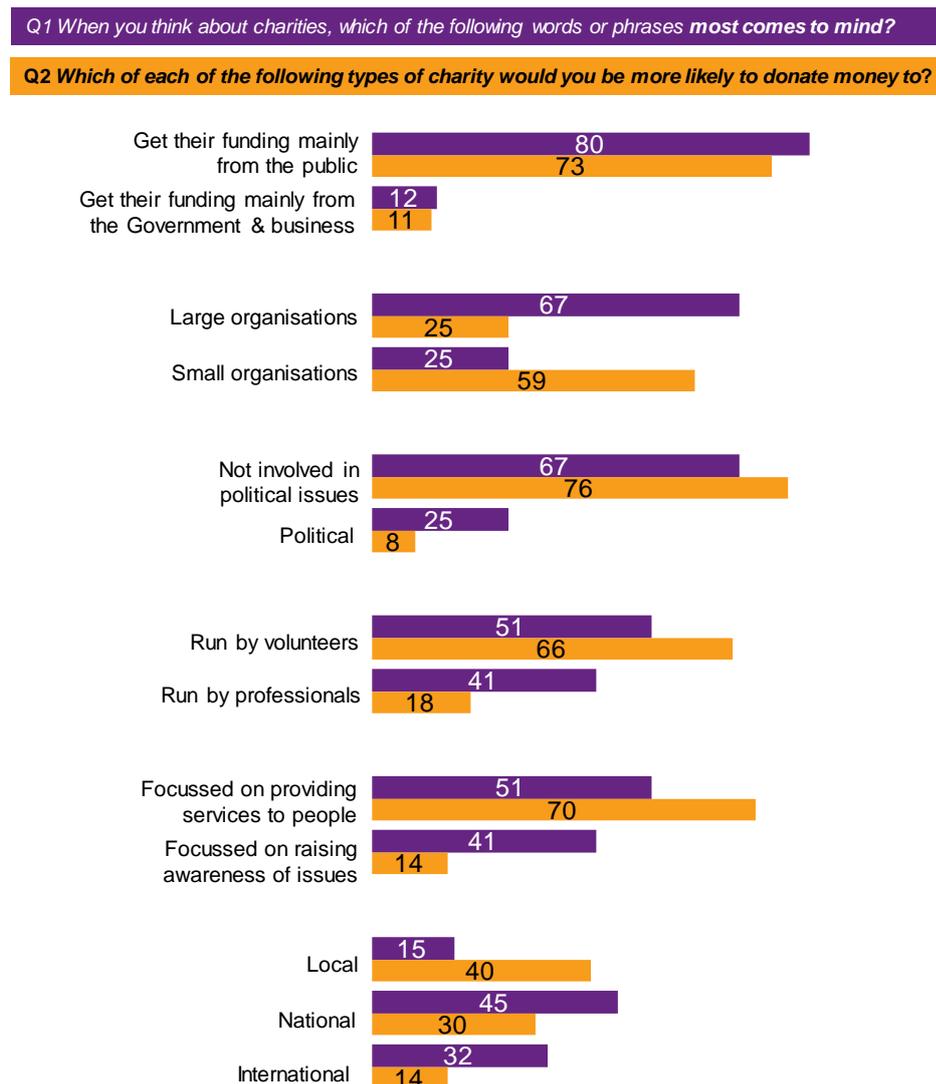
When asked which type of charities people would prefer to donate to, there are some strong preferences. Two thirds (66%) say they would prefer to donate to charities run by volunteers rather than professionals, 70% said they favoured service delivery charities to awareness raising, three in four (76%) said they favoured charities that stayed away from politics and 73% preferred charities that received most of their money from the public. However, a sizeable minority of the population would still prefer to give to charities involved in politics (8%) and awareness raising (14%)—illustrating perhaps that the diversity of the sector is mirrored by diversity in opinions about its role.

We also found a gap between peoples' perception about what types of organisations charities are and their appeal— whether people would choose to donate to them. The most significant contrast here is that the majority (59%) would prefer to donate to smaller charities, even though two thirds of people currently associate charities with large organisations rather than small ones. Similarly, while only 15% mostly think of charities as local, 40% would prefer to donate to local charities.

As above, a number of people (16% of the sample) opted out of the question: either because they didn't know the answer or because they wouldn't be prepared to donate at all.

40% of people would prefer to donate to local charities, but only 15% mostly think of charities as 'local'

Figure 4. Perception vs appeal



Base: All (1,009). Answers do not = 100% because of people saying don't know / others

How much do people know charities?

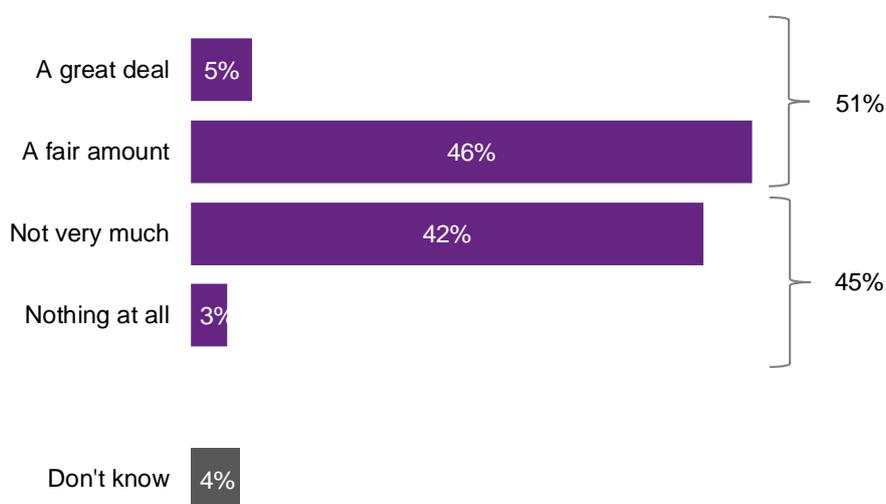
Another likely determinant of people’s trust and confidence in charities is how well they feel they know the sector and what contact they have with charities.

Firstly, we asked people to rate their own level of knowledge on a simple four point scale (see figure 5). Above all, it’s important to note that the overwhelming majority of people put themselves in the middle—either knowing a ‘fair amount’ or ‘not very much’. Only one in 20 people (5%) feel they know a ‘great deal’ about charities, while 3% say they know ‘nothing at all’ (a further 4% said don’t know).

If we then divide the sample into two groups, we see that slightly more than half (51%) feel they know at least a fair amount about charities in the UK, while slightly less than half feel they know less (45%).

Figure 5. Self-reported knowledge of charities

How much, if anything, do you feel you know about charities in the UK?



Base: All (1,009)

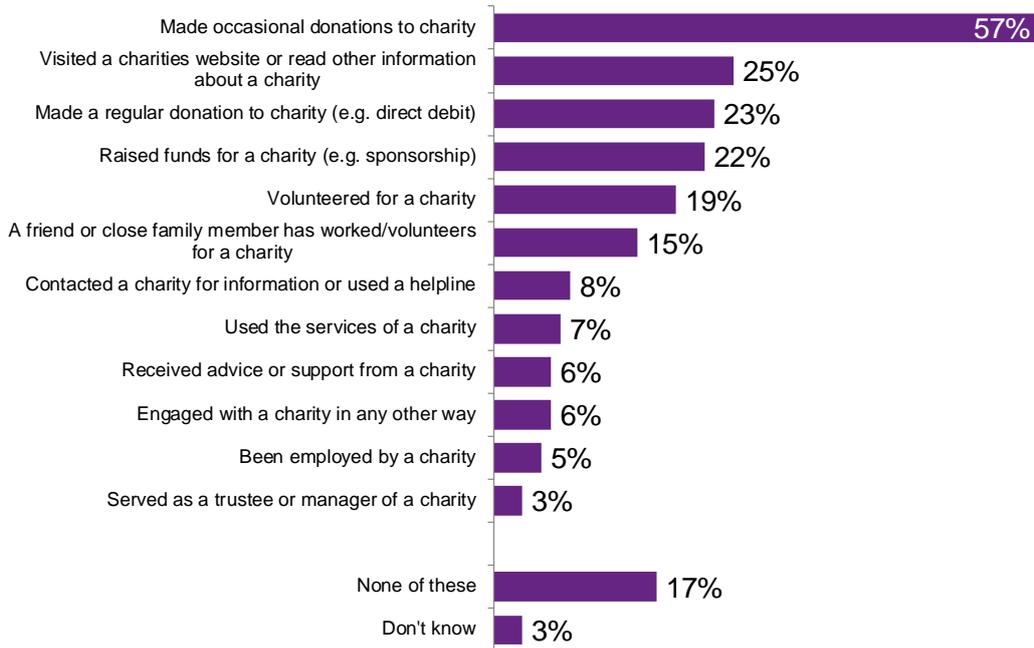
Most people feel they know a ‘fair amount’ or ‘not very much’

What contact does the public have with charities?

Respondents were also asked to identify what kinds of contact they had with charities in the last year or two. Most people (57%) say they have made occasional donations to charities during this time and 25% had made regular donations. By contrast, smaller proportions say they manage (3%), work (5%) or volunteer (19%) for a charity. Meanwhile, one in six of the population (17%) say they have had no contact or engagement with charities in the last two years.

Figure 6. Contact with charities

Which, if any, of the following have you done in the last year or two?



Base: All (1,009)

One in six say they have had no contact with charities in the last year or two

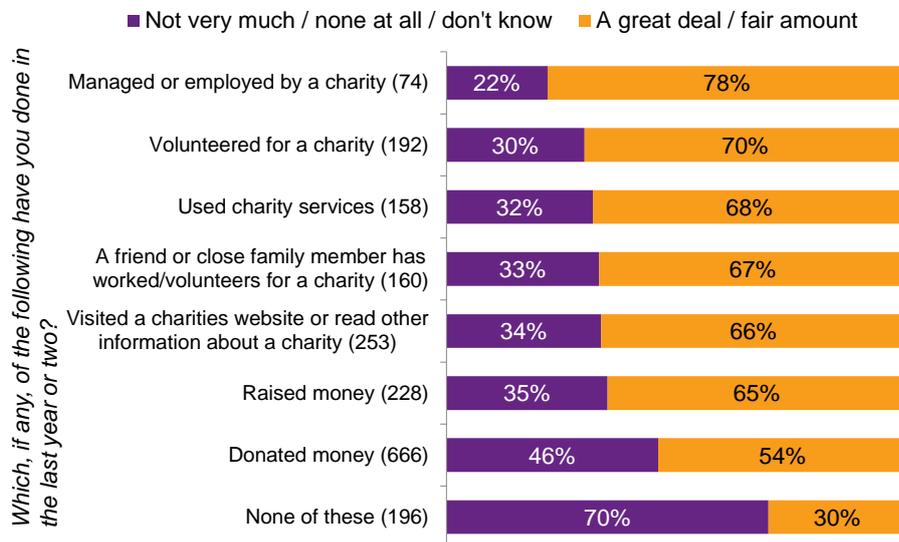
How closely related is knowledge of charities and contact with them?

The following chart combines some of the categories above to further explore the relationship between the types of contact people have with charities and how much people feel they know about them.

Similarly high levels of self-reported awareness of charities are found amongst employees and volunteers, service users, those whose friends or family are involved and those who have seen information about charities. On the other hand, those who have had no contact with charities are much less likely to feel they know a lot about them.

Figure 7. Relationship between knowledge and contact

How much, if anything, do you feel you know about charities in the UK?



Base sizes shown in brackets

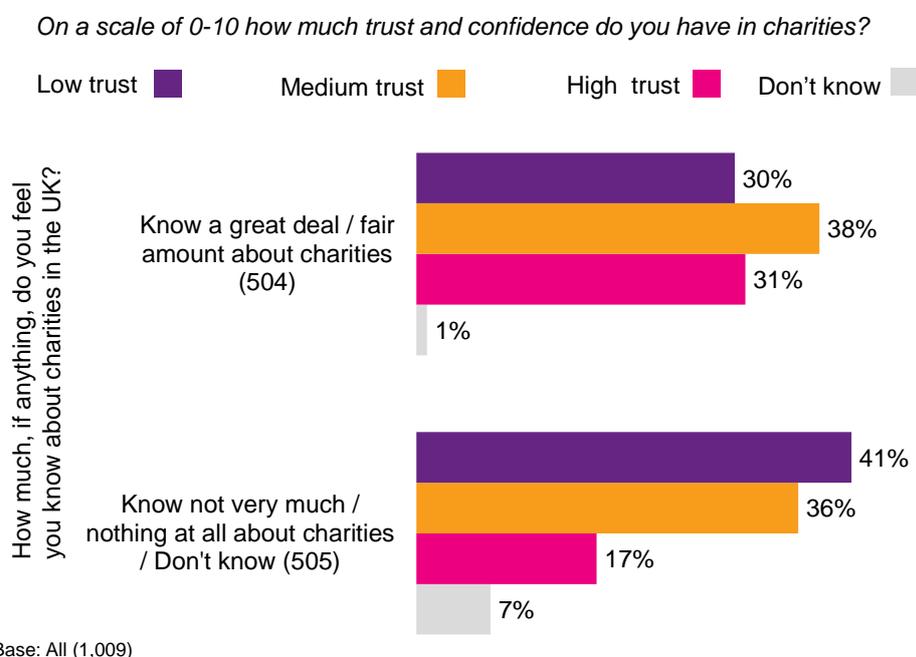
How does knowledge affect trust?

There is a relationship between peoples' perceived knowledge of charities and their levels of trust and confidence. Three in ten (31%) people who feel they know a great deal or fair amount about charities also report a high level of trust (8-10 out of ten)—compared to just 17% of those who know not very much or less. Meanwhile mistrust of charities is highest at 41% amongst those who are less informed. However, there is a significant group who feel informed but also have lower levels of trust (30% of those who feel informed). The proportion who give charities a medium trust score of 6 or 7 is similar across the two broad knowledge groups.

So, while higher levels of knowledge of charities generally goes hand-in-hand with higher levels of trust, it is not necessarily the case all the time. This suggests that there are more genuine reasons for dissatisfaction than a simple lack of awareness and that focussing on improving people's knowledge of charities alone might not improve trust.

Trust in charities does not necessarily follow knowledge

Figure 8. Relationship between knowledge and trust



How can the population be segmented in terms of their views on charities?

Just as people have a range of different mental images (rather than a single concept) of charities, there is no one public view of the sector. Instead there are different groups of views, each with their own characteristics. We combined the data on trust in charities with people's self-reported knowledge of the sector, to segment the population into four broad categories.

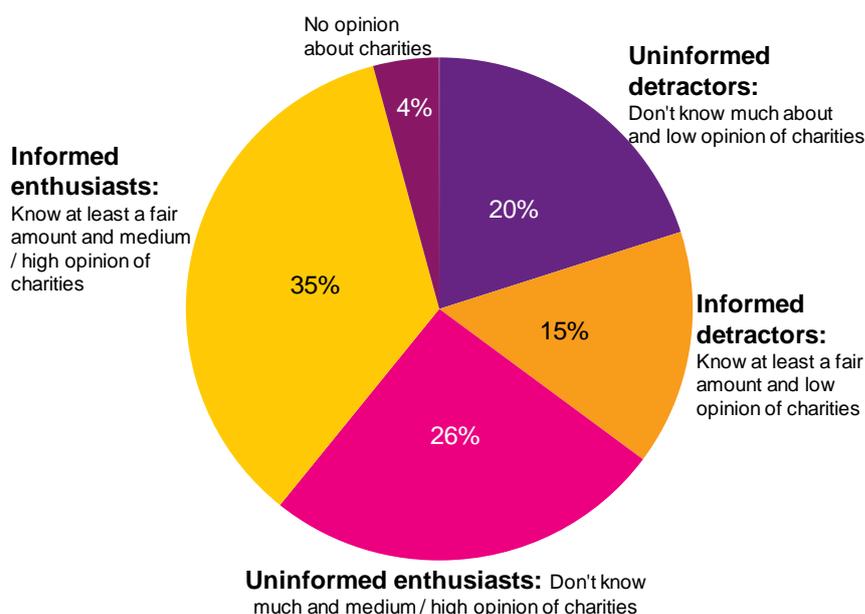
Enthusiasts vs detractors

1. Informed enthusiasts: This is the largest group of people (35%). They are at least mildly positive about charities (scoring 6 out of ten or higher) and feel they know a lot about them.
2. Uninformed enthusiasts: One in four of the population (26%). They are also positive but with a lower level of familiarity.

3. Uninformed detractors: The 20% who feel they do not know much about charities and are negative about them.
4. Informed detractors: The 15% of the population who feel negative despite knowing a great deal or fair amount about the sector.

Understanding whether a group is an informed or uninformed enthusiast, as opposed to an informed or uninformed detractor, might help charities to develop a more targeted approach. Reaching uninformed detractors might be particularly challenging given they this group rarely has direct contact with charities, for example as volunteers or service users. By contrast, the proportion of informed detractors seems to be unaffected by the relationship people have with charities (it remains at around 15% among those who work / volunteer for charities as well as those who have no contact with charities at all). Further analysis of this data will focus on understanding their concerns in more detail.

Figure 9. Enthusiasts vs detractors: how the population divides



Base: All (1,009)

Conclusion: What next?

Our sector is not alone in facing questions from the public. Indeed virtually every institution—from government to business, care homes to prisons—is under scrutiny these days. There are many transparency bodies¹⁰ at work now and international bodies like the G8 and EU are getting in on the act. When it comes to openness, charities should not get a free pass, benefitting as they do from taxpayers' time and money and from public funding and tax concessions.

In our earlier *Mind the gap* paper¹¹ we recommended that charities consider how best to respond both individually and collectively to public concerns. Among other things, we argued that the sector needed to come up with a joint strategy to talk to the public about its changing role and to respond more proactively to criticism.

We are encouraged by what seems to be an increasing recognition of the importance of charities 'having answers' and developing the capacity to respond quickly to criticism¹². A case in point is the recently formed *Understanding Charities Group*¹³ which NPC is involved with. We hope that some of the insights in this research, such as our four segments of enthusiasts and detractors will inform these efforts.

Greater accountability and transparency, while never unproblematic especially in the short run, has the capacity both to defuse some of the naysayers' arguments and to bolster the case put forward by charity proponents.

We will be sharing the full findings in the coming months, including information on the role of evidence in bolstering trust and more detailed analysis of the demographics of the four segments such as political affiliation. If you would like to find out more, please get in touch with the authors: sue.wixley@thinknpc.org and james.noble@thinknpc.org.

What are the public thinking?

Here is a selection of comments provided by respondents:

'Charities no longer seem to be charitable. They do not help the people they say that they are there to help. They seem to be tax dodging enterprises set up to make tax dodging greedy people rich.'

'Charities are great. It is a shame that councils can no longer support them financially.'

'They pay bosses too much.'

'In some viral campaigns charities raise awareness without really discussing the issues or addressing the problem directly.'

'They are pushy and also spend too much on flashy adverts.'

'Hard selling techniques by national and international charities undermine local organisations. Commissioning means that big charities push out local groups by undercutting them.'

'Too focussed on niche issues rather than the bigger picture, having large overlaps with other charities rather than rationalising and working together.'

'Some are too interested in helping abroad, not local people.'

'Charities are doing their best and need our help.'

'Charities don't get the message out to those who could volunteer'

'They are not critical enough of governments'

Appendix

Selected questions and topline results: Attitudes to charities 2014

- The survey was conducted online using the Ipsos MORI panel.
- A representative sample of 1,009 adults aged 16-75 across Great Britain completed the survey between 10 and 14 October 2014.
- Data are weighted by age, gender and work status to match the profile of the population.
- Where percentages do not sum to 100 this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of “don’t know” categories, or multiple answers. An asterisk (*) denotes any value of less than half a per cent.
- All findings presented here are based on all respondents.

Q1a. When you think about charities which of the following words or phrases most come to mind...?		
Q2. And which of each of the following types of charity would you be more likely to donate money to...?		
	Most comes to mind	Likely to donate to
	%	%
Large organisations or Small organisations	67	25
	25	59
International or National or Local	32	14
	45	30
	15	40
Run by volunteers or Run by professionals	51	66
	41	18
Focused on providing services to people or Focused on raising awareness of issues	51	70
	41	14
Political or Not involved in political issues	25	8
	67	76
Get their funding mainly from the public or Get their funding mainly from government and businesses	80	73
	12	11
Don't know	4	8
Other (Please specify)	1	1
None of these	3	7

Q3. Thinking about how much trust and confidence you have in charities, on a scale of 0-10 where 10 means you trust them completely and 0 means you don't trust them at all, how much trust and confidence do you have in charities?

0 Don't trust them	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Trust them completely	DK	Mean
4	3	3	6	5	15	15	22	16	5	2	4	5.88

Q4. How much, if anything, do you feel you know about charities in the UK?

SINGLE CODE, REVERSE SCALE

	%
A great deal	5
A fair amount	46
Not very much	42
Nothing at all	3
Great deal / fair amount	51
Not very much / at all	45
Don't know	4

Q5. Which, if any, of the following have you done in the last year or two?

	%
Made occasional donations to charity	57
Visited a charities website or read other information about a charity	25
Made a regular donation to charity (e.g. direct debit)	23
Raised funds for a charity (e.g. sponsorship)	22
Volunteered for a charity	19
A friend or close family member has worked/volunteers for a charity	15
Contacted a charity for information or used a helpline	8
Used the services of a charity	7
Received advice or support from a charity	6
Engaged with a charity in any other way (specify)	6
Been employed by a charity	5
Served as a trustee or manager of a charity	3
Don't know	3
None of these	17

References

- ¹ Noble, J, and Wixley, S. (2014) [Mind the gap: What the public thinks about charities](#). New Philanthropy Capital.
- ² Agencies, 'Big Society Network under investigation over "funding misuse" in *The Guardian*, 26 July 2014.
- ³ Press Association. 'Charities to "keep out of politics"' in the *Daily Echo*, 4 September 2014.
- ⁴ Dysch, M. 'Revealed: who gets what among charity movers and shakers' in *The Jewish Chronicle*, 23 May 2014.
- ⁵ Weakley, K. 'Shawcross: "Too often charities respond defensively"', in *Civil Society* online, 17 September 2014.
- ⁶ Interviews conducted online on 10-14 October 2014 of 1,009 adults aged 16-75
- ⁷ Ipsos MORI (2014) [Public trust and confidence in Charities 2014](#). Charity Commission.
- ⁸ NCVO, (2013) [UK Civil Society Almanac](#).
- ⁹ NCVO, *op cit*.
- ¹⁰ Staff reporters, 'The parting of the red tape' in *The Economist*, 8 October 2011.
- ¹¹ New Philanthropy Capital, *op cit*.
- ¹² Civil Society, *op cit*.
- ¹³ The [Understanding Charities Group](#) was set up on October 2014. It has four aims: to improve understanding of the public, donors and other stakeholders of how charities work; to improve the public's trust, empathy and engagement with charities; to increase positive media coverage and tackling the negative; and to achieve this by combining collaborative action by the sector with activities of individual charities. It has a steering committee made up of Vicky Browning of CharityComms, Alan Gosschalk of Scope, Joe Saxton of nfpSynergy and Karl Wilding of NCVO.

TRANSFORMING THE CHARITY SECTOR

NPC is a charity think tank and consultancy which occupies a unique position at the nexus between charities and funders, helping them achieve the greatest impact. We are driven by the values and mission of the charity sector, to which we bring the rigour, clarity and analysis needed to better achieve the outcomes we all seek. We also share the motivations and passion of funders, to which we bring our expertise, experience and track record of success.

Increasing the impact of charities: NPC exists to make charities and social enterprises more successful in achieving their missions. Through rigorous analysis, practical advice and innovative thinking, we make charities' money and energy go further, and help them to achieve the greatest impact.

Increasing the impact of funders: NPC's role is to make funders more successful too. We share the passion funders have for helping charities and changing people's lives. We understand their motivations and their objectives, and we know that giving is more rewarding if it achieves the greatest impact it can.

Strengthening the partnership between charities and funders: NPC's mission is also to bring the two sides of the funding equation together, improving understanding and enhancing their combined impact. We can help funders and those they fund to connect and transform the way they work together to achieve their vision.

New Philanthropy Capital
185 Park Street, London SE1 9BL
020 7620 4850
info@thinkNPC.org

Registered charity No 1091450
A company limited by guarantee
Registered in England and Wales No 4244715

www.thinkNPC.org