Brexit

In 2016 most charities didn't think Brexit would affect them

The fieldwork for our State of the Sector research took place in the immediate aftermath of the UK's vote to leave the European Union.

Only 36% of respondents thought it would adversely impact upon the cohesion of the communities they worked in. 63% said that Brexit would have no effect—positive or negative—on demand for services.

Two years later, charities are still uncertain and feel powerless

Many of the charity leaders we spoke to found it difficult to comment on the exact impact of Brexit on the sector, due to continuing uncertainty surrounding negotiations at the time of asking. Without knowing what Brexit might look like, many had not taken concrete steps to prepare. A sense of powerlessness pervades these interviews:

'None of us really understand the implications or long-term impact, we're all trying to make sense of it... it's going to be a long burn and by the time we really realise the impact it will be too late to do anything about it... we aren't doing anything practical about it at the moment.'

Practical concerns: funding and employees

Some charity leaders are worried about the impact on their current and future staff from the EU. Others are concerned about their funding streams, and detect reticence to launch new programmes or services when there is such uncertainty about future funding.

'There's a hell of a lot of uncertainty, we haven't really talked about implications but there is just an acceptance that there will be less funding down the line... there's so many unknowns, it feels like larger organisations are holding back on launching new programmes until they see what the lie of the land is next year [after Brexit].

'We are concerned about European staff and whether they can stay in their roles, and about talent stream coming in.'

There is significant uncertainty about policy, service provision, and funding in a range of areas relevant to charities post Brexit. Funders can provide stability in this context with unrestricted funding.

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Government is consumed by Brexit

Respondents were particularly concerned about the wider 'policy vacuum' this creates, with parliamentarians and civil servants seemingly distracted to the exclusion of all else:

'My biggest worry [about Brexit and the sector] is distraction in Government from the issues people are facing... instead everyone is thinking about trade agreements and medicine stockpiling, while there is a policy vacuum on many of the policy issues that charities are dealing with.'

Some respondents wondered if this vacuum provides opportunities at a local level.

'Charities' normal channels of communications with decision makers have just dried up, everything is seen through the lens of Brexit, but some campaigning charities have worked around this with their local supporters and networks.'

Despite the uncertainty, shouldn't the sector be doing more?

A number of respondents felt the sector could more proactively speak up and out about Brexit and its implications for communities and individuals. The worry about lack of voice often went hand in hand with concern that charities could do more to reduce division and deprivation.

'The charity sector has been missing from Brexit discussions, it isn't all about trade... Brexit is symptom and not a cause... Charities at the local level have significant role to play not just in delivering services but also in understanding how we got here...'

One went further, arguing that the sector should see not see itself as blameless in the social and cultural division that erupted into the mainstream following the referendum.

'The Government and the charity sector had a role in letting those places go to wreck, and there's a role for the charity sector to help support those areas that have been left behind… There is a massive place-based opportunity, I don't think charities do nearly enough to help those places.'

NPC's plans for 2019

How will the social sector cope with the reality of Brexit, and what can we learn from each other? These are the questions we will be taking forward into our next, full-scale state of the sector research programme.

Please visit our [website](#) or contact [policy@thinknpc.org](#) if you are interested in supporting this work.

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