

Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey 2011: The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland

Themes and attitudes towards charities and charitable regulation

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A word cloud of terms related to the survey. The most prominent words are 'charities', 'ireland', 'operate', 'respondents', 'trust', 'public', 'northern', 'commission', and 'people'. Other visible words include 'accountable', 'age', 'beneficiaries', 'disability', 'disagreed', 'donors', 'employment', 'findings', 'full-', 'time', 'general', 'group', 'honest', 'information', 'key', 'likely', 'open', 'overall', 'regarding', 'statement', 'status', 'students', 'survey', 'transparent', 'unemployed', 'views', and 'volunteers'.

Overview

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland is the new independent regulator of charities established under the Charities Act 2008. The Commission was established with a key aim of promoting and ensuring public confidence in the charitable sector. There was previously no formal regulation and while the majority of charitable organisations operate effectively to meet their purposes, there was concern in the sector and amongst the population at large regarding potential mismanagement and misappropriation of charitable resources.

This report presents information gathered in the first half of 2011 when, in line with our vision of *"a dynamic and well governed charities sector in which the public has confidence"*¹ we surveyed a cross-section of the general public to gain their views in three key areas:

- Levels of trust in charities;
- The openness and transparency of charities;
- The establishment of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

This is the first piece of research undertaken by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. We will use these findings to inform our work going forward. They provide a useful baseline and a benchmark against which we can measure our effectiveness in the future.

It is our intention that, as the register of charities is developed, reports will be produced on a regular basis analysing information held and presenting key facts and figures on charities operating in Northern Ireland. These will be published on the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland website.

Methodology

This report analyses information gathered as part of the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey, Feb. 2011, prepared by Central Survey Unit. The Charity Commission Module contained five questions. Respondents were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statements:

1. I trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland;
2. Those people who give their time and money to charities in Northern Ireland know enough about how charities are operating;
3. Those people who use their services know enough about how charities are operating;
4. The public in general know enough about how charities are operating;
5. The new Charity Commission will improve how charities in Northern Ireland operate.

¹ Charity Commission for Northern Ireland Corporate Plan 2011-14

The base sample was 1109 respondents. As part of the omnibus survey each respondent answered questions on a number of subjects. They also provided demographic information which enabled answers to be analysed in greater depth to determine factors which influence opinions.

Research limitations

This survey is very useful in providing a baseline on which further research can be conducted. However, there are some important limitations and caveats to keep in mind. Using the Omnibus survey methodology, we were able to reach a large number of people from a wide cross-section of society. This gives a valuable indication of the views of the population as a whole. However, the number of questions that can be asked in an Omnibus survey is limited. Each respondent's answers are based on perception and the study is not grounded in whether the respondent has any recent involvement in the sector and at what level. In future research studies we intend to investigate how each respondent's background might inform their perceptions. For example, it would be useful to understand:

- What is each respondent's charitable experience
 - Do they work / have they worked for a charity?
 - Are they / have they been a charity beneficiary?
 - Are they / have they been a charity donor or volunteer?
- Are their answers generic or do they apply to a specific charity?
- What is their definition of a charity?

The research is a valuable baseline and gives a useful quantitative evidence base to inform future qualitative and in-depth research.

Levels of Trust in Charities

The first statement put to respondents was "*I trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland.*"

The following analysis provides information on how members of the public responded to the statement, i.e. did they agree or disagree and how strongly.

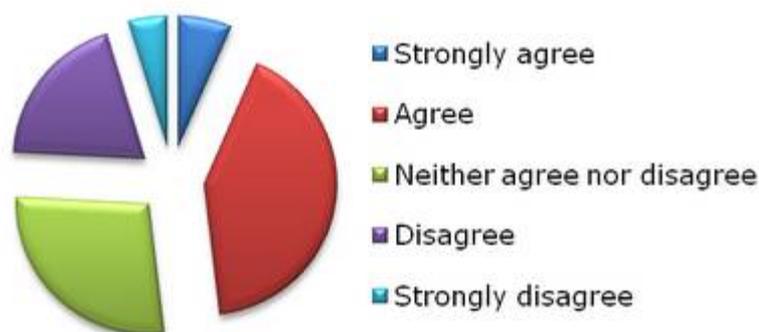
Answers are broken down according to different demographic and socio-economic factors to investigate themes and trends that apply to certain groups of people. Some factors were more influential than others, for example while employment status and age have a clear impact on opinion, other factors such as gender and geographical area do not.

Overall

- **49% of respondents trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland;**
- **24% of respondents do not trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland.**

Overall, 49% of respondents agreed – 7% strongly – that they trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland. Conversely, just over half (51%) of all respondents were unable to agree with this statement. Almost one quarter (24%) of all respondents disagreed – 5% strongly – indicating their active distrust of charities operating in Northern Ireland. A higher percentage of respondents actively agreed with this statement compared to those who actively disagreed, however the figures demonstrate a clear need to improve public confidence amongst certain sections of the population as to how charities in Northern Ireland operate.

Chart 1: all respondents
"I trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland"

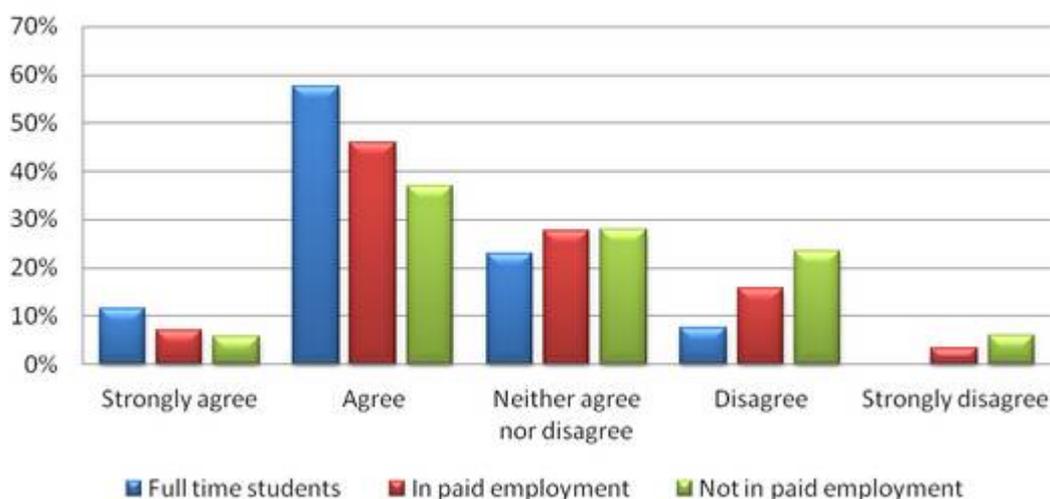


Employment status

- **70% of full-time students trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland;**
- **53% of respondents in paid employment trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland;**
- **43% of respondents not in paid employment trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland.**

Employment status has a clear bearing on attitudes towards charities' trustworthiness. The biggest difference is between full-time students and those who are unemployed. Unemployed people are much more likely to mistrust charities. Only 43% agreed with the statement "*I trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland*" while 29% actively disagreed. Comparatively, 53% of employed people agreed that they trust charities with 19% disagreeing. 70% of full-time students agreed that they trust charities operating in Northern Ireland, with only 8% disagreeing.

Chart 2: employment status
"I trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland"



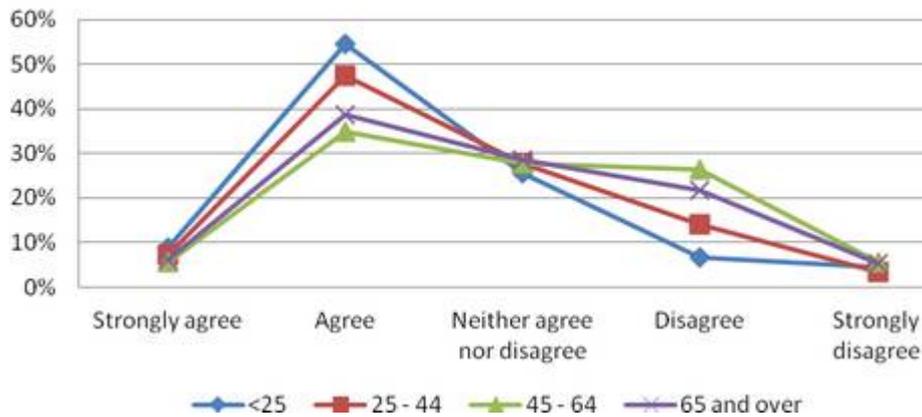
Age

- **With age, respondents were less likely to trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland.**

Age profiling also provides an indication of whether an individual is more or less likely to trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland. Young people aged 16-24 are most trusting, followed closely by those aged 25-44. Least trusting are individuals in the 46-64 age group, again closely followed by the 65+ age

group. This correlates with the figures for full-time students – it is likely that most full-time students fall into the 16-14 age group. There is a clear trend that, with age, trust in how charities operate declines, with only a slight improvement amongst the oldest age group.

Chart 3: age
 "I trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland"

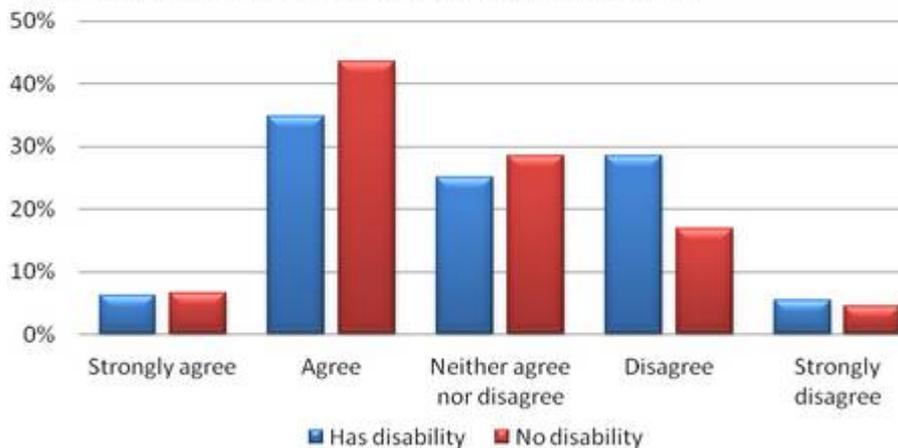


Disability

- **41% of respondents with a disability trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland;**
- **51% of respondents without a disability trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland.**

The survey findings indicate that people with a disability are less likely than people without a disability to trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland. People without a disability are 10% more likely to agree with the statement "I trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland."

Chart 4: disability
 "I trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland"



Openness and Transparency

Respondents were given a series of three statements and asked for their opinion on each:

Question 2: *"Those people who give their time and money to charities in Northern Ireland know enough about how charities are operating."*

Question 3: *"Those people who use their services know enough about how charities are operating."*

Question 4: *"The public in general know enough about how charities are operating."*

These statements relate to the **openness** and **transparency** of charities in Northern Ireland to three sections of the population:

- Charity donors / volunteers;
- Charity beneficiaries;
- The general public.

Some demographic and socio-economic factors had a greater influence on opinions than others.

Overall

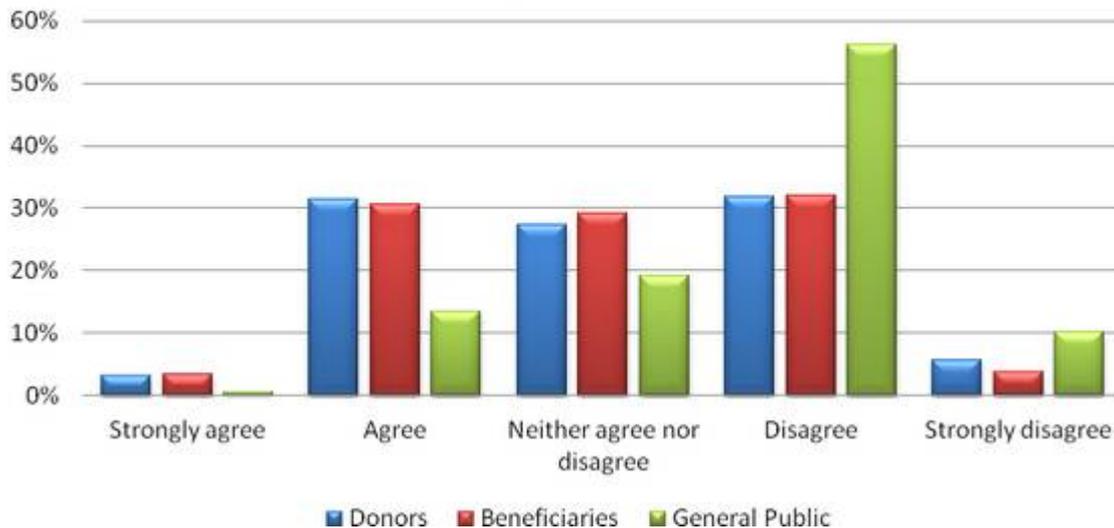
- **34% of respondents agree that those who give their time and money to charities in Northern Ireland know enough about how charities are operating;**
- **34% of respondents agree that those people who use their services know enough about how charities are operating;**
- **15% of respondents agree that the public in general know enough about how charities are operating;**
- **66% of respondents consider that the general public do not know enough about how charities are operating.**

A similar number of respondents agreed as disagreed that charity donors/volunteers and charity beneficiaries know enough about how charities operate.

Conversely, the graph below clearly demonstrates the perception that the general public are much less well informed. 66% of respondents disagreed with the statement *"the public in general know enough about how charities are operating."* 15% agreed with this statement.

While more respondents feel charity donors/volunteers and charity beneficiaries are well enough informed, the numbers – just over a third - are still quite low.

Chart 5: overall
 "Do donors / beneficiaries / general public know enough about how charities are operating"



Geographical location

- **25% of respondents from Belfast agree that donors / volunteers know enough about how charities are operating;**
- **39% of respondents from the west of Northern Ireland agree that donors / volunteers know enough about how charities are operating.**

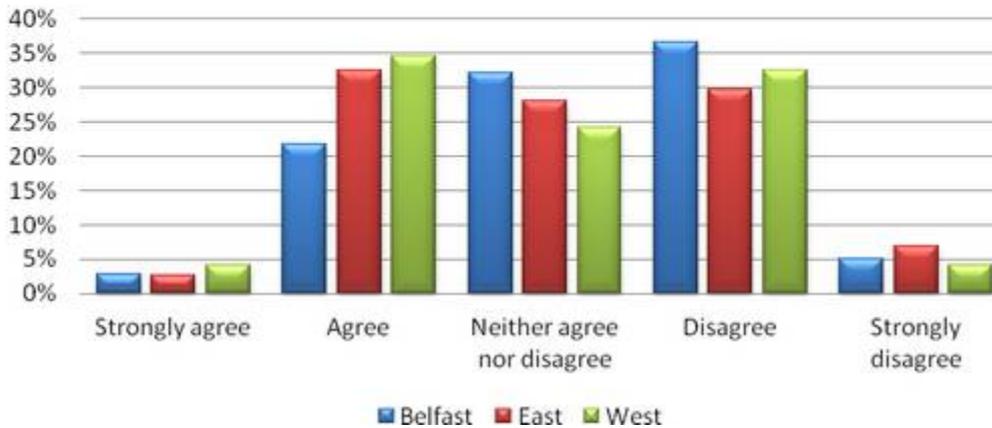
Geographical location does not have a significant bearing on views regarding charities' openness and transparency towards beneficiaries and the general public.

The results are consistent across the areas, and with the findings overall. There is however a distinction between respondents from Belfast and those from the west of Northern Ireland regards donors / volunteers. In response to the statement – *"those people who give their time and money to charities in Northern Ireland know enough about how charities are operating"* – 25% from Belfast agreed compared with 39% from the west.

People from the west of Northern Ireland are therefore 14% more likely to agree that charities are sufficiently open and transparent towards their donors / volunteers than people from Belfast.

Chart 6: location

"Do donors / beneficiaries / general public know enough about how charities are operating"



Employment status

- **54% of full-time students agree that charity beneficiaries know enough about how charities operate compared with 33% of unemployed who are also most likely to disagree (41%);**
- **4% of full-time students agree that the public in general know enough about how charities in Northern Ireland operate compared to 15% of those who are unemployed.**

As with trust for charities, employment status does have an impact on views regarding charities' openness and transparency. Those who are in paid employment have views consistent with those expressed overall. Full-time students and people not in paid employment are more likely to diverge.

Chart 7: employment status

"Donors / volunteers know enough about how charities are operating"

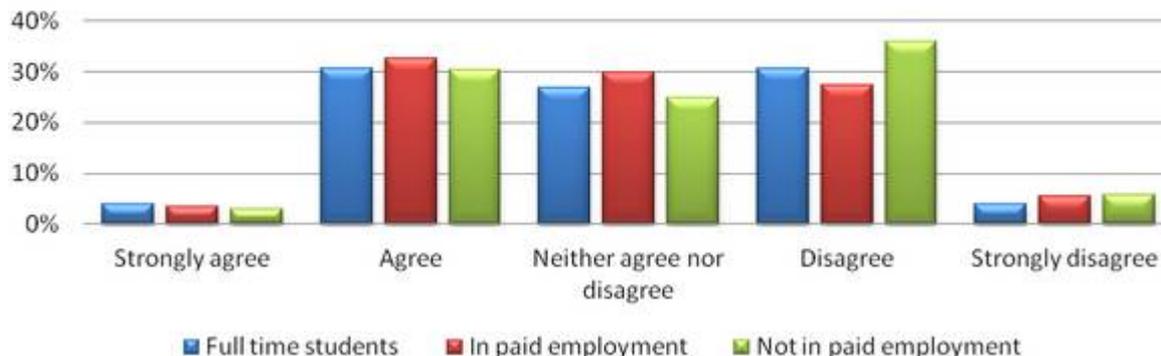


Chart 8: employment status
 "Beneficiaries know enough about how charities are operating"

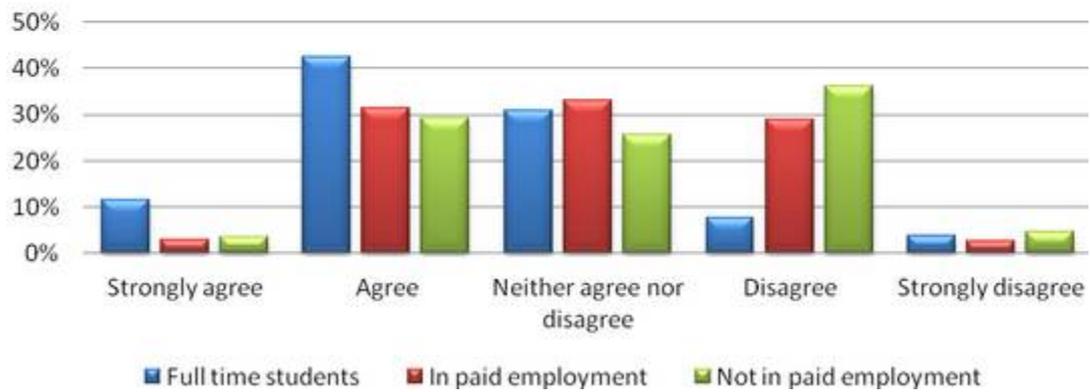
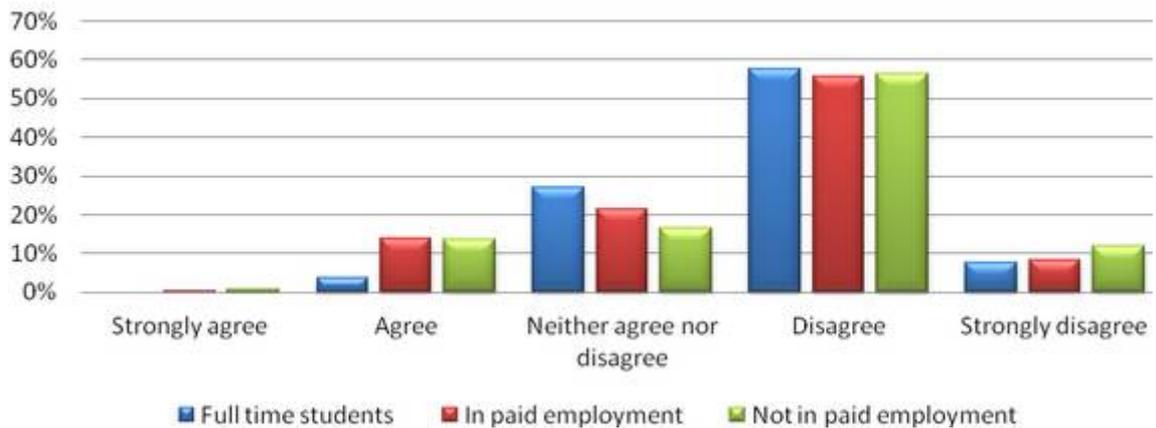


Chart 9: employment status
 "The general public know enough about how charities are operating"



Age

Younger respondents (<25 and 25 – 44) are somewhat more likely than those in the older age bands (45 – 64 and >65) to agree that enough is known about how charities operate in Northern Ireland.

- **The difference is clearest when looking at charity accountability to donors / volunteers and beneficiaries.**
- **Views are more consistent across the age groups regarding how aware the general public is of how charities operate.**

Chart 10: Age
 "Donors / volunteers know enough about how charities are operating"

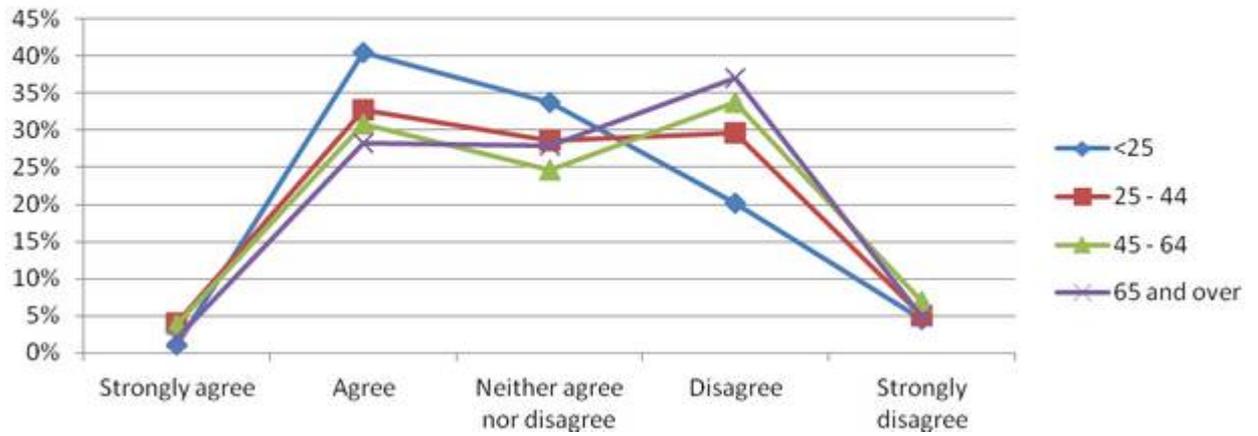


Chart 11: Age
 "Beneficiaries know enough about how charities are operating"

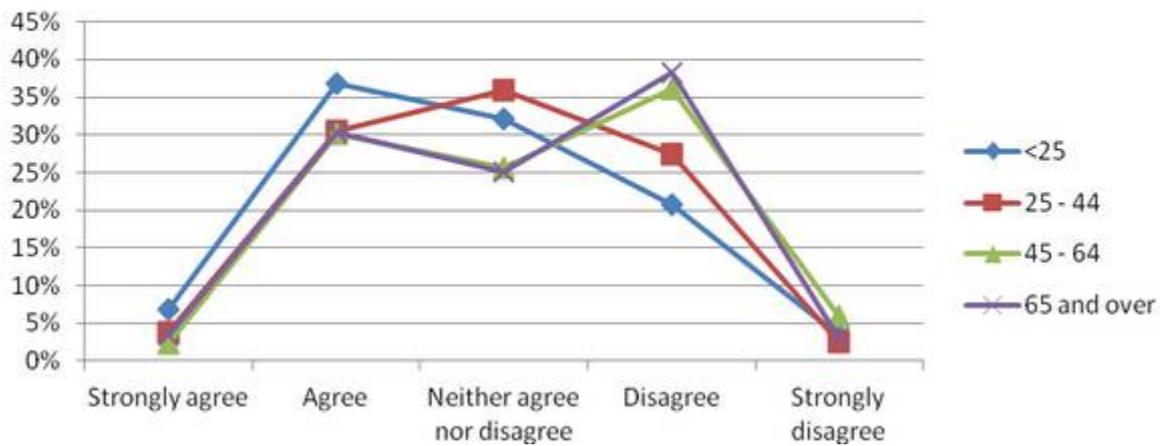
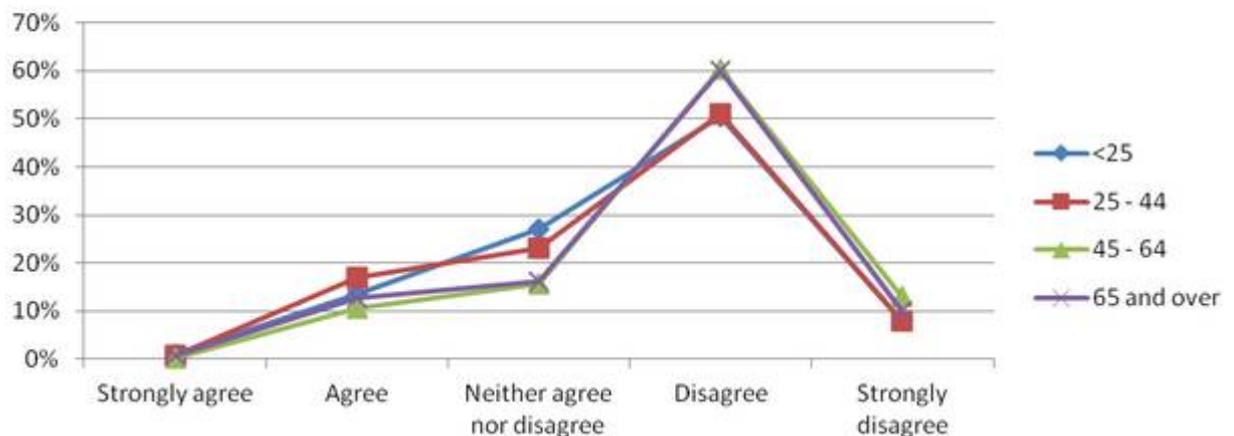


Chart 12: Age
 "The general public know enough about how charities are operating"



Disability

- **45% of respondents with a disability believe charity donors / volunteers do not know enough about how charities are operating;**
- **35% of respondents with no disability believe charity donors / volunteers do not know enough about how charities are operating;**
- **43% of respondents with a disability believe that charity beneficiaries do not know enough about how charities are operating;**
- **33% of respondents with no disability believe that charity beneficiaries know enough about how charities are operating;**
- **72% of respondents with a disability believe the public in general do not know enough about how charities are operating;**
- **64% of respondents with no disability believe the public in general do not know enough about how charities are operating.**

Respondents with a disability were more inclined to think that people do not know enough about how charities operate in Northern Ireland. This is shown in the graphs below which show that more people with a disability disagree – by approximately 10% - that charities in Northern Ireland are sufficiently transparent in the opinion of:

- People who give of their time and money;
- Charity beneficiaries;
- The general public.

Chart 13: disability

"Donors / volunteers know enough about how charities are operating"

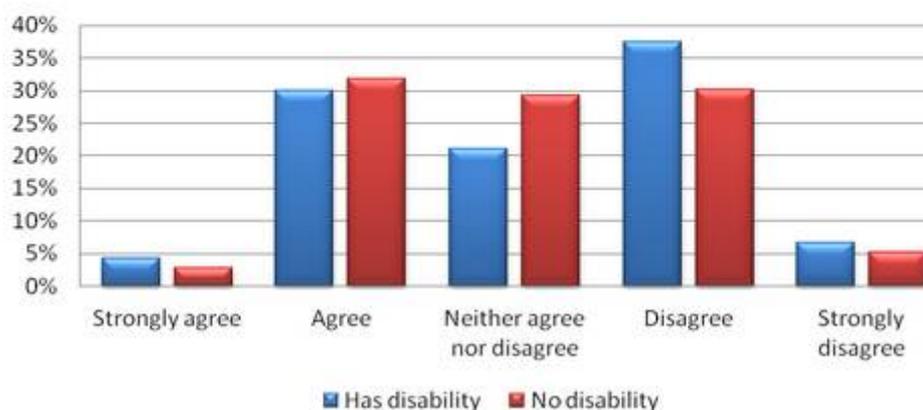


Chart 14: disability
 "Beneficiaries know enough about how charities are operating"

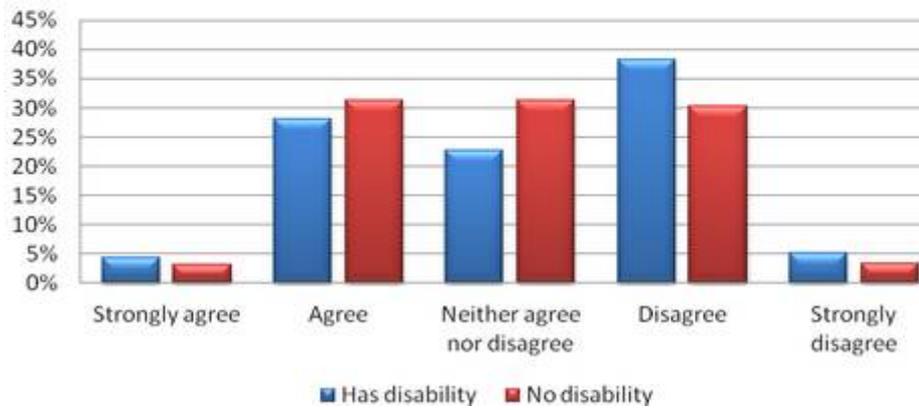
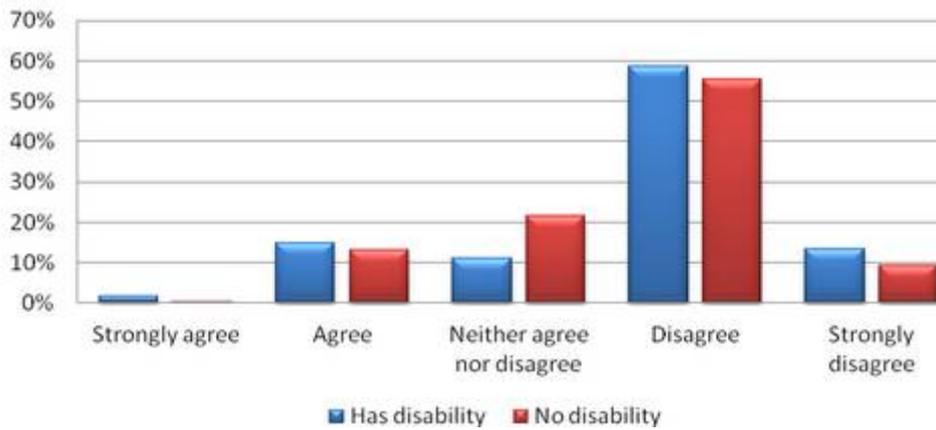


Chart 15: disability
 "The general public know enough about how charities are operating"



The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland

All respondents were asked to comment on the statement: *"The new Charity Commission will improve how charities in Northern Ireland operate."*

In addition to agreement / disagreement, spontaneous answers were recorded where the respondent indicated that they had not previously heard of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

Overall

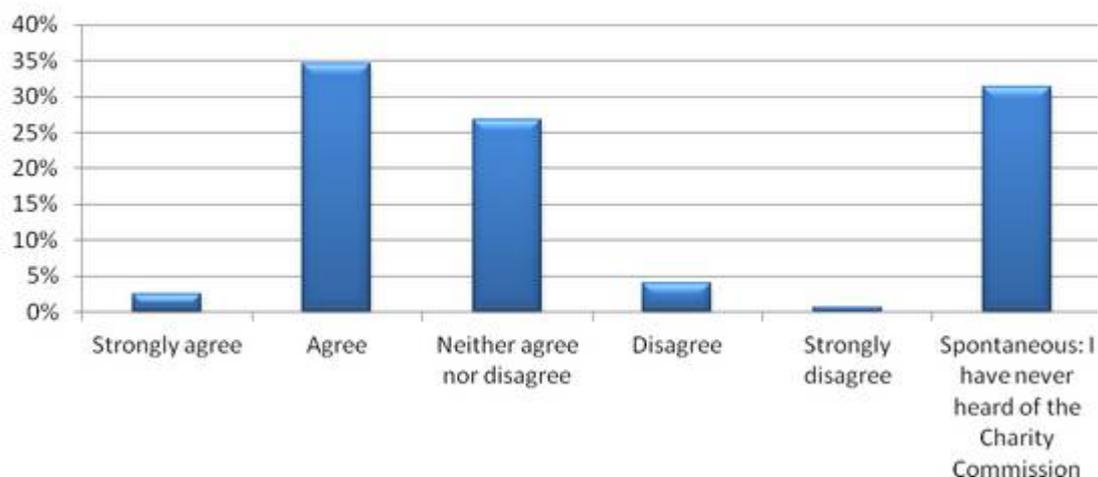
- **37% of respondents agreed that the new Charity Commission will improve how charities in Northern Ireland operate;**
- **5% of respondents disagreed that the new Charity Commission will improve how charities in Northern Ireland operate;**
- **31% of respondents had not previously heard of the Charity Commission.**

Only 5% of respondents disagreed with the statement: *"The new Charity Commission will improve how charities in Northern Ireland operate."* This can be compared to the 37% who agreed or strongly agreed. However, 31% of respondents – almost one third – have not heard of the Commission. The graph below illustrates this.

Another reading of the statistics is that 63% of respondents were unable to actively agree with the statement.

Chart 16: overall

"The new Charity Commission will improve how charities in Northern Ireland operate."



Geographical location

- **42% of respondents from the west of Northern Ireland had not previously heard of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (compared with 29% from Belfast and 24% from the east of Northern Ireland).**

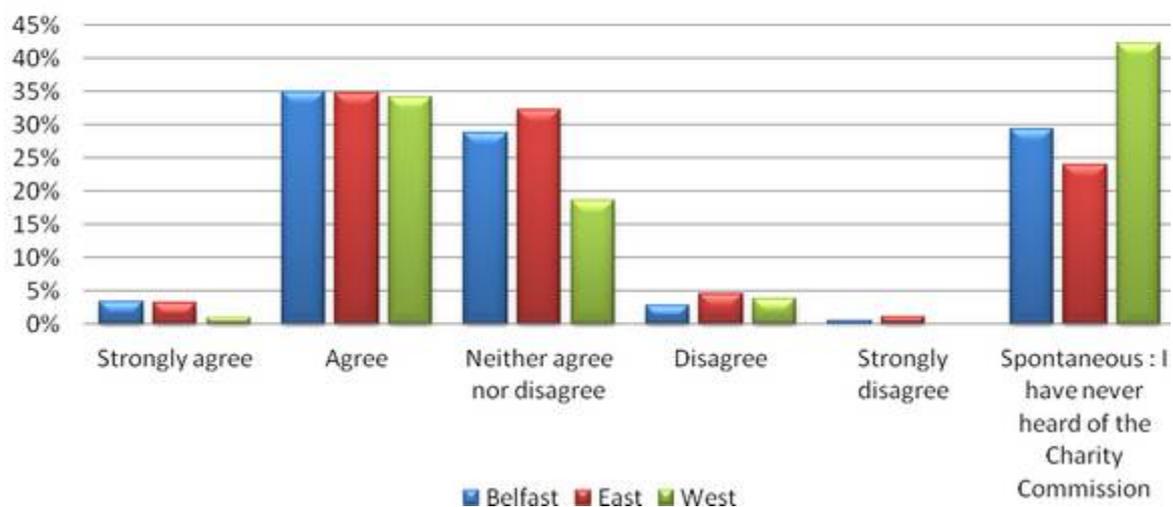
The area each respondent comes from does not have a significant impact on their agreement or disagreement with this statement. The percentages for each area vary by no more than 2%.

There is a very clear difference in awareness however. 42% of people in the west of Northern Ireland had not previously heard of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. This compared with 29% of people from Belfast and 24% of people in the east of Northern Ireland.

This has informed the work of the Commission this year as it has undertaken engagements across Northern Ireland. As a new organisation, profile building is an important task for the Charity Commission. The Commission has conducted several stakeholder events across Northern Ireland in the past twelve months as well as engaging with Northern Ireland's elected representatives and media.

Chart 17: area

"The new Charity Commission will improve how charities in Northern Ireland operate."

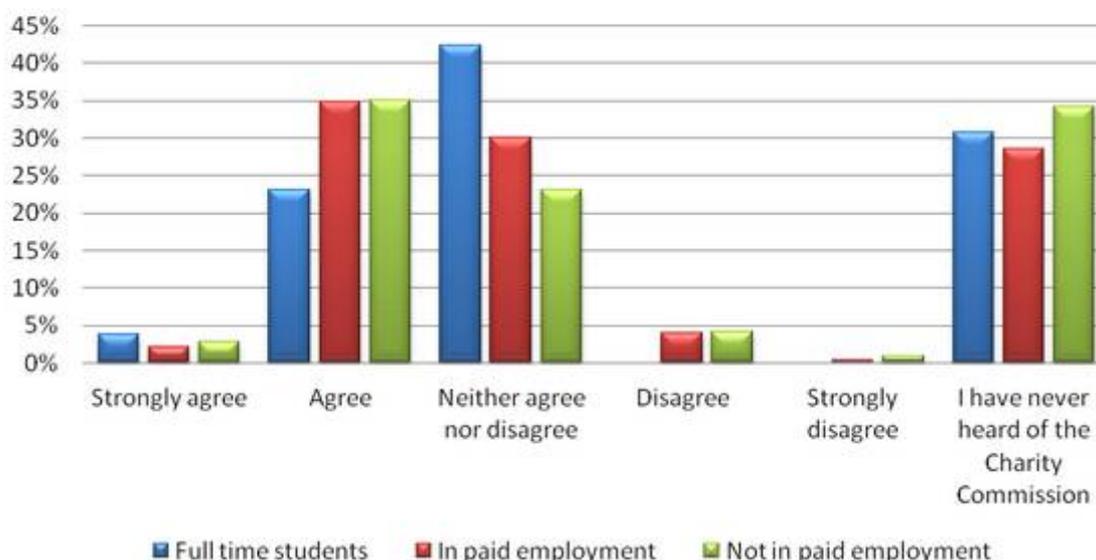


Employment status

- **27% of full-time students agree that the new Charity Commission will improve how charities in Northern Ireland operate;**
- **37% of respondents in paid employment agree that the new Charity Commission will improve how charities in Northern Ireland operate;**
- **38% of respondents not in employment agree that the new Charity Commission will improve how charities in Northern Ireland operate.**

The percentage of people, in paid employment, who agree or disagree that the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland will improve how charities in Northern Ireland operate, is very similar to those not in paid employment. This is quite different to the percentage of full-time students. Full-time students are less likely to agree; this does not however translate into active disagreement. A substantial number of full time students (42%) neither agree nor disagree and 31% had not previously heard of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

Chart 18: employment status
"The new Charity Commission will improve how charities in Northern Ireland operate."



Profiling those who have not heard of the Commission

- **343 people, or 31% of the full sample, had not previously heard of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.**

Profiling those 343 respondents should inform the Commission's awareness raising and communications planning. We can profile those who have not heard of the Charity Commission as follows:

- 59% are female and 41% male;
- 55% are not in paid employment, 43% are in paid employment and 2% are full time students;
- Those least aware are in the 25 – 44 and 45 – 64 age bands. Greatest awareness is amongst the <25 age band;
- 25% have a disability and 75% do not;
- 37% have dependents and 63% do not;
- 48% are from the west of Northern Ireland.

Largely, the profile of those who have not heard of the Commission tallies with the profile of the entire sample.² For example, of the respondents who indicated spontaneously that they had not heard of the Charity Commission previously, 59% were female. In the full sample, 56% of respondents were female.

The key factor on which the profile of those unaware of the Commission and the profile of the full sample differs is area. 48% of those who had not previously heard of the Commission are from the west of Northern Ireland. Overall, only 35% of respondents are from the west. From this, we can conclude that of all demographic and socio-economic factors, it is the respondent's area which has the greatest impact on awareness of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

² See Appendix 1 for full sample profile

Conclusion

The findings of this research provide a useful benchmark for the Charity Commission. Importantly:

- Almost 25% of respondents indicated that they do not trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland;
- 15% of respondents perceived that the general public know enough about how charities are operating in Northern Ireland;
- Just a third of respondents believe that charity donors, volunteers and beneficiaries are well enough informed.

According to these statistics, the general public - a cross-section of whom was surveyed for this research - feel that there could be greater openness and transparency from the sector. Additionally, there is scope for increasing trust in charities operating in Northern Ireland.

Appendix 1: Sample demographics

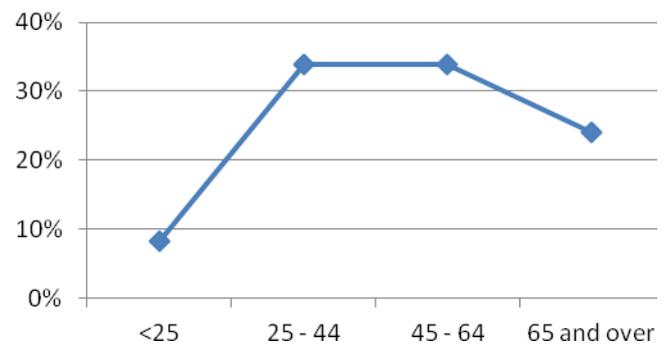
Gender

	Number	Percentage
Male	485	44%
Female	624	56%



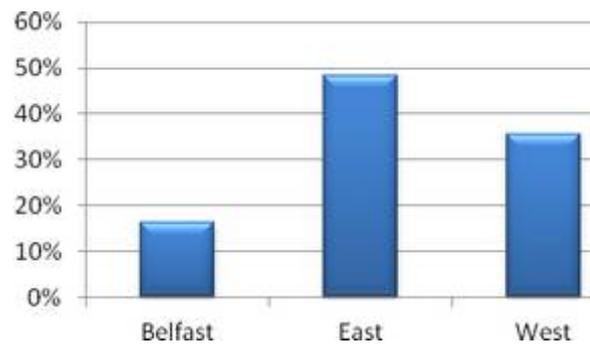
Age

	Number	Percentage
<25	91	8%
25-44	375	34%
45-64	376	34%
65+	266	24%



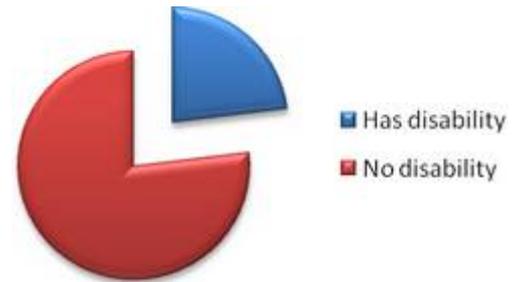
Area

	Number	Percentage
Belfast	180	16%
East	536	48%
West	393	35%



Disability

	Number	Percentage
Has a disability	256	23%
Does not have a disability	853	77%



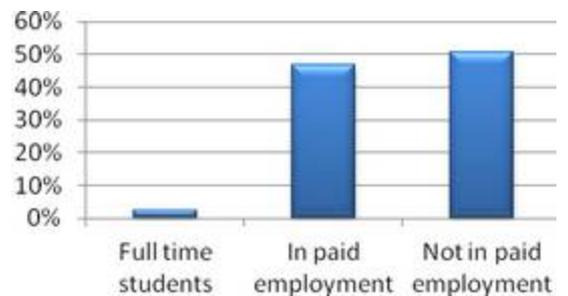
Dependents

	Number	Percentage
Has dependents	417	38%
Does not have dependents	692	62%



Employment status

	Number	Percentage
Full-time student	26	2%
In paid employment	520	47%
Not in paid employment	563	51%



Appendix 2: Definitions

Employment Status: Whether the respondent is currently in paid employment or not. Those individuals who are temporarily away from work and those who are on a government training scheme are included as being in paid employment.

Disability: The definition of disability is those answering yes to both of the following questions:

- Do you have a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity?
- Does this illness or disability limit your activities in any way?

Area: East and west of Northern Ireland are defined by residence in particular District Council areas.

- East: Antrim, Ards, Ballymena, Banbridge, Carrick, Castlereagh, Craigavon, Down, Larne, Lisburn, Newtownabbey, North Down;
- West: Armagh, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Cookstown, Dungannon, Fermanagh, Limavady, Derry, Magherafelt, Moyle, Newry and Mourne, Omagh, Strabane.