



# Research with Trustees: 2025

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

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# Executive Summary

## Executive Summary (1/3)

### 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%-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.

## Executive Summary (2/3)

### 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.

## Executive Summary (3/3)

### 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%).

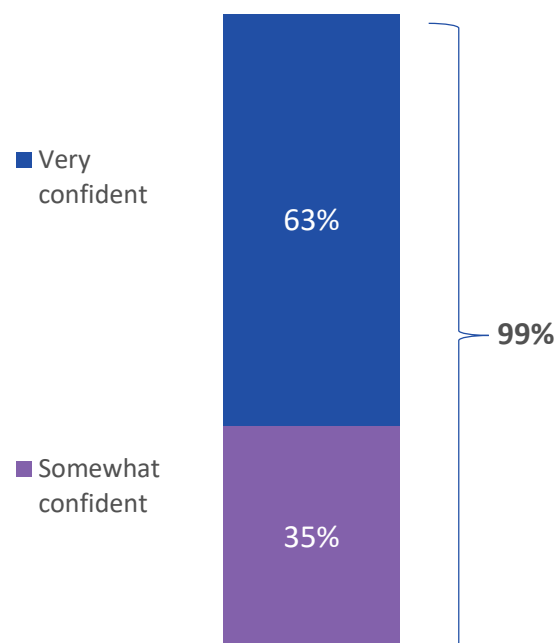
### Cost-of-living

- 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%).

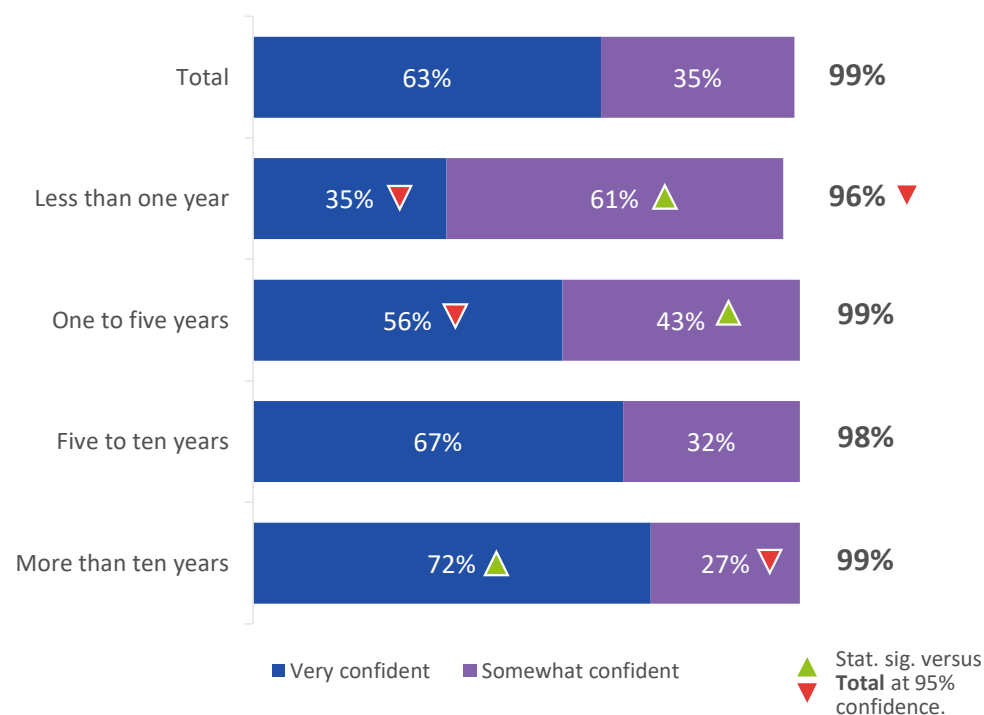
# Trustee Role

## 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

Overall confidence as a trustee

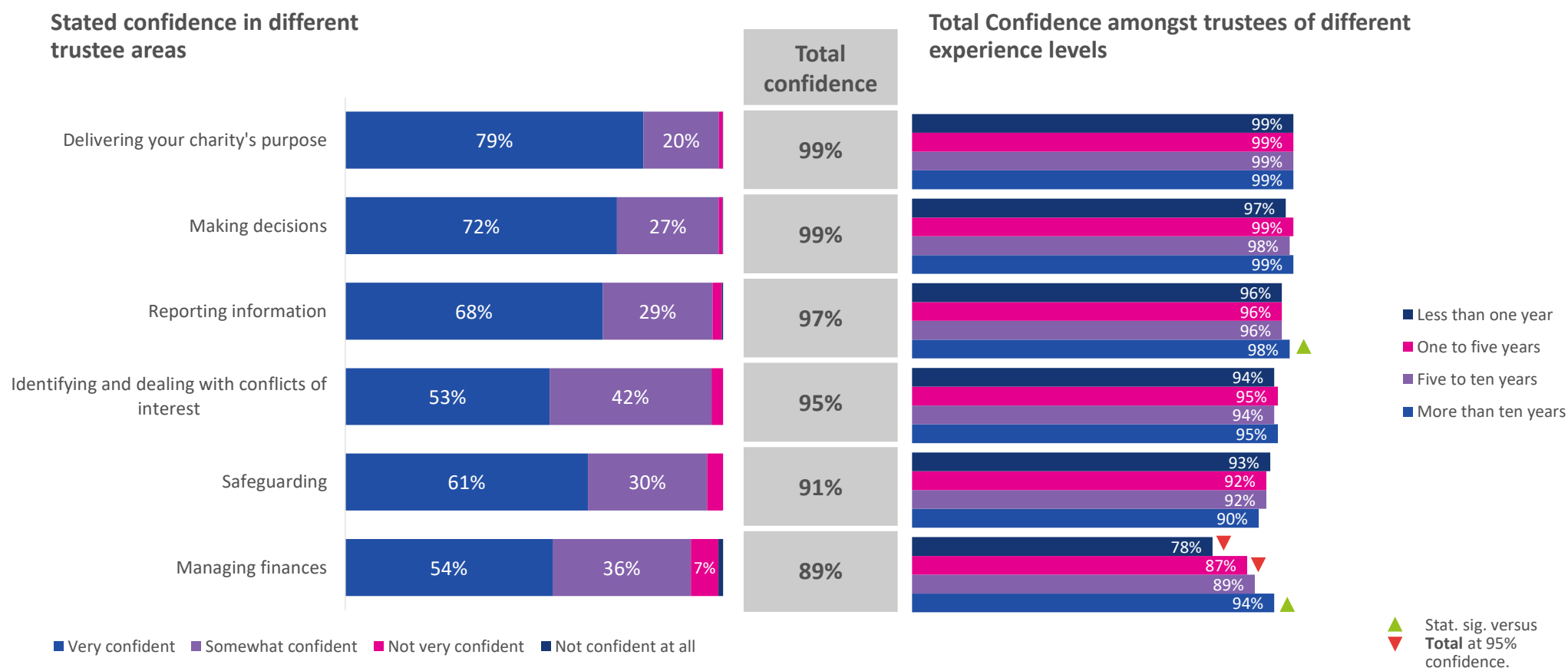


Total Confidence amongst trustees of different experience levels





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



## 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% ▲
Safeguarding	92%	91%
Managing finances	87%	89% ▲

▲ Stat. sig. versus 2024 at 95% confidence.  
▼

### Significant increases in 2025

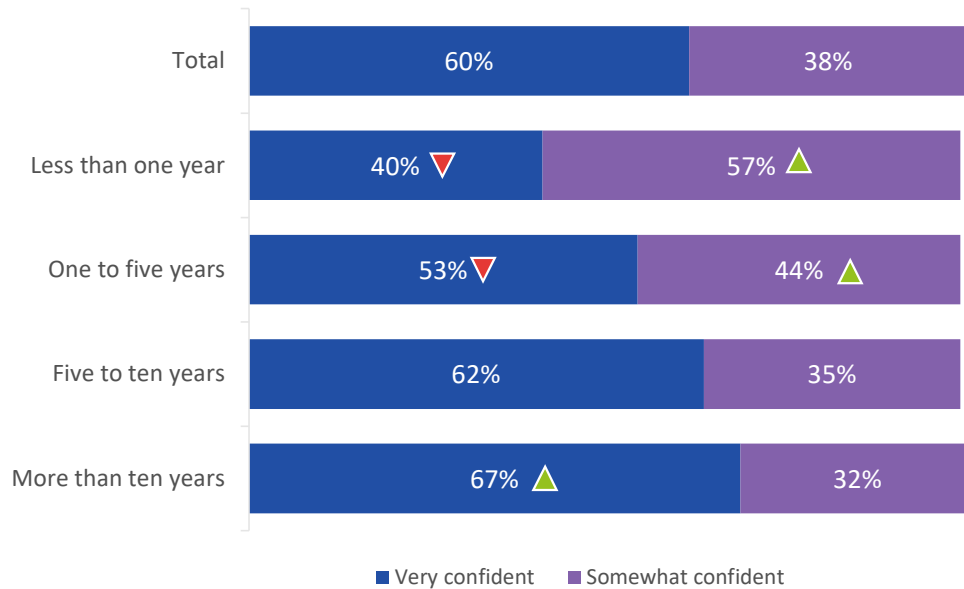
Trustees with less than one year of experience are more confident on delivering their charity's purpose (99% vs. 95%)

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.

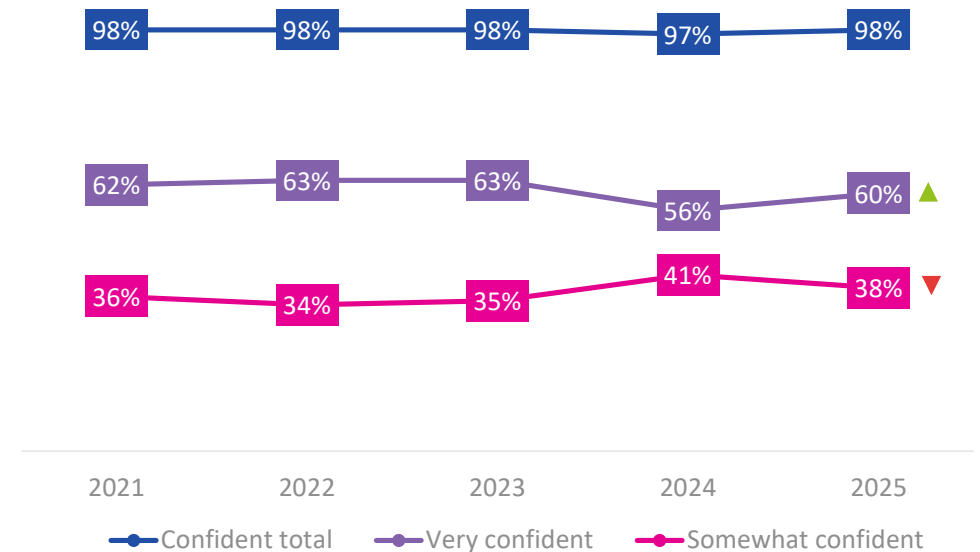
# Most trustees are confident in their ability to protect their charity and beneficiaries from wrongdoing and harm, with growth in the numbers saying 'very confident'

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



▲ Stat. sig. versus Total at 95% confidence.  
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Confidence over time

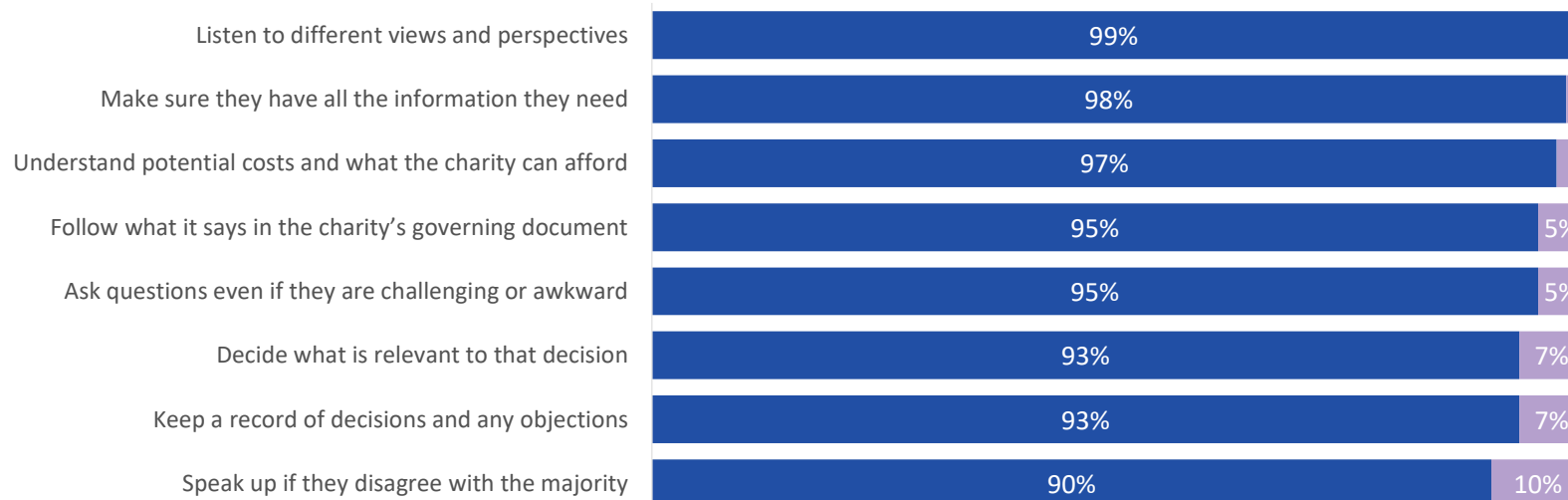


▲ Stat. sig. versus 2024 at 95% confidence.  
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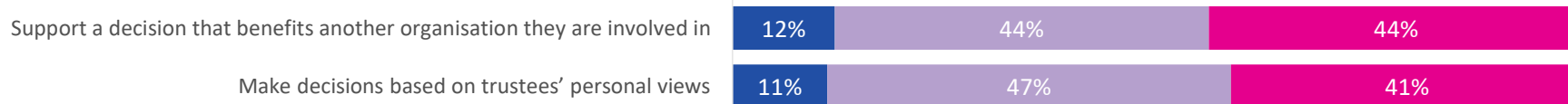
## Most trustees know what they should always do when making decisions, but they are less sure about basing decisions on personal views, or recognising conflicts of interest

### Things trustees should do

■ Trustees should always do this ■ It depends ■ Trustees should never do this



### Things trustees should not do



More respondents this year think they should always do this.

2024

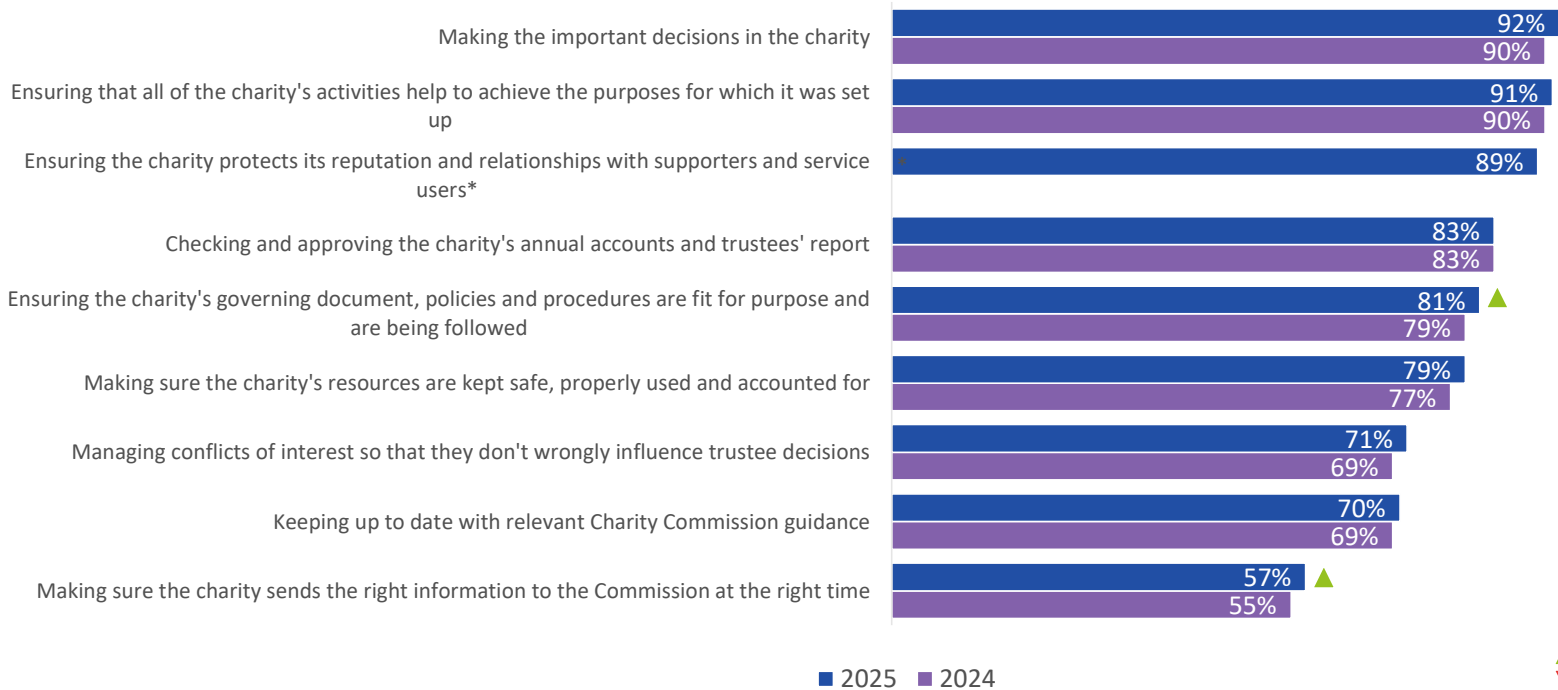
7% said always

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’

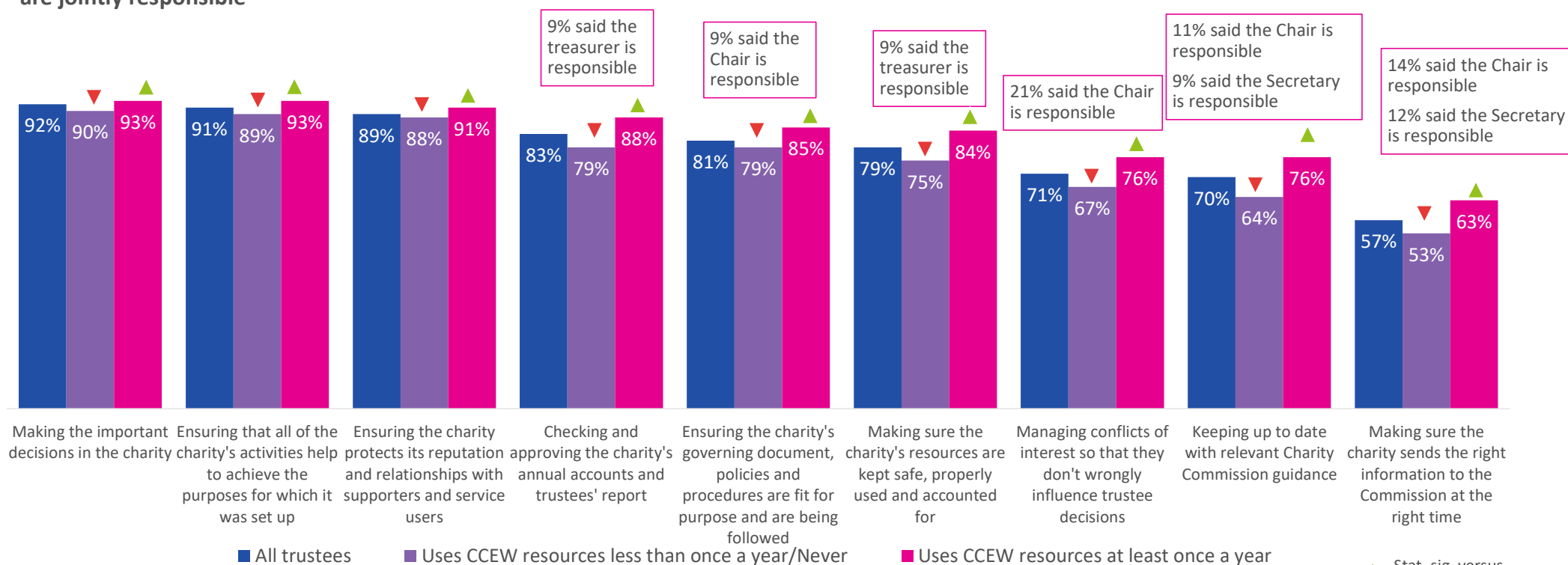


The only areas to see significant improvement relate to the responsibilities of **sharing the right information with the Commission (57%)** and **ensuring the charity’s governing document, policies and procedures are fit for purpose (81%)**.

▲ Stat. sig. versus previous year at 95% confidence.  
▼

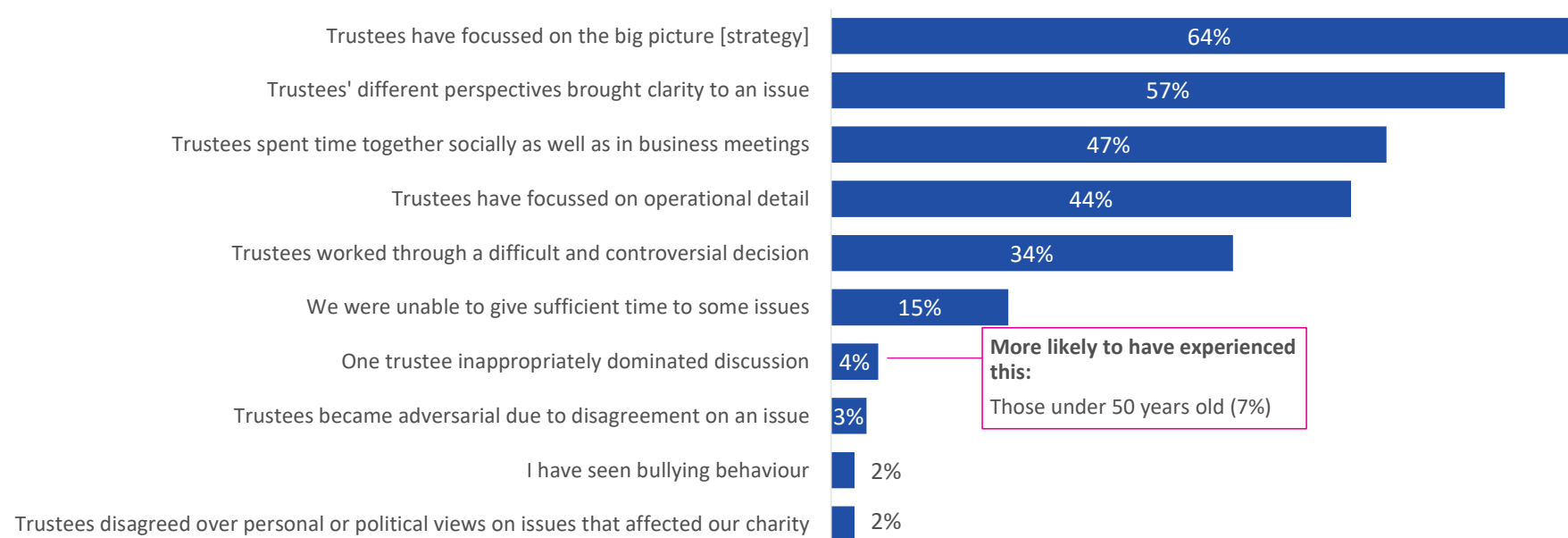
## Those who use the Commission's resources are better informed about their legal responsibilities than those who don't

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



## 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



## 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

*"It's absolutely essential."*

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

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

*"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:

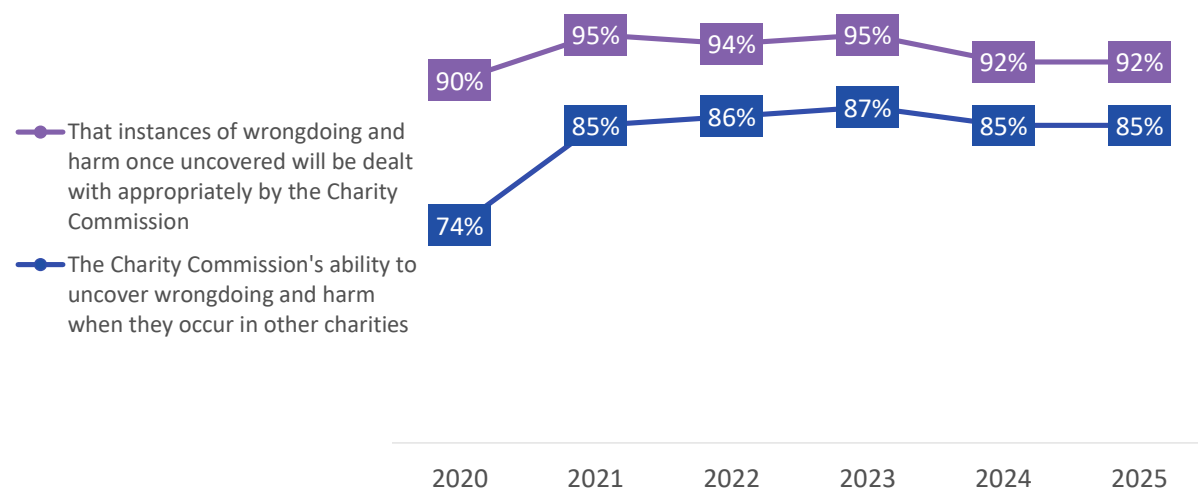
- A conflict between trustees may resolve itself in time, with one trustee experiencing one party of a conflict resigning and the subsequent return to effective running.
- Trustees mentioned the difficulties involved in trying to remove trustees – even where there are clear reasons, and that creating 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



### 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:

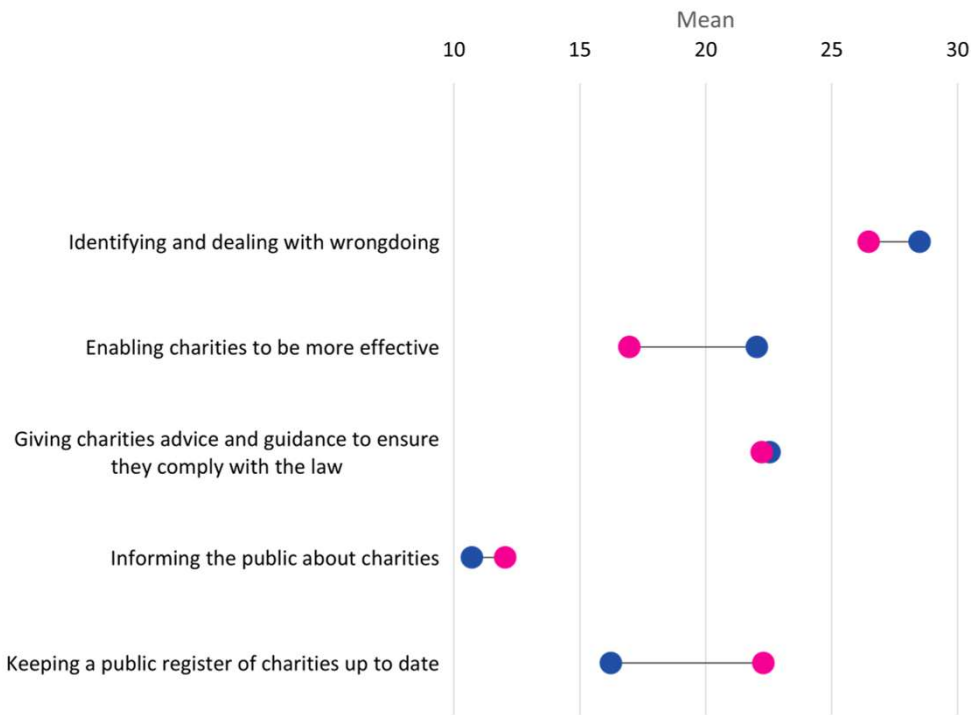
- Trustees who said their charity mainly operates in England (89%)
- Trustees under 50 (90%)

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

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



- Ought to focus on
- Actually does focus on



### Focus Groups

\*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.

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.

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



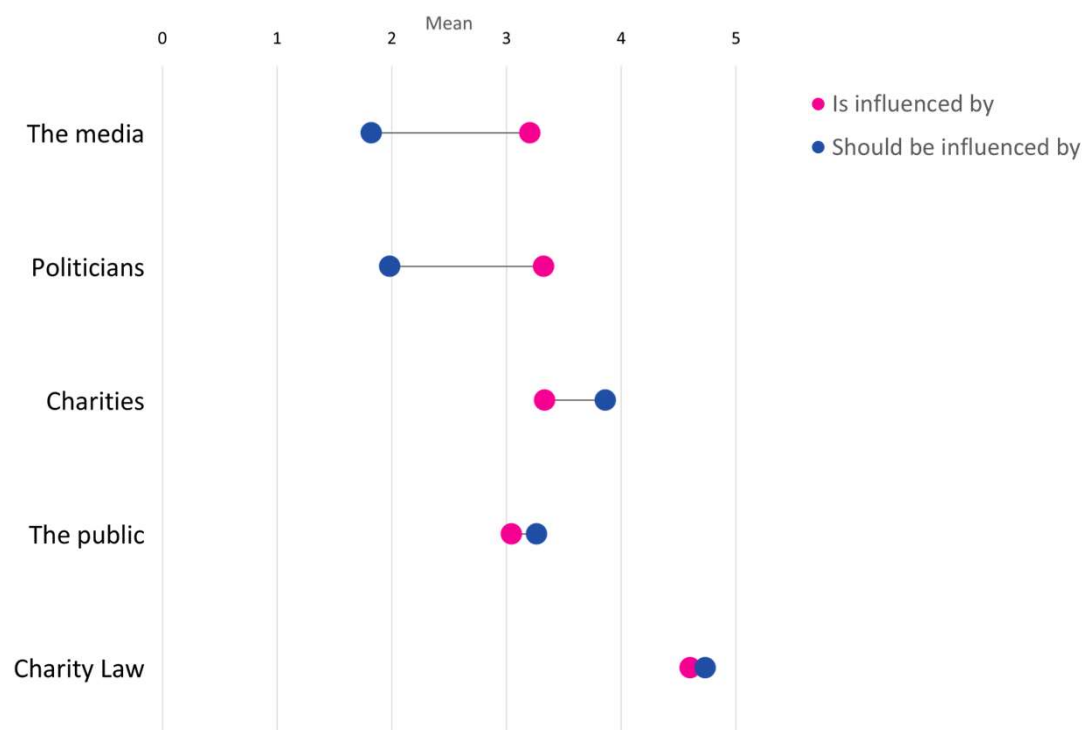
D01: Thinking about the work of the Charity Commission, how much do you think it ought to focus on the following things? D02: Now, thinking about the work of the Charity Commission, how much do you think it actually does focus on these things? Please divide 100 points across the boxes as if they were representing resources  
Base: All trustees (2511)



CHARITY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

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)



### 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.

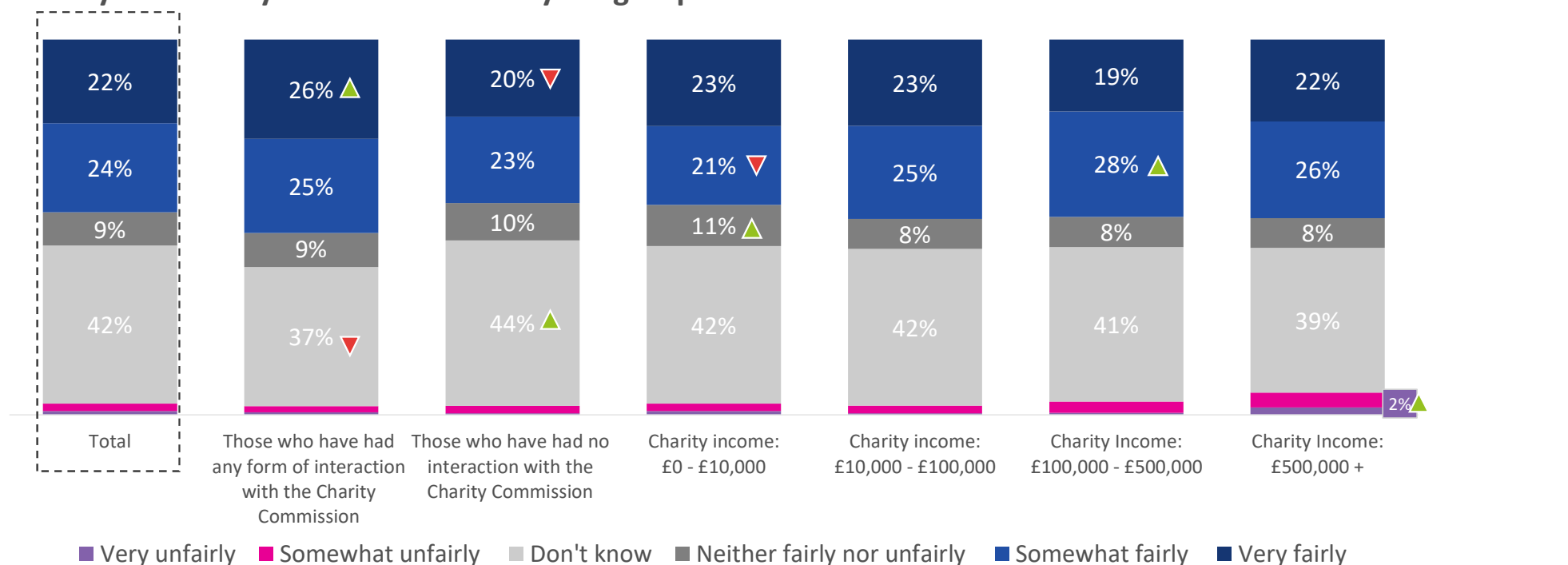
*"I feel like they are not on our side and are determined to catch me out."*

*"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'

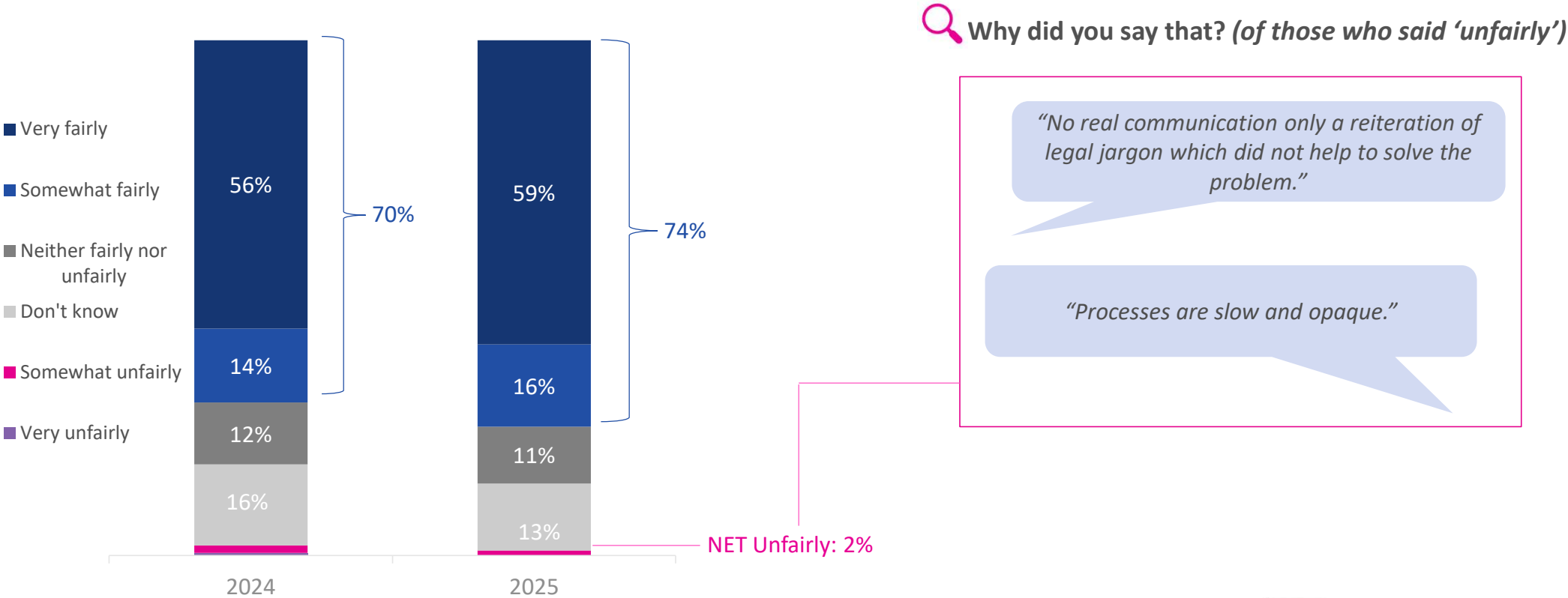
### How fairly the Charity Commission acts by subgroups



▲ Stat. sig. versus Total at 95% confidence.  
▼ Stat. sig. versus Total at 95% confidence.

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

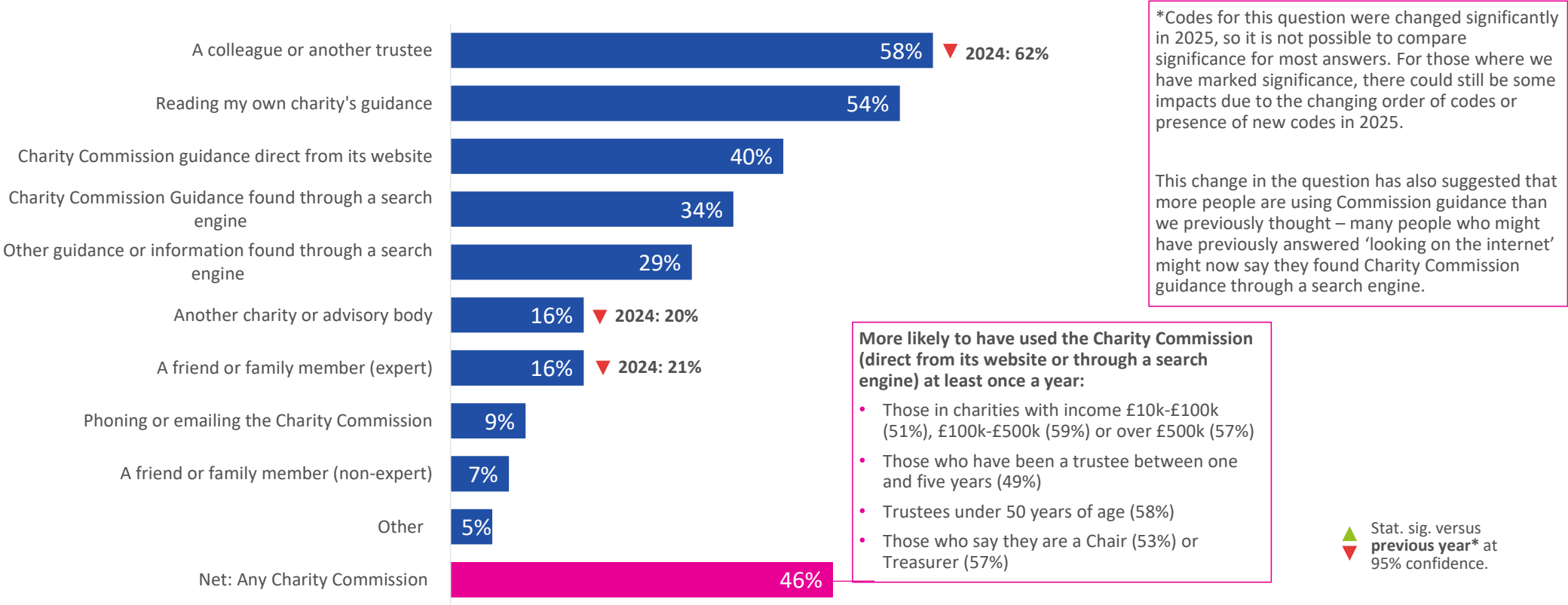
How fairly charities have been treated by the Charity Commission





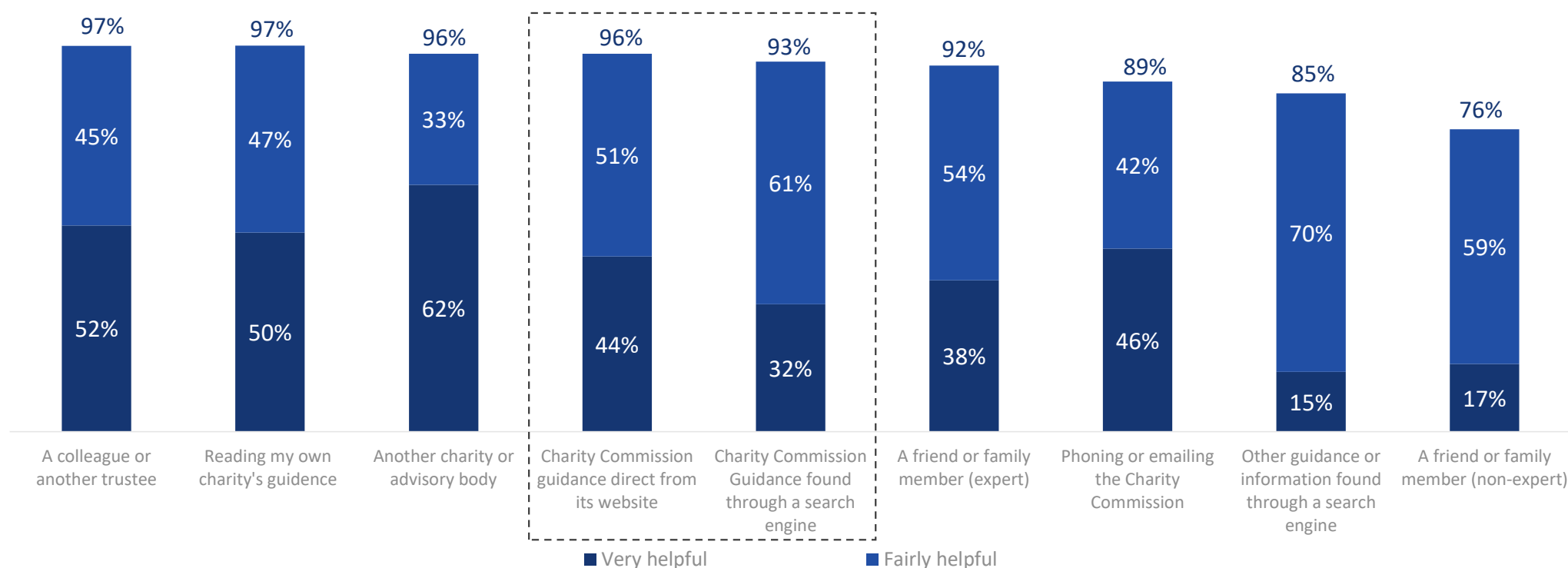
# The most common sources of information trustees use are colleagues or other trustees, and their own charity's guidance. Following these is the use of Commission resources

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



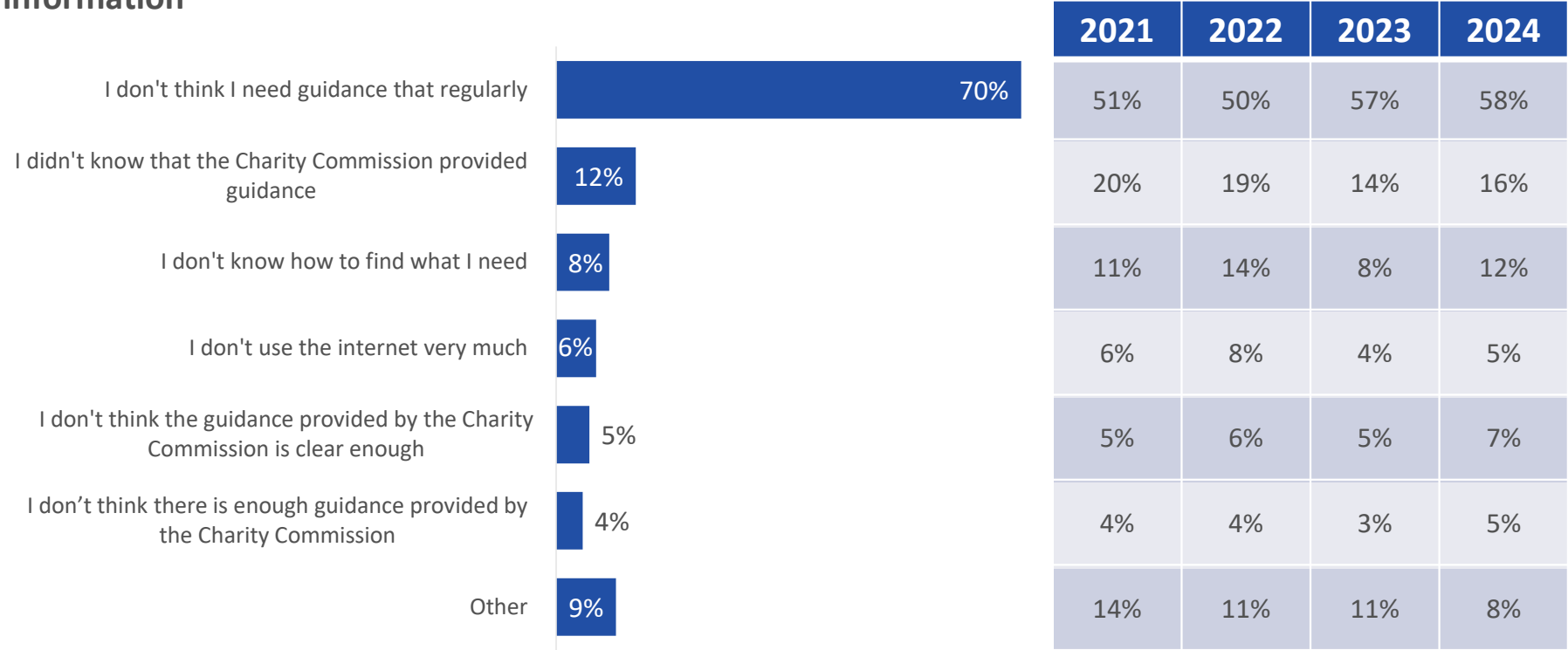
All information sources are deemed broadly helpful by at least three quarters of those that use them, with over nine in ten finding Charity Commission's guidance helpful

### How helpful trustees have found each source of information



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

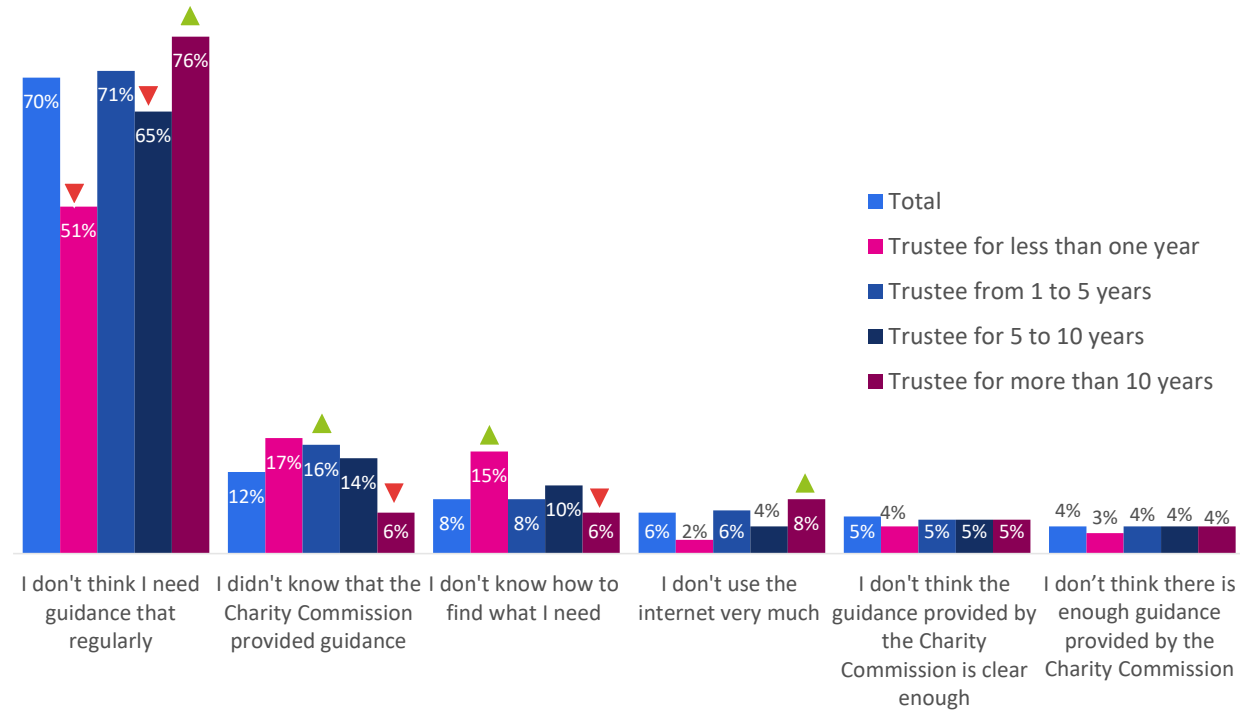
Why the Charity Commission has not been used more as a source of information



\*Due to a question wording change, and change in base routing, we have removed significance testing between years.

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



Analysis

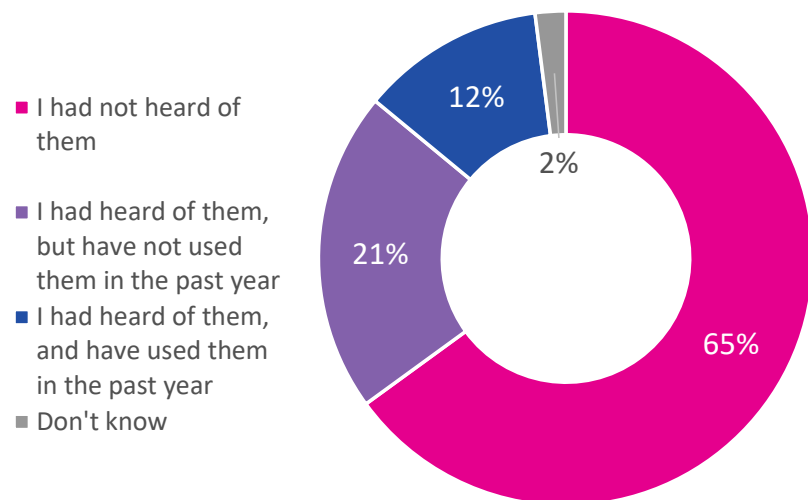
Trustees with more experience cite a perceived lack of need as their reason for not using the Commission for guidance, whilst less experienced trustees are more likely to say they don't know what they need, how to find it, or that they didn't know the Commission provided guidance.

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

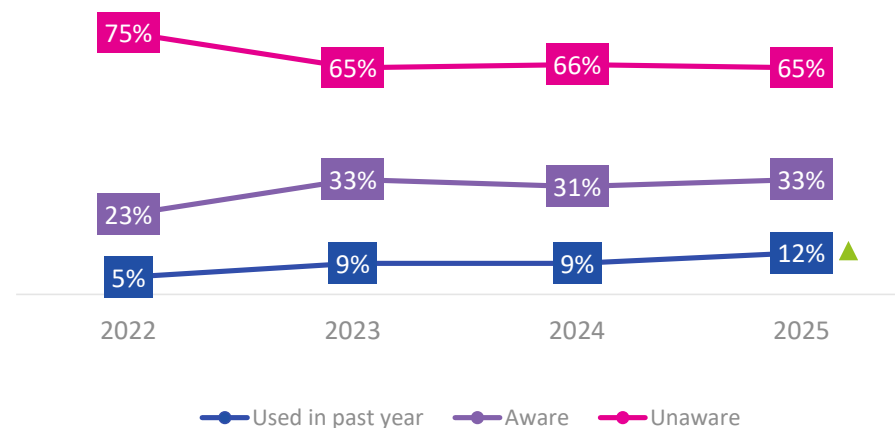
▲ Stat. sig. versus Total at 95% confidence.  
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# Awareness of the 5-minute guides has remained level, but usage has increased in the last year

## Awareness and use of the 5-minute guides



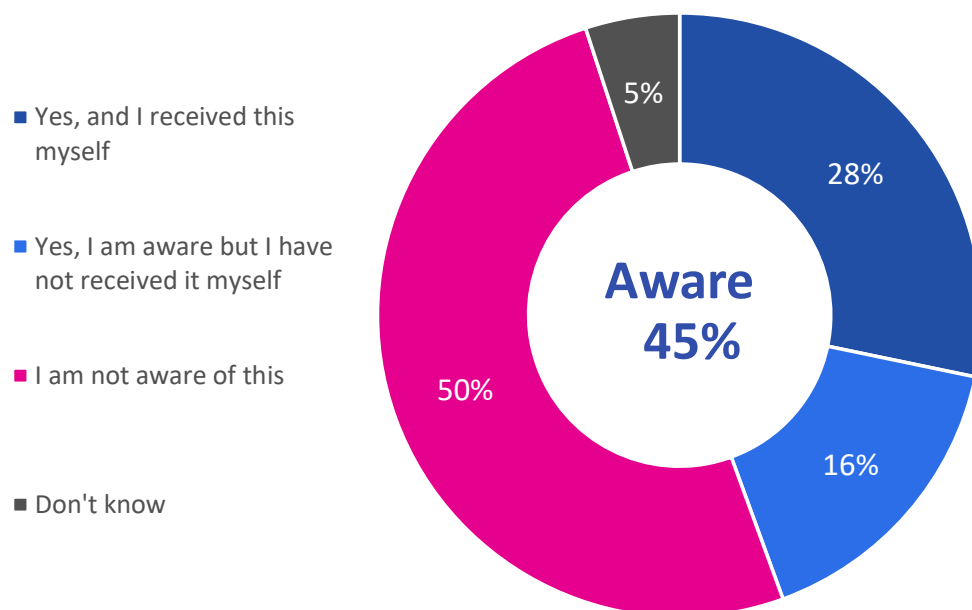
## Trend in awareness and use of the 5-minute guides



▲ Stat. sig. versus 2024 at 95% confidence.  
▼

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:



### 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%)

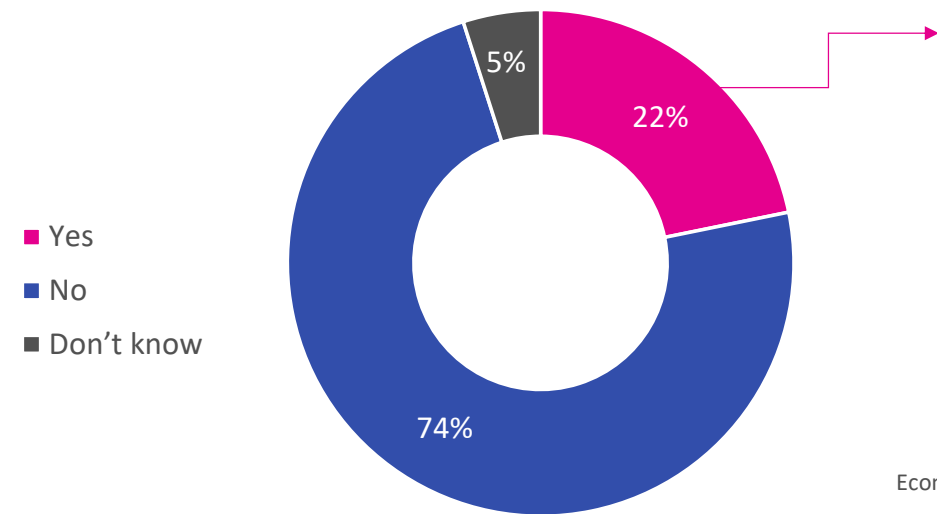
Trustees more likely to be **unaware** are:

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

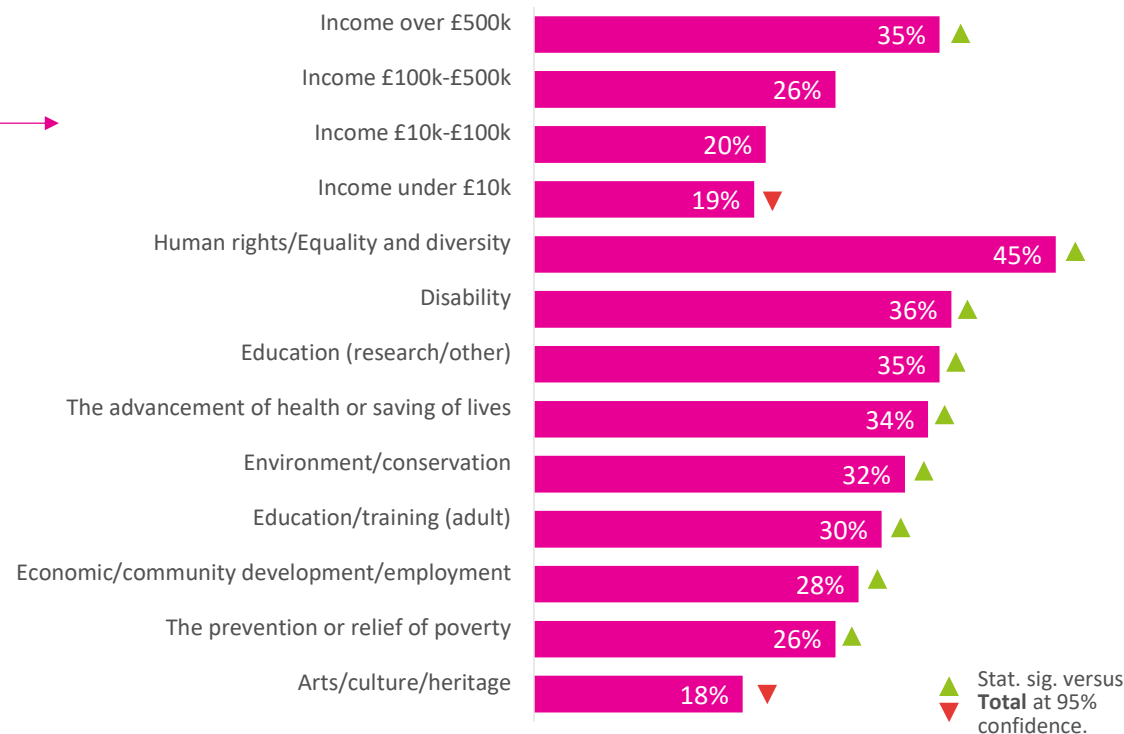
# Charity Campaigning

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?



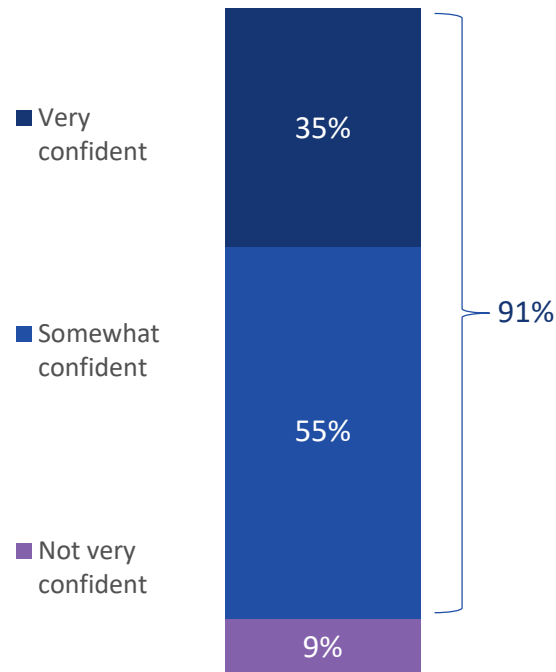
Charity undertakes campaigning





## 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:



#### 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

### Focus Groups

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.

*"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.

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

*"This is an example of when you read the [Charity Commission's] guidance, and it isn't always clear."*

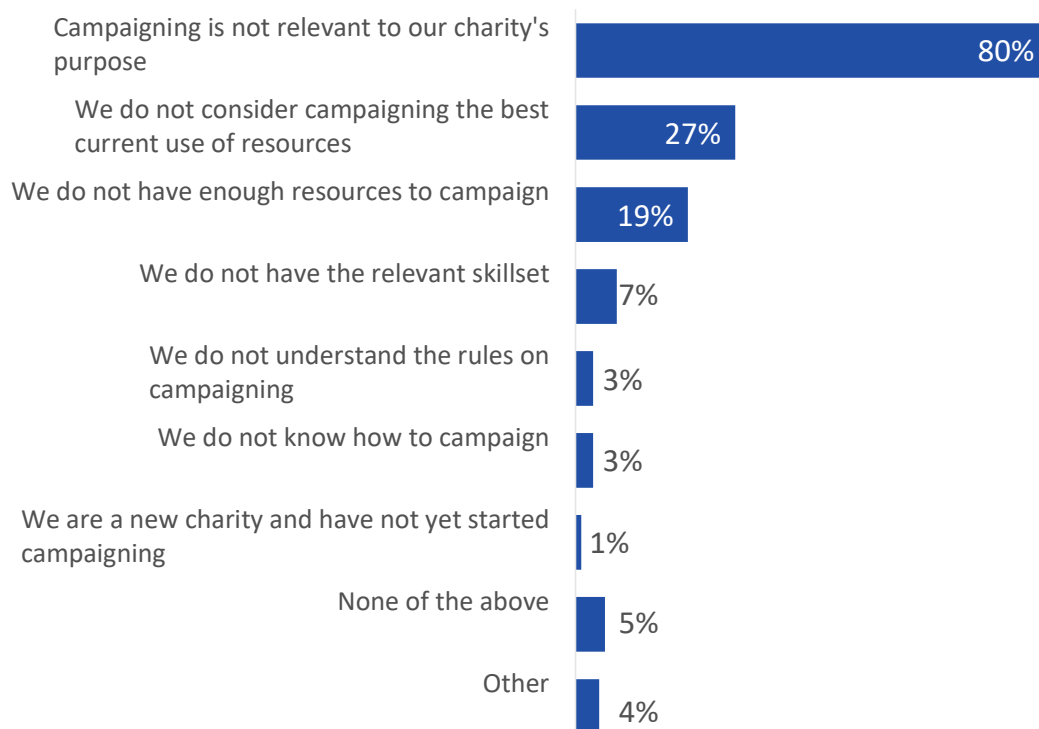
Thinking about campaigning in the charity sector as a whole, trustees identify both benefits and drawbacks-including potential reputational damage.

*"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



### 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.

*"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.

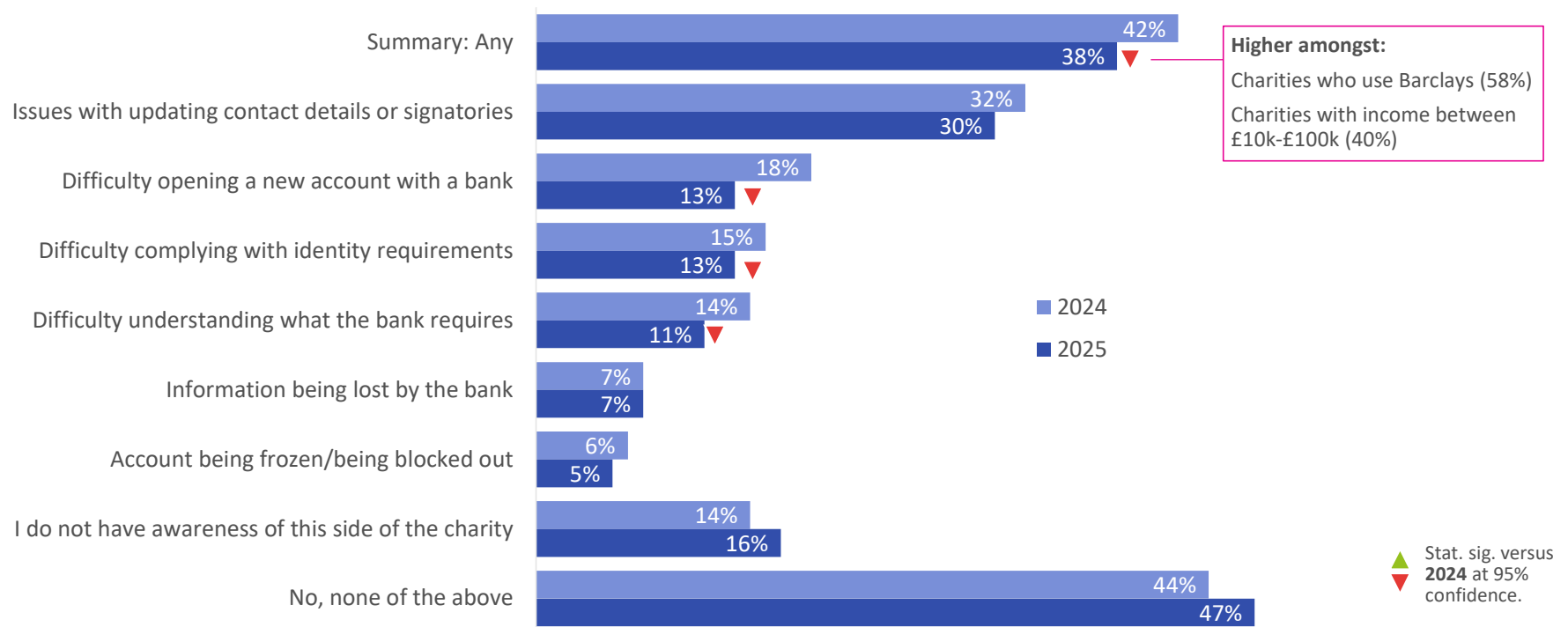
As mentioned, it became clear from focus groups that there is a clear **understanding gap** around what exactly is considered campaigning. Therefore, it's possible that proportions who said they campaigned in the survey actually do not, and vice versa.

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

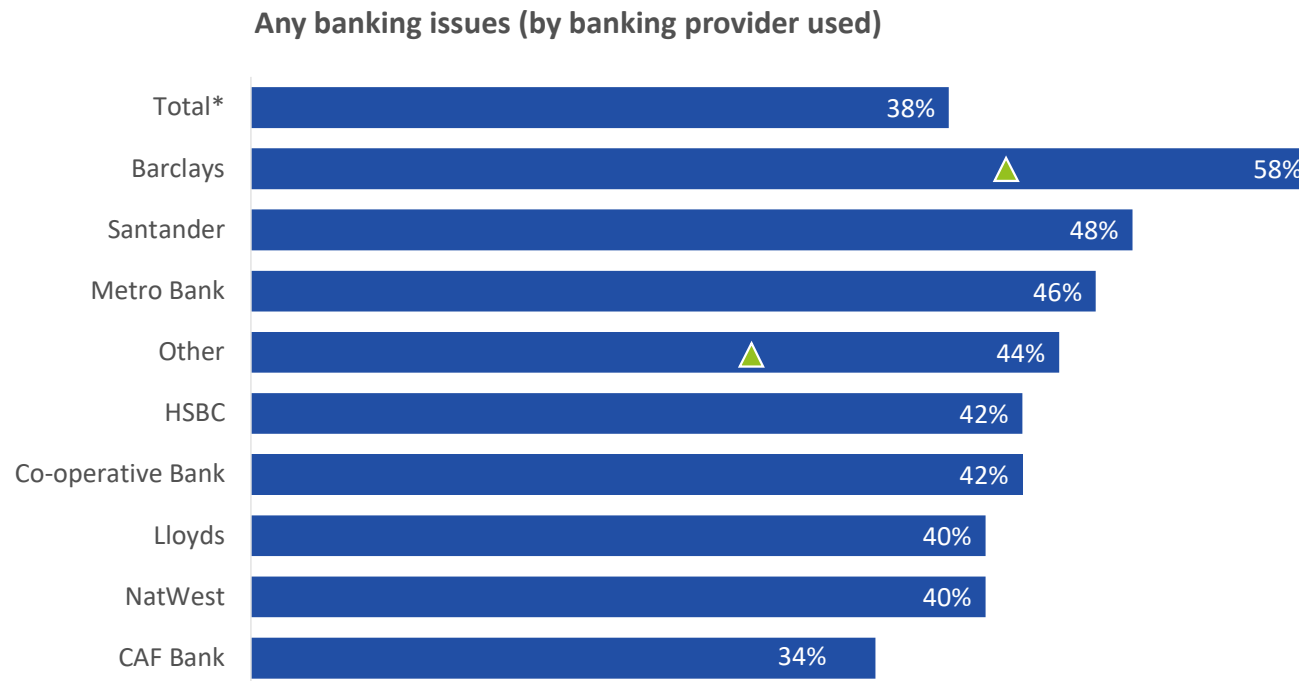
# Banking

## 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



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

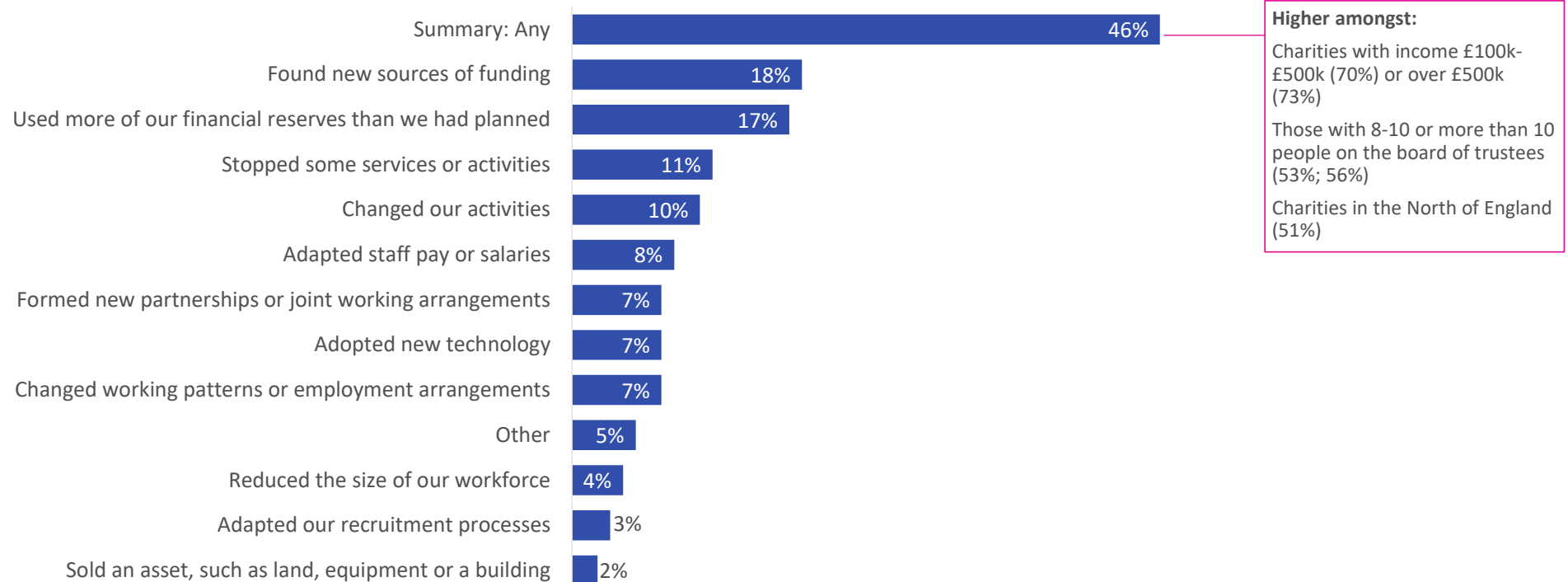


▲ Stat. sig. versus  
Total at 95%  
confidence.

# 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

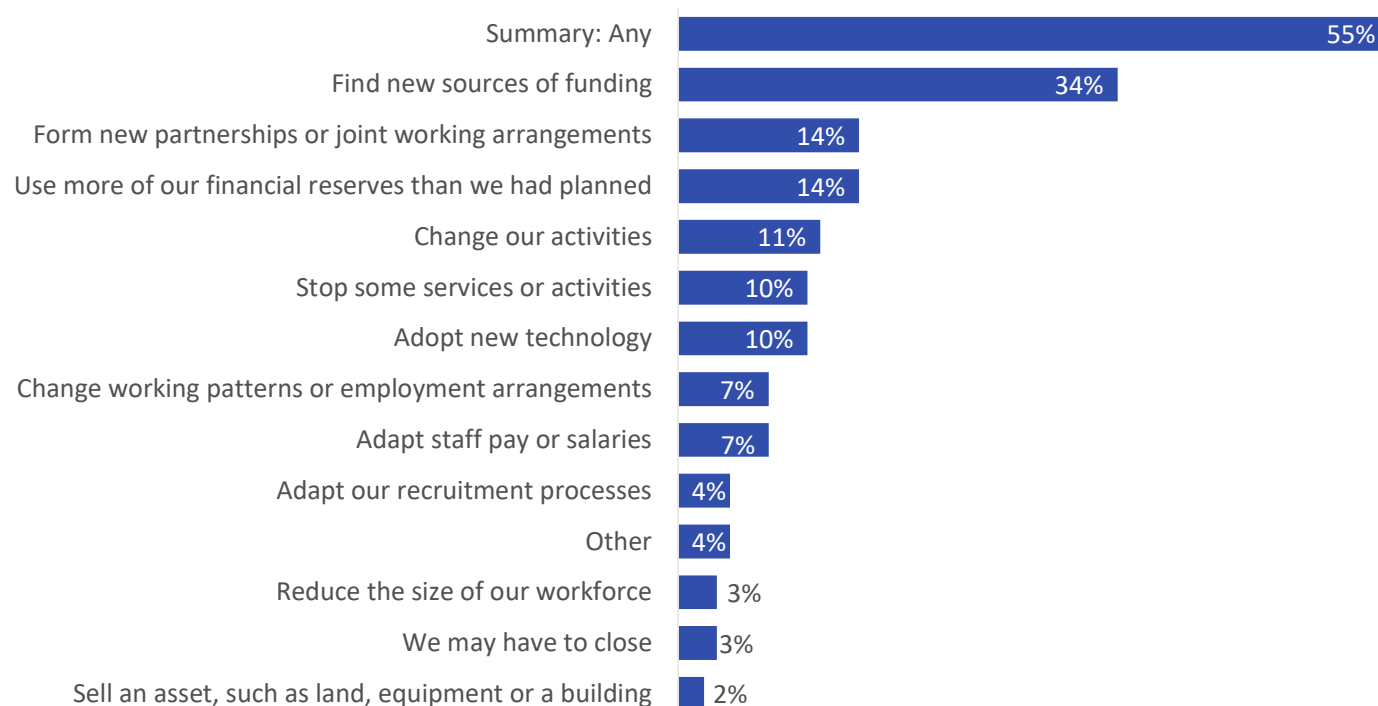
### Ways in which charity has adapted in last 12 months in response to cost-of-living crisis





## 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



#### Higher amongst:

Charities with income £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 3<sup>rd</sup> February and 24<sup>th</sup> 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 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> 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.

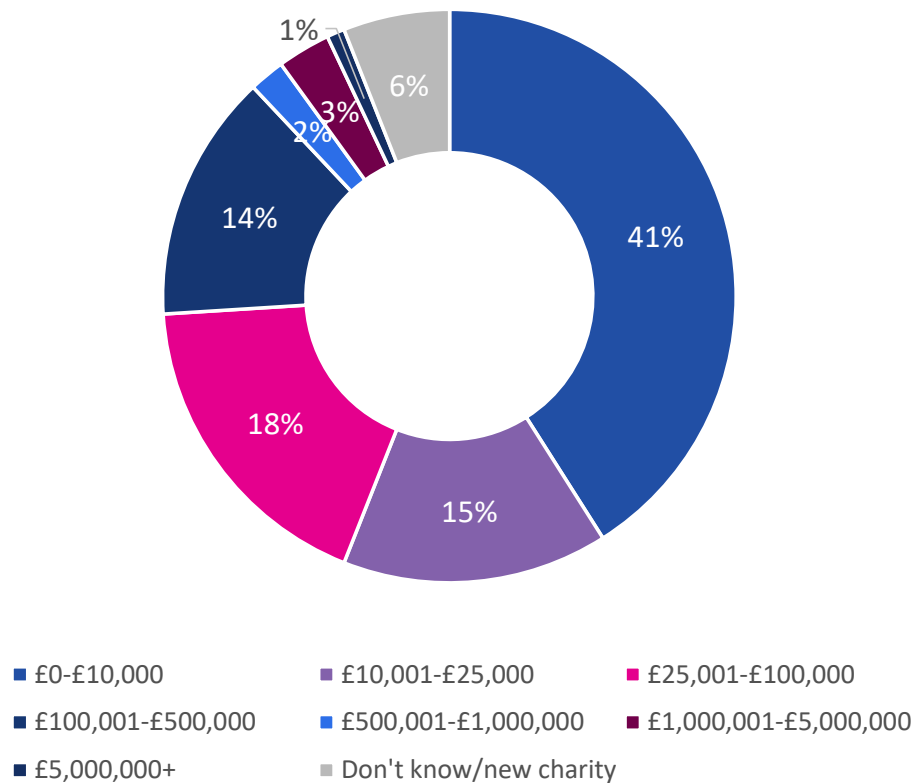
## Comparability Over Time

- 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.
- The 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.

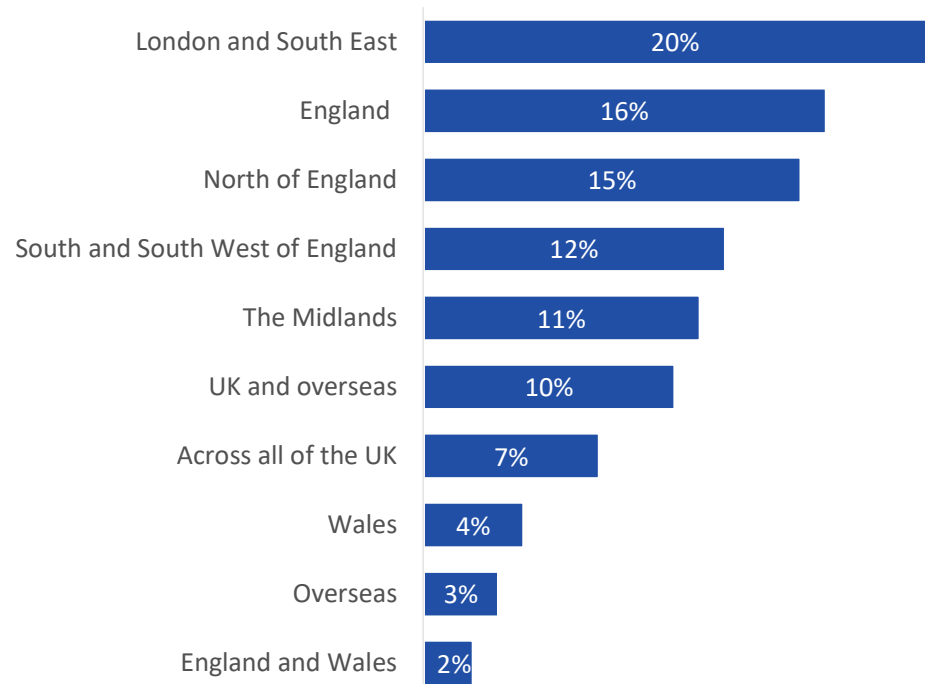
## Appendix 2: Sample breakdown

## Sample breakdown

Annual income of charity (used for weighting)



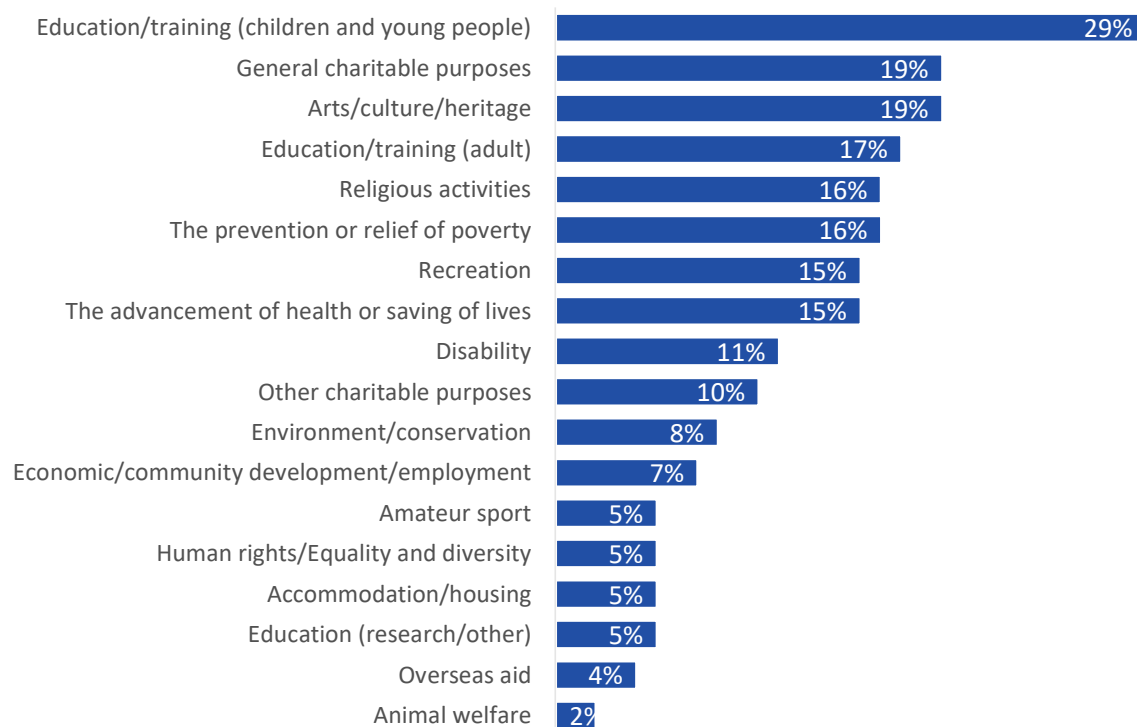
Charity's main area of operation



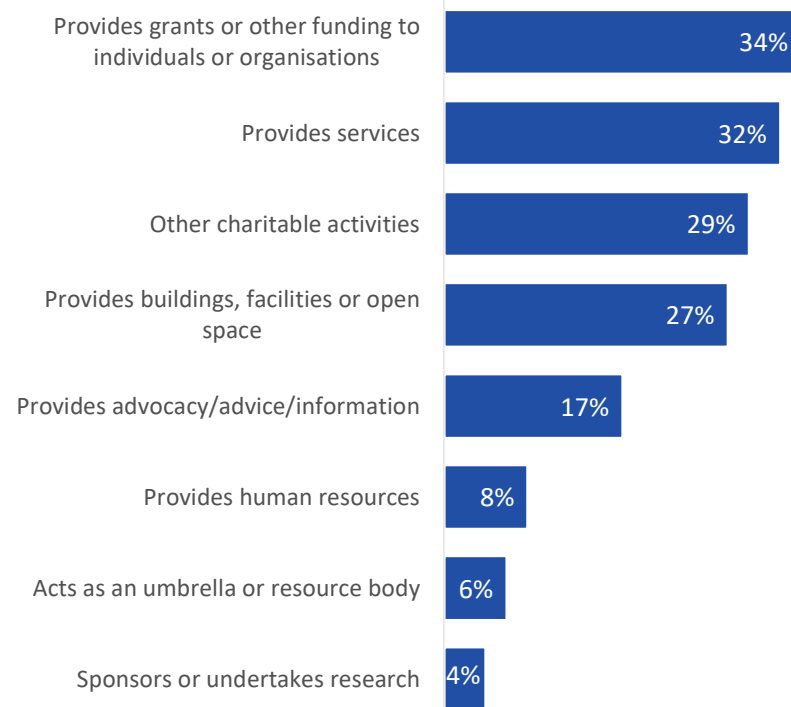


## Sample breakdown

### Charity sector

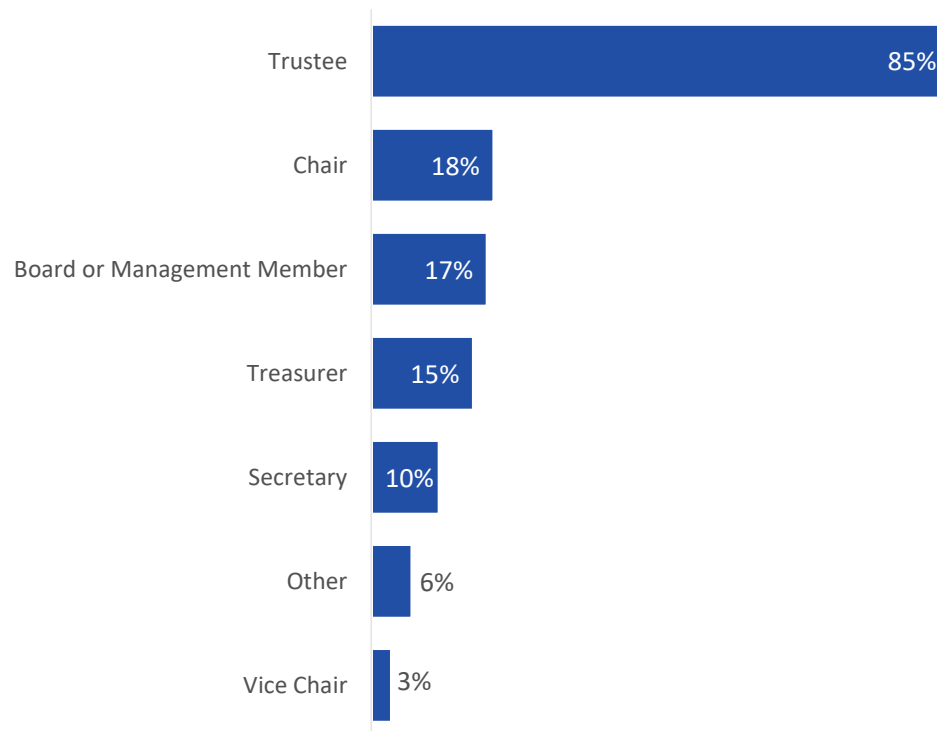


### Charity activity

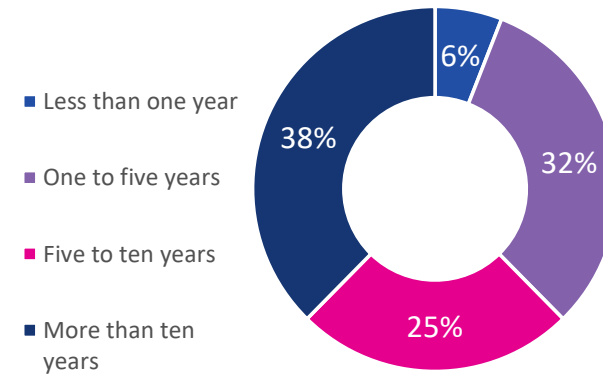


## Sample breakdown

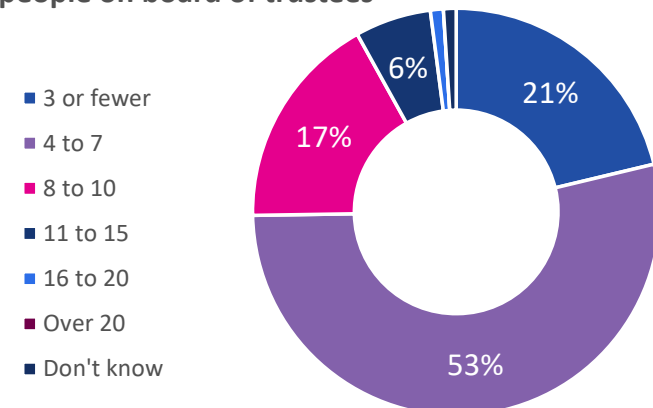
### Role in charity



### Length of time as trustee



### Number of people on board of trustees





BMG

success decoded