



OSCR Charity Survey 2016 and 2018

Summary of Volunteering Findings

Background

The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) has regularly commissioned external stakeholder surveys since 2007. The surveys are designed to capture the attitudes of certain audiences, to draw attention to attitudinal changes and to flag any existing and developing issues and concerns regarding the charity sector. The most recent survey to be carried out was the [Scottish Charity Survey](#) in 2018.

As in previous years, the survey was carried out in two parts: one section gathered the views of the general public on whether and how they supported charities; what levels of interest and support they had for charities; what issues of concern they had; and how aware they were of OSCR and its work. A second section asked charities (stakeholders) about the challenges they faced and how satisfied they were in dealing with the Regulator. The survey contained a number of results relating to volunteering. The key findings of which are presented below, including a comparison against the previous set of results from 2016 and some additional interpretation and commentary on the results.

Involvement of Volunteers and Trustees

In **2016**, the survey asked charities whether they '*had any volunteers*'. Of those charities who participated in the survey (n=1,215), 85% of them said they did involve volunteers. Chart 1 demonstrates that the level of volunteer involvement was relatively similar across different sized charities (based on income). The only slight exception was amongst those charities with an annual income of £0-2,000. The results indicated that fewer charities in this income band involved volunteers (77%) compared to those charities with a higher income. This arguably sits at odds with what we might have expected to see for this income band. With negligible income, there's an assumption that charities in this income band would have the greatest reliance on volunteer involvement to fulfil their purpose.

The reason(s) behind this finding were unclear. Could it be a definitional issue? Do people identify with being a volunteer (bearing in mind that this is an organisational survey and not an individual survey)? Do people recognise that most trustees are volunteers?

Reflecting on the 2016 results, Volunteer Scotland worked with OSCR to enhance the wording of the survey question to see what difference this would make to the findings. As a result, in **2018** charities were asked whether they involved volunteers in roles other than being a trustee, with the survey acknowledging that '*most charity trustees (sometimes known as directors, office holders or committee members) are volunteers who give their time and expertise without financial reward*'. It's important to note that due to this change in the wording of the survey question, the results from 2016 and 2018 cannot be compared against one another.

Chart 1: Involvement of volunteers by charity income, 2016 (n=1,215)

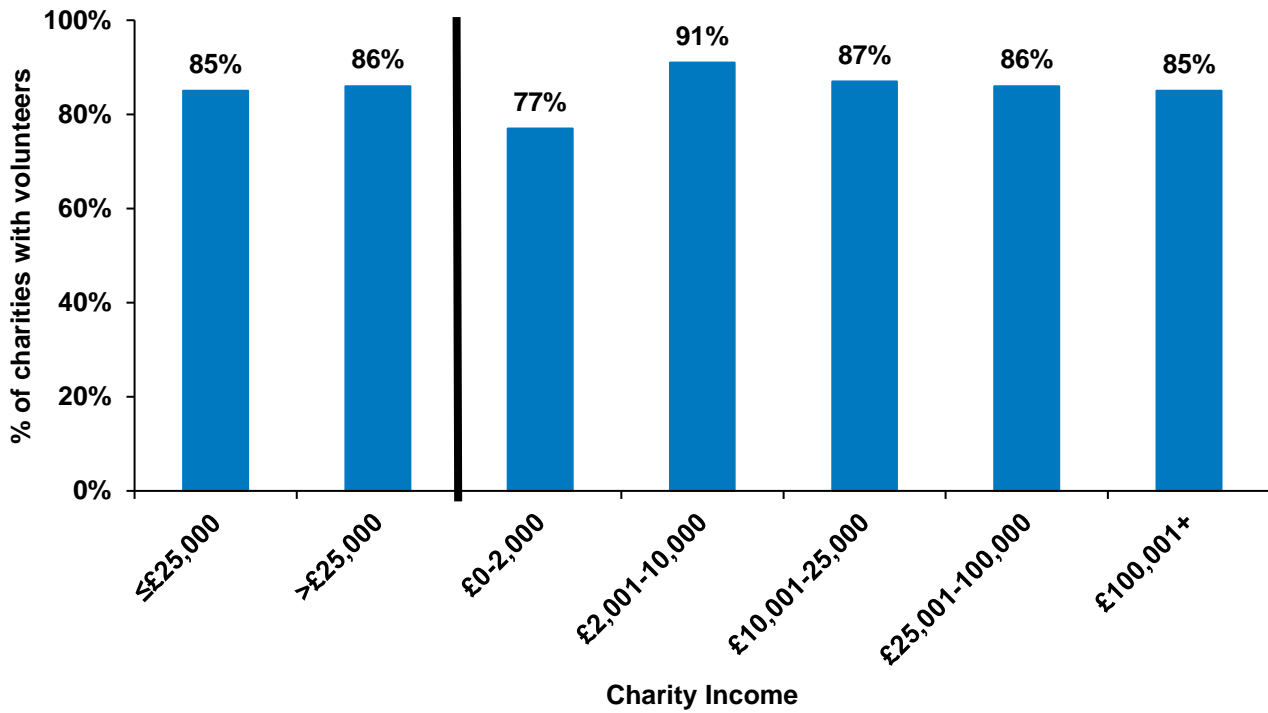


Chart 2 shows that of those charities who responded to the 2018 survey (n=1,215), 73% involved both trustees and volunteers in other roles and a further 26% involved trustees only (1% of charities responded 'don't know' to this question). Chart 3 goes on to demonstrate that as charity income increases, so too does the involvement of volunteers in other roles (in addition to having trustees), with 61% of charities with an income of $\pounds 0-\pounds 2,000$ involving both volunteers and trustees compared to 80% of charities with an income of over $\pounds 100,000$. This reinforces the 2016 finding that charities with a lower income are perhaps not as reliant on volunteers as might be expected.

Chart 2: Involvement of trustees / volunteers, 2018 (n=1,215)

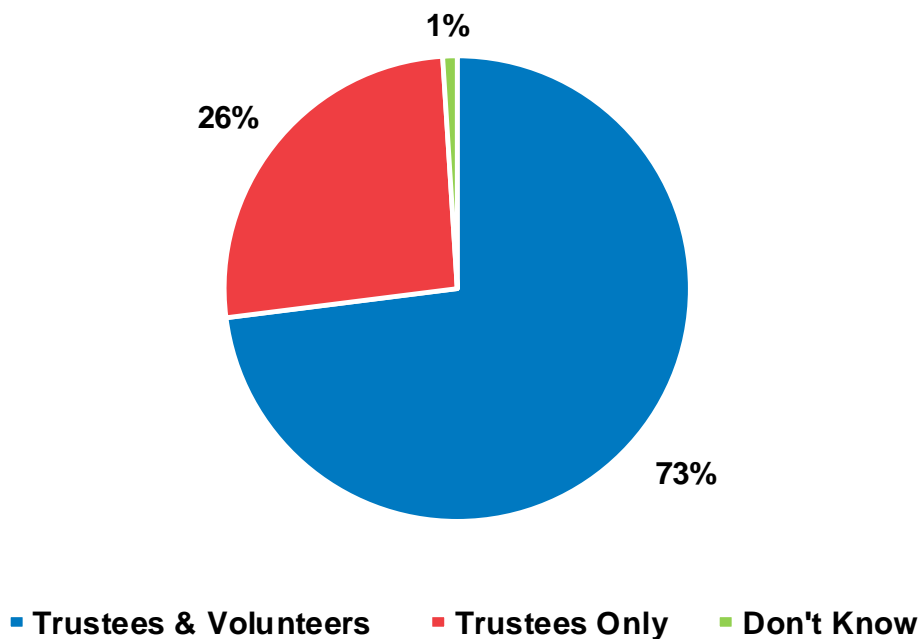
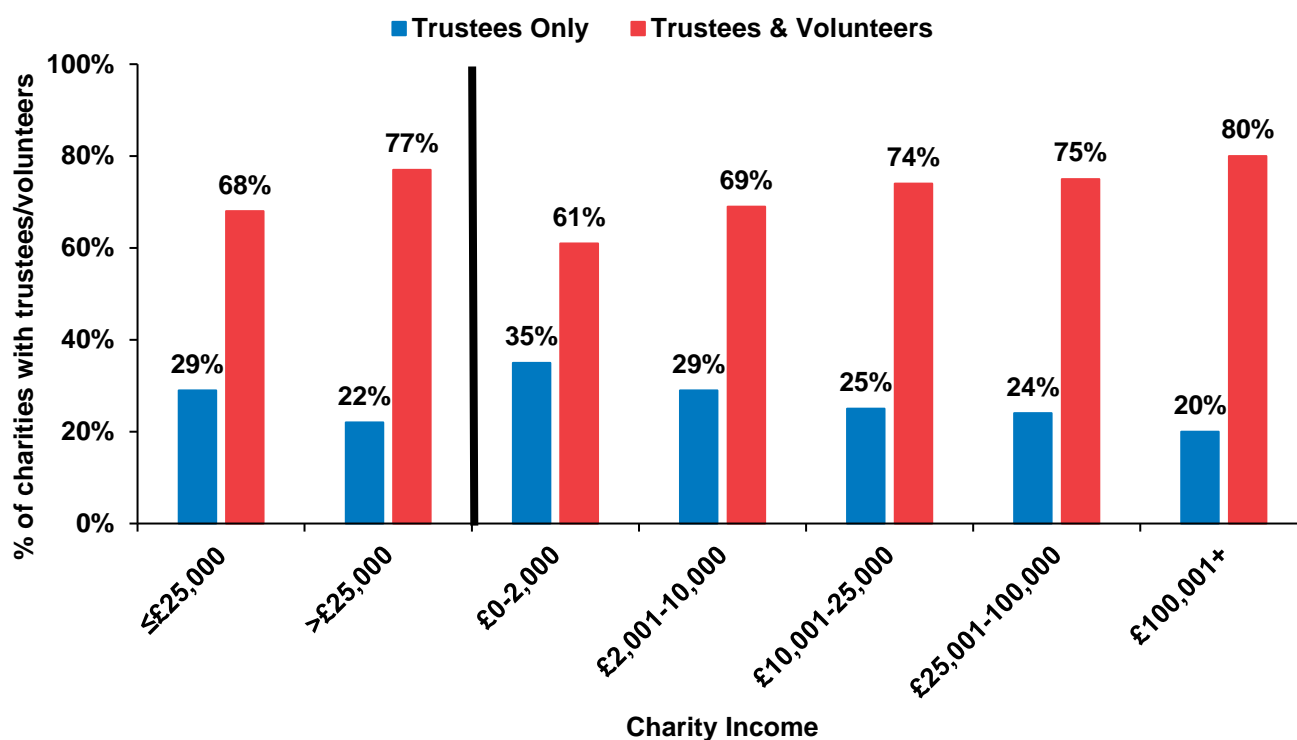


Chart 3: Involvement of trustees / volunteers by charity income, 2018 (n=1,215)¹



This finding is also further supported when the involvement of trustees and volunteers is examined by the number of staff a charity employs. In 2018, 66% of those charities who had no paid staff reportedly involved trustees and volunteers in other roles (Chart 4). However, this increased to over 80% for those charities who did employ paid staff. Once again, for those charities who had no paid staff, we would have arguably expected to see a stronger dependence on volunteers. Perhaps this is because charities with no staff (and no or very low income) find it difficult to involve volunteers due to a lack of resources? Despite the assumption that volunteers are ‘free’, there actually tends to be a need for a certain level of investment in the management and co-ordination of volunteers, and this will arguably be difficult to achieve without an adequate income and/or staff capacity.

A further possible explanation for the lack of volunteer involvement amongst these very small charities is that they may be at the tail-end of their lifecycle, with only a few trustees left and not much by way of resources to carry out activities. They could potentially report fairly static, low income and expenditure for a number of years. They could also be charities set up in response to a particular need and who are waiting on something else to happen before they can progress their cause, such as waiting for a funding application to be approved which can both take time and may or may not materialise. Again, charities in this position can appear to be dormant or to be carrying out fairly limited activities.

In terms of the level of volunteer involvement across the different regions in Scotland, the results were relatively consistent across the range of charities in 2018 (Chart 5). There were some slight variances, with charities in North East Scotland (79%) and Central Scotland (77%) involving more volunteers in other roles than in West Scotland (62%) and Lothians (66%).

When the level of volunteer involvement was examined by how long the charity had been

¹ ‘Don’t know’ responses have been excluded from the results.

established for in 2018, the results were once again relatively consistent across the range of charities (Chart 6). The highest involvement of both trustees and volunteers in other roles was within those charities who'd only been established within the last 4 years (78%). This higher level of volunteer engagement might suggest that newer charities are more dependent on volunteers to become established, or it might indicate that more volunteers are interested in newer and more 'current' charities, or it may be that newer charities are more attuned to the different ways of engaging volunteers, such as advertising opportunities via social media channels, offering more flexible and short-term roles, etc.

Chart 4: Involvement of trustees / volunteers by number of staff, 2018 (n=1,215)¹

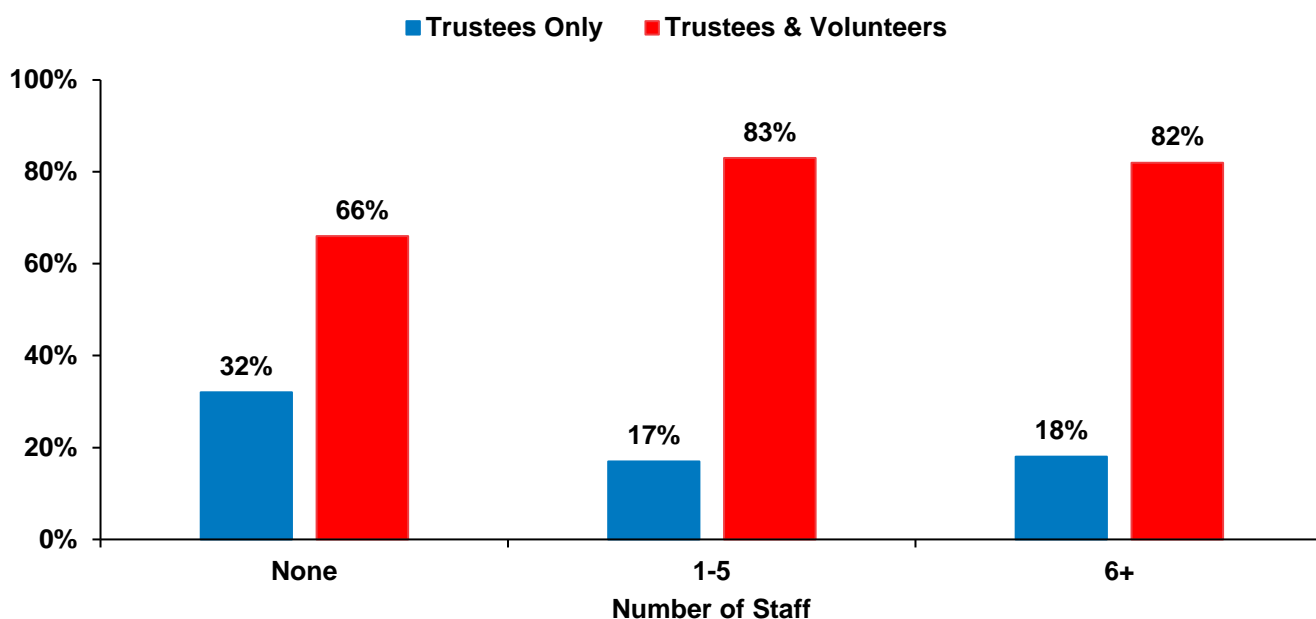


Chart 5: Involvement of trustees / volunteers by region, 2018 (n=1,215)¹

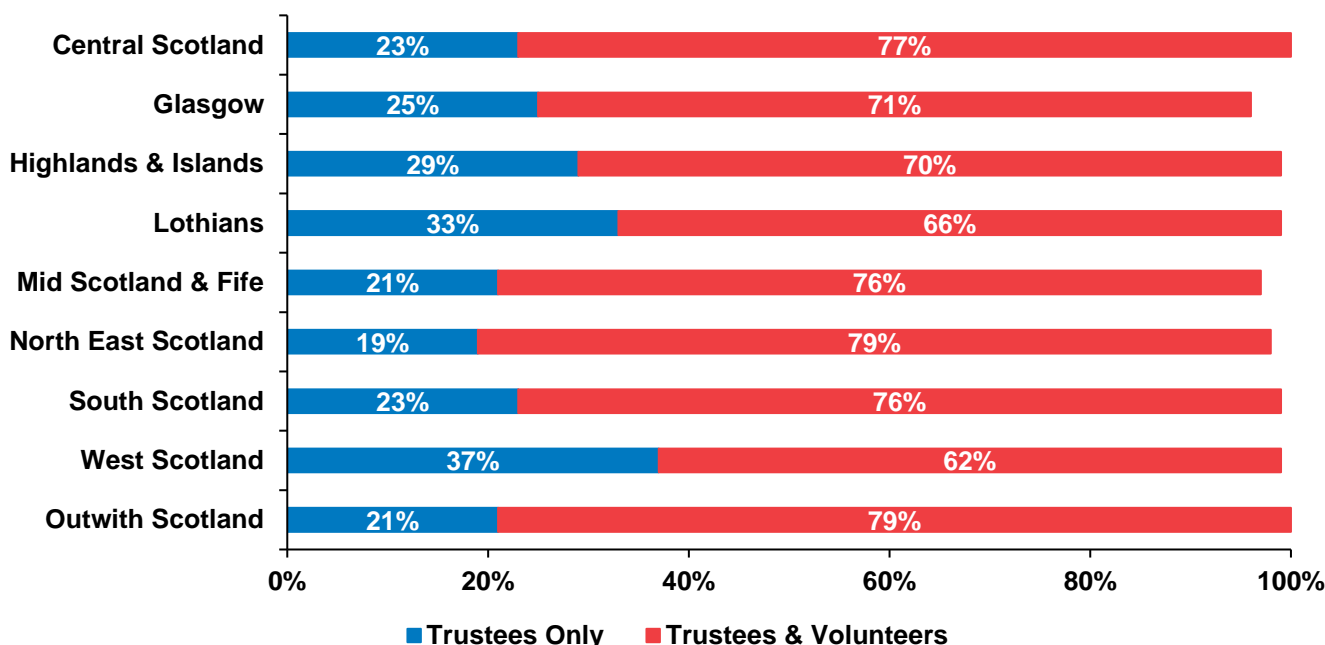
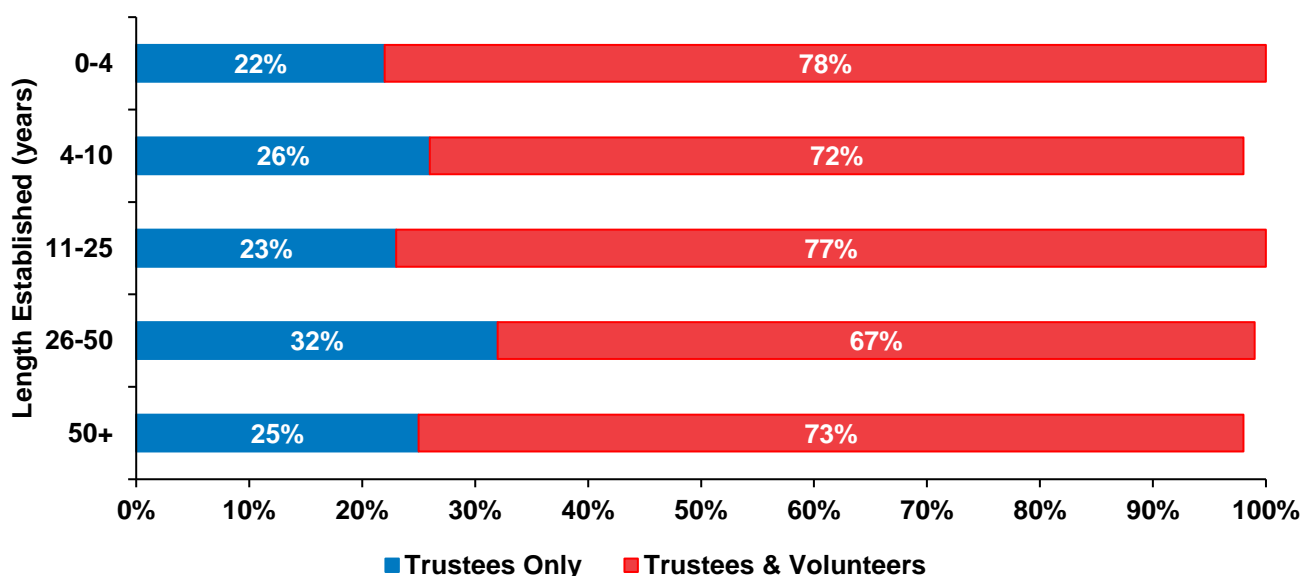


Chart 6: Involvement of trustees / volunteers by length of establishment, 2018 (n=1,215)¹



Recruitment of Volunteers and Trustees

The recruitment of volunteers and the recruitment of trustees both featured in the top issues facing charities in 2016 (Chart 7) and 2018 (Chart 8).

When these two issues were explored in more detail, the recruitment of volunteers appeared to be more of an issue for smaller charities (those with an income of £25,000 and below) than it was for larger charities (those with an income of over £25,000) – 26% of smaller charities identified this as an issue compared to 14% of larger charities in 2016 (Chart 9). This had further increased as an issue for smaller charities in 2018, with 32% identifying this as an issue compared to 13% of larger charities (Chart 10).

When volunteer recruitment was examined at a regional level (Chart 11), it appeared to have increased as an issue across all regions between 2016 and 2018, although it seems to be more of a problem for those charities based in the rural areas of Scotland. Charities in North East Scotland, South Scotland, Mid-Scotland and Fife and the Highlands & Islands all identified volunteer recruitment as more of an issue in both 2016 and 2018 compared to those charities based in more urbanised areas. One of the main differences between the results for 2016 and 2018 was in West Scotland where only 5% of charities in this region had reported the recruitment of volunteers as a top issue in 2016, but this had risen to 30% in 2018. Central Scotland had also witnessed a similar increase, from 9% in 2016 to 19% in 2018.

In terms of the issue of recruiting trustees (Chart 12), there was little difference between those responses provided by smaller charities compared to larger charities across both 2016 (18% and 17% respectively) and 2018 (19% and 17% respectively). Although the recruitment of trustees appeared to be more of an overall problem for charities in rural areas in 2016 (apart from Lothian who reported having the highest issue of recruiting trustees), this seems to have become an issue that's now affecting urban areas as much as it is rural areas in 2018. One of the most marked increases was in West Scotland where only 5% of charities in this region had reported the recruitment of trustees as a top issue in 2016, but this had risen to 24% in 2018. Glasgow had also witnessed a similar increase, from 6% in 2016 to 20% in 2018.

Chart 7: Issues facing charities, 2016 (n=1,215)

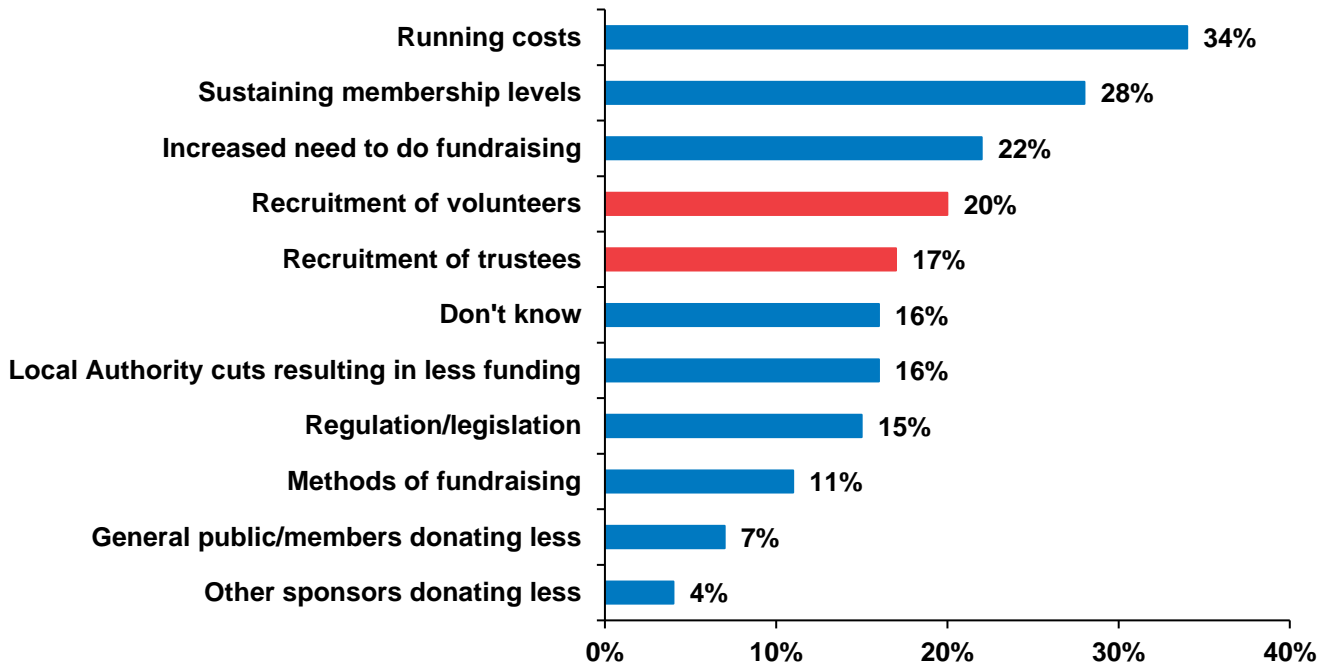


Chart 8: Issues facing charities, 2018 (n=1,214)

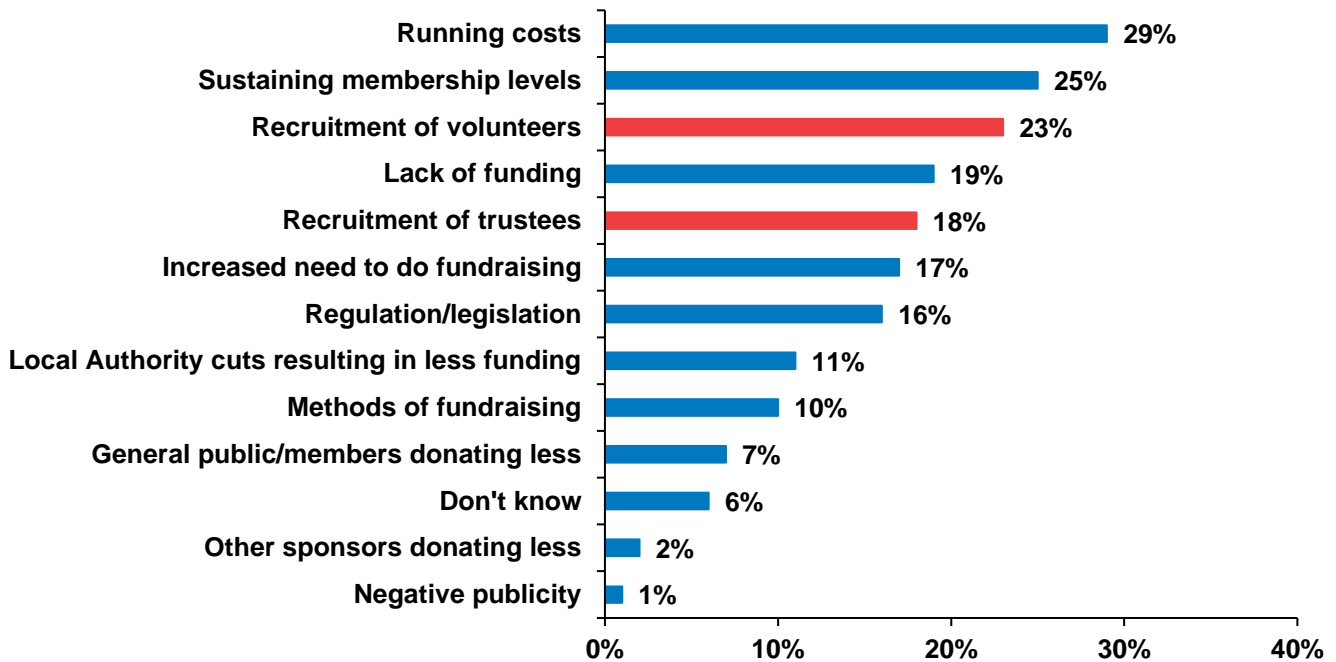


Chart 9: Issue of volunteer and trustee recruitment by charity income, 2016 (n=1,215)

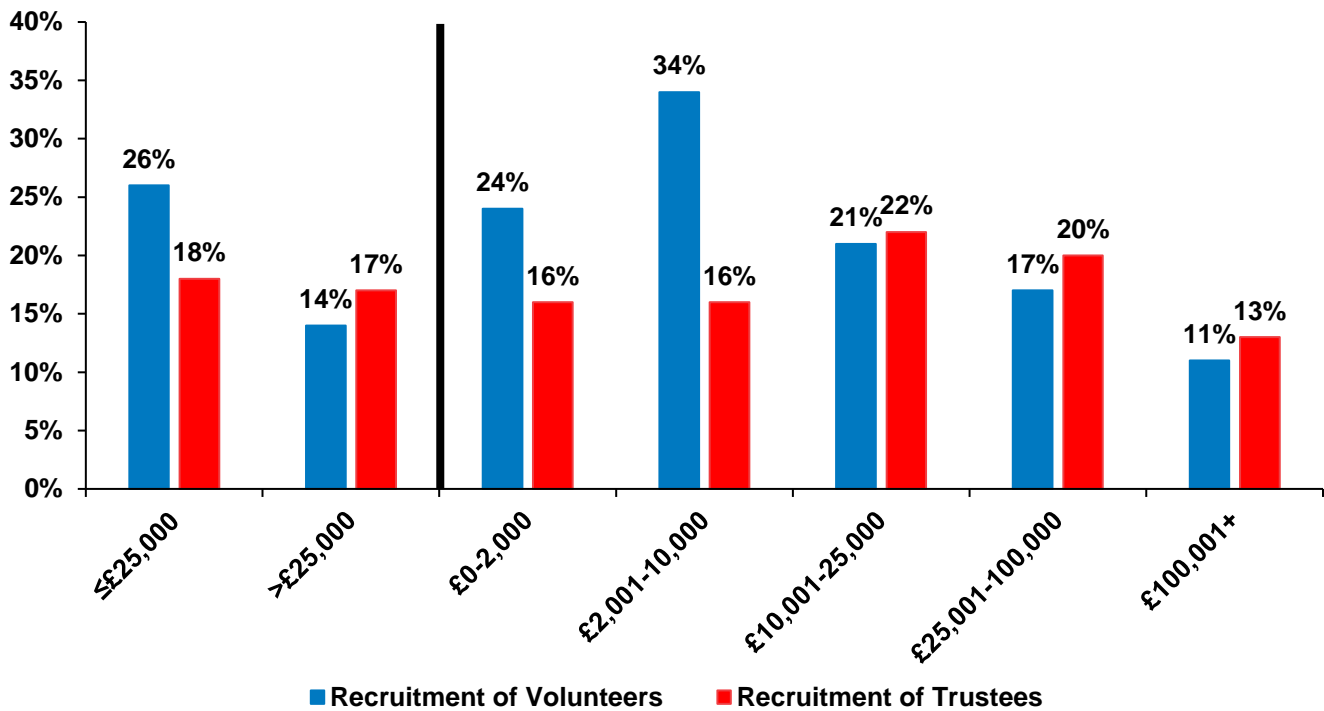


Chart 10: Issue of volunteer and trustee recruitment by charity income, 2018 (n=1,214)

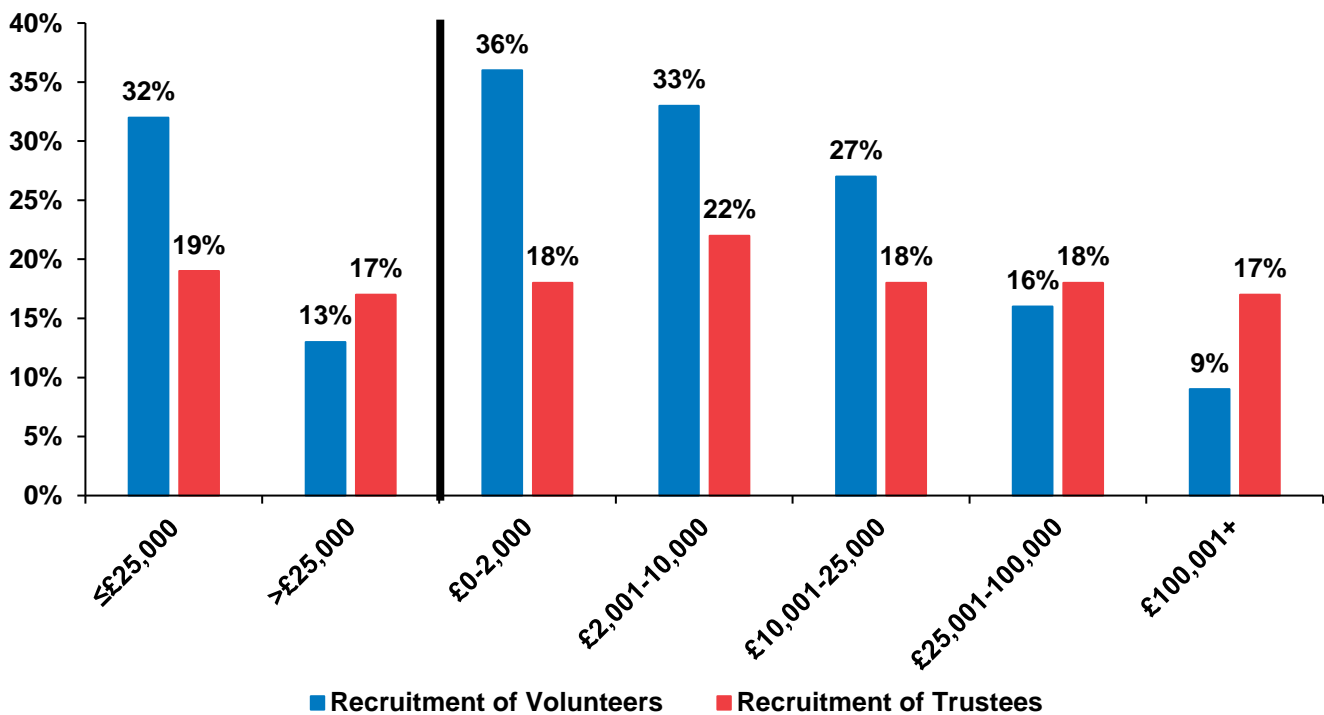


Chart 11: Issue of volunteer recruitment by region, 2016 and 2018 (n=1,215 / 1,215)

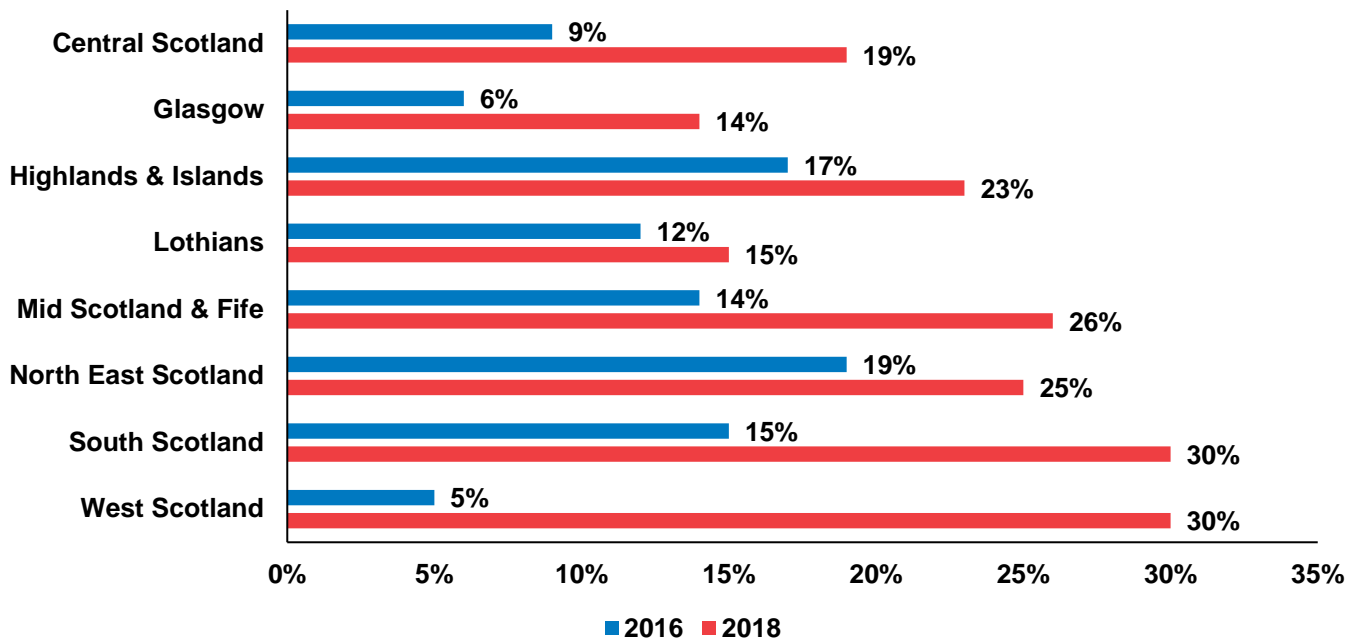
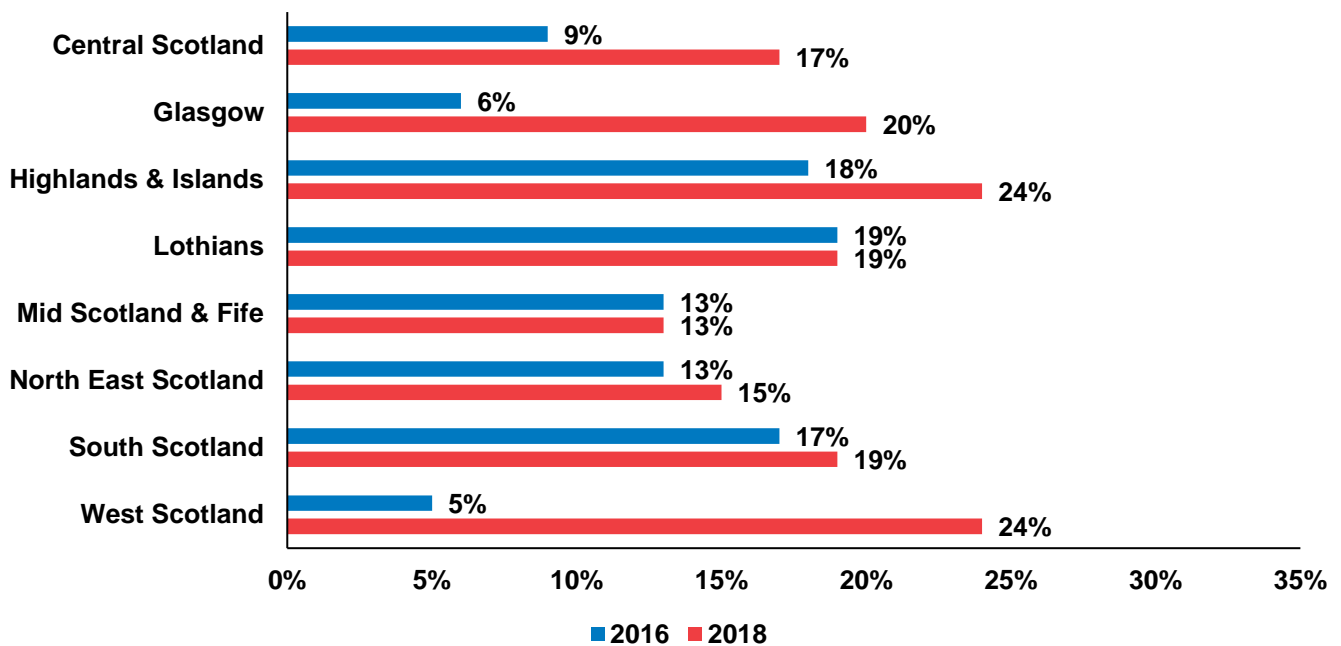


Chart 12: Issue of trustee recruitment by region, 2016 and 2018 (n=1,214 / 1,215)



Interpretation of findings

So what do these findings tell us? It's widely believed that there's an untapped pool of potential volunteers out there who are just waiting for organisations to provide them with an opportunity to get involved. Indeed, an often-cited barrier to volunteering is a lack of available volunteer opportunities. However, the above results suggest that attracting volunteers and trustees (who are themselves mostly volunteers) is not that straightforward or easy and is of particular concern for smaller scale organisations.

Perhaps the problem comes down to organisations not offering the *right* type of volunteer opportunities. Chart 13 shows that the most frequently cited reason that would encourage people to volunteer in the future is *'if it fitted in with my other commitments'* followed by *'if it fitted in with my interests and skills'*. To attract volunteers, organisations often need to provide flexibility in their volunteering offer – flexibility in roles, tasks, location, timing, etc. Organisations need to make it easy for people to volunteer, including considering how to make roles more inclusive and engaging. This may involve adopting different approaches such as home-based volunteering. Organisations need to acknowledge that people will have their own individual motivations for volunteering and want to know “what’s in it for me”. One way of addressing this may be for organisations to develop roles together with potential volunteers to ensure a good fit for their skills and interests.

All these aspects of providing an attractive volunteer role are arguably more difficult for smaller organisations to offer and provide due to a lack of time and resources. Given that smaller organisations can be especially reliant on volunteers – some being entirely volunteer-run – this can pose a big challenge. It’s also possible that smaller organisations struggle to compete for volunteers against the high-visibility, “big name” organisations who have the means to offer and promote a wider range of volunteer opportunities. Volunteering with larger organisations may also be more attractive in terms of the perceived benefits that can be acquired, such as opportunities to gain valuable skills and experience and to be able to put on your CV that you’ve been involved with a large, established charity. There may also be an assumption that volunteering with a larger charity is a safer bet in terms of receiving a ‘quality’ volunteer experience as the charity will have the resources and expertise to effectively manage volunteers.

Although more volunteering takes place in rural areas than urban areas in Scotland, attracting volunteers in rural areas can still be problematic. In 2017, the rate of volunteering in rural areas was higher than in urban areas, with 31% of adults in remote rural and 31% of adults in accessible rural areas saying they provided unpaid help to groups or organisations compared to around a quarter of adults in large and other urban areas (26% and 27% respectively)². However, studies have found that organisations can experience difficulties attracting volunteers in rural areas due to accessibility and transport issues. A study for [Historic Environment Scotland](#) in 2016 revealed that *'organisations found that the remoteness and lack of facilities (for example, toilet and kitchen facilities) at some historic environment sites could pose a challenge to attracting volunteers, particularly older people and those with limited mobility. The seasonal opening of some sites also made it difficult to keep volunteers interested in the off-season'*. There’s also the added challenge that the smaller population sizes found in rural areas means that there’s a smaller pool from which to attract volunteers, coupled with an increased demand for volunteers to help sustain services in rural areas that are often funded in urban areas. There can sometimes be a tendency for the same “hard-core” volunteers to be involved in multiple volunteering activities in rural areas which can lead to volunteer fatigue and burn-out, which is not a sustainable position for the future.

Without carrying out additional research, it’s not possible to say with any definitive authority what are the true reasons behind these emerging findings. It’s also important to note that the sample sizes behind some of the survey results are relatively small, particularly those relating to regional breakdowns and the length of time a charity has been established, so we need to be careful about what firm conclusions we can draw from these findings without further exploration to validate the results. Nevertheless, the findings do raise some interesting points for consideration and provide a

² Source: [Scottish Household Survey \(2017\)](#), [Scottish Government](#)

good basis and justification for carrying out further research in this area.

Chart 13: Reasons why adults may undertake unpaid help in the future (Scottish Household Survey, 2016, n=7,020)

