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Taken on Trust

The provider perspective on
advice and support for charity trustees



CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES



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1. Executive summary

Overview

Charity boards and trusteeship are under scrutiny.¹ A series of high-profile organisational failures, parliamentary interest in the role of charity trustees, and longer-standing concerns about how best to strengthen the pool of charity trustees and board effectiveness form the background to this report. Actions are already underway to address perceived weaknesses, such as the development of a revised Charity Governance Code.²

Understanding the support available for charity trustees is also a part of the charity sector's response. This report describes findings from research in 2017 to scope out the provision of support for charity trustees. It looks at the support on offer, the perceptions of support providers, and the uptake and usage of different types of support provided to charity boards and trustees. The research was commissioned by the Cranfield Trust as part of a broader project examining trustee awareness. It was carried out by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations.

The research consisted of an initial mapping exercise, an exploratory survey (Number=167) and follow-up telephone interviews (N=10) with organisations that between them provided support to approximately 6,600 trustees and 5,400 organisations over the preceding 12 months. The sample included local and national infrastructure bodies, national and specialist charities, private sector accountancy and consultancy firms, and individual trainers and consultants.

Our research is small in scale and exploratory in nature. It provides a useful insight into the support provided to charity boards and trustees from the perspective of provider organisations. Inevitably, it raises further questions, given the diversity of both the provider market and those seeking support.

Our findings

Several insights emerge from our research. Many of the issues providers identified echo the findings of existing studies. Most significantly, trustees do not appear to be taking up the support offered by the respondents to this survey in large numbers. A complex interplay between supply and demand emerges. There are issues pertaining to both demand for support (trustees unaware of the gaps in their own skills and knowledge) and the supply of support services (support not being provided in the right ways, or not been marketed due to fear of creating demand).

Providers also report clear gaps in the effectiveness and confidence of charity boards. In small charities, board skills gaps are perceived by providers to be especially acute due to informal processes of trustee recruitment, lack of resources and wider challenges around organisational development.

1 For example, see www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2016/feb/10/charity-trustee-terrified-being-next-alan-yentob

2 www.charitygovernancecode.org/en

Meanwhile, evidence from the companion study of trustees' attitudes and behaviours indicates a greater level of confidence among trustees, a preference for seeking the advice and support of their peers on the board, and a confidence regarding board effectiveness.

The market for support and advice is not functioning well

Uptake of formal support is low

Considering the number of registered trusteeships (currently around 950,000, although some of these may be individuals holding more than one position), the number of trustees reached by the providers in this survey appears small. This may be because trustees are comfortable with the advice provided by their peers, a finding to emerge from the concurrent research into trustees' attitudes by Cass Business School. However, the number of charities providers are supporting is also small in comparison with the population.

Local infrastructure organisations are an important feature of the support landscape

Local infrastructure organisations such as Councils for Voluntary Service (CVSs) and volunteer centres play a central role in the provider landscape, particularly in relation to supporting the trustees of small, local charities. Their views are well represented in our research. Many however continue to struggle with their own sustainability: some of the insights (CVSs not promoting services so as not to create demand; gaps appearing in the network) suggest that finding new ways to support small, local charities should remain a priority for providers and policy makers.

Barriers to take-up of support remain

Navigating information and support can be challenging. Providers described challenges around not just the amount and type of support on offer, but also identifying and accessing that support, particularly for organisations with an inability to pay. Concerns around the lack of signposting and/or lack of a central hub of information came up repeatedly. These also related to how accessible the information was.

Trustee recruitment is largely informal, despite support

Over half the organisations in the survey played some role in the recruitment of trustees, if only through posting listings. Providers report that trustees are typically recruited through informal networks, suggesting an approach that in turn might play into their concerns about new trustees' lack of awareness of their roles and responsibilities.

Demand for core governance training is most in demand

The informal approach to recruitment may be generating demand for support. Providers were most likely to report basic support around governance, and understanding of trustees' roles and responsibilities as being in highest demand.

Board effectiveness and review is where support is more needed

Despite many providers offering service around board effectiveness, demand is felt to be relatively high. In turn, board effectiveness is cited by providers as the biggest gap in support provision. This may reflect the time-intensive, tailored nature of board effectiveness reviews.

Providers have concerns about the skills and awareness of trustees

The concurrent piece to this research reports that charity trustees are relatively confident in board effectiveness and their own skills and knowledge. Providers paint a less rosy picture, with middling levels of awareness among new trustees, suggesting that a majority only have 'some' knowledge of their roles and legal responsibilities. Longer standing trustees are perceived to be competent and skilled in their role, but fewer providers agree that they are able to hold senior management teams to account.

Channel shift? The role of digital support

Three quarters of our providers report providing face to face support, compared with one in five using digital channels. Providers may have made a conscious choice to prioritise face to face support due to their perception that trustees' own digital skills are lacking. We are nevertheless aware that providers themselves may lack digital capability and capacity. At a time when changes in the external environment – greater scrutiny from media, parliament and the regulator – indicate that demand for support is likely to increase, and gaps are appearing in the map of local providers, there appears to be a reluctance to shift to digital channels of support or uncertainty as to how.

2. Policy implications

This insights from our respondents suggest that take up of support for charity trustees is relatively low due a to a range of supply and demand factors; that informal approaches to recruitment may be an important driver of need (if not demand); and that many providers believe new trustees only have some awareness of their roles, including their legal responsibilities. Many support providers are themselves charities, and therefore issues of limited capacity and capability cut across our findings, particularly in relation to providing advice and support using digital channels.

If charity governance is to progress from being good to great, current practice around trustee and board effectiveness will require further development. Several policy options merit consideration. The Charity Commission should:

1. **Communicate directly with trustees electronically.** Reaching trustees with the support they provide is a challenge for providers, either in terms of their own capacity or ability to reach those in need of support (section 6). Anticipated changes to the annual return process will enable the Charity Commission to communicate with more trustees directly and electronically. We hope that this increased capability can be used to inform/remind more trustees of their need to stay aware of their responsibilities and also where help can be found from providers.
2. **Increase take up of support.** Take up of support is low (section 5), for reasons including cost, low awareness and lack of signposting. We are aware that trustees may also prefer to rely upon their peers from the board. Increasing take-up could be achieved through several means:
 - a. Improved signposting of trusted services: umbrella bodies should improve signposting to where support for trustees and governance are available, as poor awareness is a barrier (section 8). This should include better signposting to local providers of support where capacity is available, given their important role in supporting small, local charities (section 5). Particular attention may also need to be given to providers of digital advice and support, who were not well-represented in the mapping exercise (section 5).
 - b. Not knowing where to get help or who to trust (section 8) might be addressed by the sort of brokerage platform found in other industries. Development of a web-based marketplace of support providers, incorporating feedback from users, should be considered. The providers (umbrella bodies, universities, publishers) who regularly meet via NCVO's governance round table may be a starting point for this conversation.
 - c. The Association of Charitable Foundations should ask the Intelligent Funding Forum to consider whether more 'funder plus' or voucher scheme arrangements might be made available by the funder community to address the issue of cost.

3. **Support charities to make trustee recruitment more formal, planned and transparent.** The research found that providers think that recruitment is largely informal, through social networks. This may be generating demand downstream for support. Progressing trustee recruitment from reliance on social networks to being more strategic, open and skills-based, and making trustee job descriptions and good induction processes the norm will require pro-active efforts to make the case for doing recruitment differently. Universities (Cass, Open) and umbrella bodies including NCVO, ACEVO and the AoC should:
 - a. synthesise and publish the evidence and arguments for board diversity and more strongly make the case for open recruitment³
 - b. promote the use of more open recruitment channels, primarily the various platforms for volunteer and trustee recruitment; these should be brought together to signpost their availability
4. **Aim the ‘From Good to Great’ campaign at trustees.** The research identified a failure to access the support that is available, citing trustees’ lack of awareness that they need to improve their own knowledge and skills. It also highlighted providers’ views that the majority of new trustees only have ‘some awareness’ of their role and legal responsibilities. High-performing organisations are typified by strong governance so the aim of this programme could be to lift more trustees from being good to great. This could also apply to paid staff in the role of company secretary and who support the trustee board, and therefore it might be a campaign with two strands.
 - a. The Office for Civil Society, the Charity Commission for England and Wales and umbrella bodies should consider the merits of a medium-term campaign and scope-out whether grantmakers are interested in supporting it.
 - b. The Charity Code of Governance⁴ provides a framework for building trustee skills and knowledge. Its steering group should explore what support is available for its continued promotion and increasing its usage.
5. **Change the format of support to more digital.** The research found that trustees are uncomfortable with support in digital format and preferred face-to-face support. It found very little digital delivery. However, it is unlikely that voluntary sector providers will be able to meet existing demand, let alone any increase in demand, on a face-to-face model. Organisations including Reach Volunteering are already successfully taking this approach, while training in other sectors of the economy increasingly utilises web-based methods.

Use a MOOC approach to meet increasing demand. It is likely that more support services will need to progress from being largely face-to-face to an offer that is

³ Although moral and strategic arguments for diversity are common (e.g. www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/report-calls-on-charities-to-think-differently-about-diversity.html), the empirical backing for diversity in relation to boards remains thin

⁴ www.charitygovernancecode.org/en

much more digital. Small providers of advice and support do not have the resources or capability to develop digital platforms, but they are potentially partners for larger, national providers such as universities. A MOOC approach could perhaps be adopted using a tried and tested supplier such as the Open University, with digital channels augmented by the face to face support frequently offered in local infrastructure bodies.

6. **Change the format of support to 'bitesize'.** A finding from the research was the difficulty of accessing support in a format that was helpful. More emphasis on modularisation could be introduced to the current support offer, similar to the sorts of web based, short, modular training increasingly being adopted across the private and public sectors.

3. Purpose of this report

There is a paucity of information and insight on the available advice and support for trustees and those responsible for charity governance. To inform what, if any, interventions are required and how those interventions should be developed, this work was commissioned to deepen our understanding of the market for support providers. It is exploratory in nature and, we believe, the starting point for addressing gaps in our knowledge.

This report therefore has three aims. These are:

- to scope the current market of advice and support providers for charity trustees, including providing an up-to-date (and updateable) list of providers
- to explore the uptake and usage of the support provided to charity boards and trustees
- to gauge providers' understanding and perspectives on what advice and support charity trustees need and what, if any, gaps in provision exist

This report is a companion piece to a larger study of trustee board characteristics, trends in governance, and trustee attitudes and behaviours which was undertaken at a similar time.

4. A note on research design

The insights in this report were developed from an exercise to map support providers, scope the level of their activity, and seek their perspective on topics pertaining to supporting charity trustees. The research design comprised three specific activities:

- development of a list (or population frame) of organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors that provide advice and support to charity trustees as part of their normal activities – these organisations are referred to as support providers throughout the report
- a questionnaire survey of support providers identified by the initial scoping exercise, which received 167 valid responses overall – where individual questions received lower response levels, these are reported accordingly
- follow-up telephone interviews with a small number of support providers (N=10) to explore issues raised in the survey

Survey respondents comprised a broad range of providers: generic infrastructure providers at both national and local level, including CVSs were the largest categories of respondent. Local infrastructure organisations (42%) and specialist national infrastructure organisations (18%) form the two largest groups of respondents.

Research design limitations

As noted in the previous section, current information in relation to the market of support providers is limited: there is no provider association, nor is the market limited to a specific sector. There is relatively little existing market scoping literature to compare our results with. Moreover, this is a relatively small-scale survey. The findings in this report are therefore subject to several provisos:

- We are unlikely to have identified the full range of support providers working with trustees and we may have surveyed those who are most active or networked.
- Local infrastructure bodies comprise the largest group of respondents and may have overly influenced our results; conversely, we are unlikely to sufficiently reflect the views of private sector providers given the profile of respondents.
- Providers are, on balance, likely to have been in contact with charities and trustees who are the most engaged and interested in learning about trusteeship. Providers may therefore not have a rounded view of the trustee population, particularly those who do not seek support from the provider market.
- The survey responses are therefore likely to reflect the views of the respondents only. They should not be used to make inferences or statements about the entire population of support providers, nor the overall volume of support provided to charity trustees.

Further details of the methodology are given in the Appendix to this report.

5. Who provides advice and support for trustees?

Charity trustees receive advice and support from a wide range of providers across the public, private and voluntary sectors, as well as individual consultants. Trustees receive advice on a range of issues, including but not limited to charity governance (see below). This also includes support on and around the process of trustee recruitment.

It is worth noting that the companion piece to this report identified that trustees perceive other trustees as an important and valued source of advice and support. Trustees also receive advice and support from the Charity Commission for England and Wales.

Types of support organisations

The mapping exercise identified 242 organisations that self-report as providing support to trustees. It is highly unlikely to be complete, though in our judgement captures the main/specialist providers of support. A full list, including, contact details, is contained within the appendices. The following types of relevant organisations were identified as providing advice and support to trustees:

Category	Number
National umbrella bodies	5
Specialist national organisations	28
Trustee recruiters	21
Volunteer/trustee networks	9
Federated organisations	7
Local infrastructure	111
Universities	2
Consultancies	14
Professional bodies	2
Charity specialist legal firms	16
Charity specialist accountancy firms/bodies	19
Grant makers and livery companies	5
Other	3
Total	242

Some organisations work across categories, and therefore could have been placed in more than one category – as such, the groupings are intended as a guide. The most common example was that many local infrastructure organisations offer to recruit trustees, but have not been placed in the trustee recruiters category.

Local infrastructure organisations – primarily CVSs – constitute the majority of providers (111) identified in this exercise. Not all local infrastructure organisations (an estimated 240 in total)⁵ providing advice necessarily provide support for trustees, while not all areas are covered by a local infrastructure organisation. This may imply that charity trustees in some geographical areas are not able to access a source of free, face-to-face support, an issue raised in the section below on the challenge of finding advice and support.

Support for trustees is available from many organisations. Advice and support span a range of very different organisations, ranging from specialist to more generalist providers. The distributed, fragmented nature of this support may be inhibiting take-up.

The mapping exercise did not seek to make any assessment of quality. We observe that there is little market information for trustees seeking to select a provider, as is increasingly found in other marketplaces. This also may be a barrier to take-up.⁶ It may be worth exploring the validity of this assertion.

Levels of support uptake

The respondents were asked about the numbers of trustees and charities that they have supported over the last 12 months.

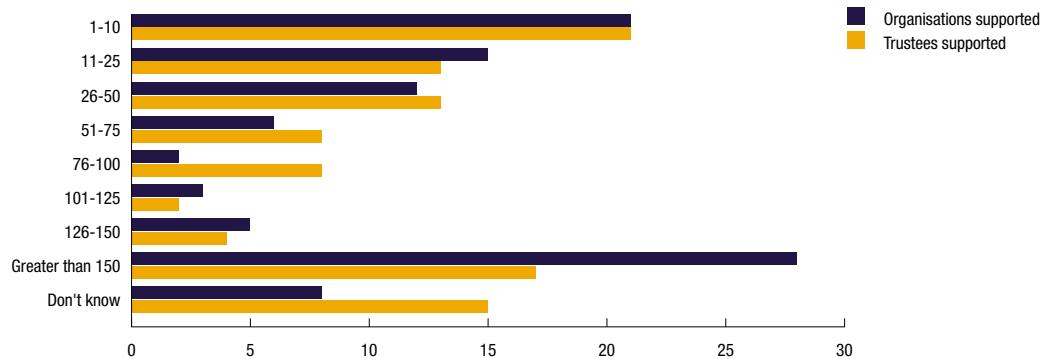
- Many providers are small, either in terms of their own scale, and/or small scale in terms of the numbers of charities and trustees that they work with. Nearly half the organisations supported no more than 50 individual trustees a year. Nearly half the organisations supported no more than 50 organisations with trustee development over the last six months.
- The market includes specialist providers for whom governance support is a core (business) activity. 28% supported more than 150 organisations a year; 17% supported more than 150 trustees a year. Moreover, a quarter of respondents supported more than 150 organisations a year.

Using the mid-points of the ranges shown in the chart, below, we estimate that the 167 organisations in the sample reached approximately 6,600 trustees in the last year and supported 5,400 organisations. In the context of an estimated 950,000 trustees and 160,000 charities in England and Wales, these numbers are low. They should however be viewed with some caution.

5 See www.navca.org.uk/members/members-directory

6 A common finding in market scoping exercises is that a lack of market information (or unequal access to available information) is a barrier to the take-up of services: buyers may, for example, not buy or use services because they do not know whether to trust suppliers. For example: http://roar.uel.ac.uk/1783/1/The_London_Childcare_Market_Labour_Market_Research_Series_5_10835.pdf and www.ofgem.gov.uk/ofgem-publications/86804/assessmentdocumentpublished.pdf

Figure 1: number of organisations and trustees supported in the last 12 months (% of respondents)



Bearing in mind the need for caution, a range of reasons are worth discussion. The low estimates of support uptake may reflect the more significant and important role of the Charity Commission for England and Wales in providing advice and support to trustees; further, they may highlight the widespread reliance of trustees upon their colleagues on the board for advice and support. It may also be the case that our method has simply failed to identify the breadth of organisations providing support to charity trustees.

Finally, it may also be the case that levels of uptake are low due to barriers or distortions in the market, real or perceived, or problems with the support being provided. This could include the issue of paid vs. free support, and issues around the ability of the market to pay for support, leading to disengagement. This would not however explain low utilisation of free support.

6. What issues are trustees offered support on?

Charity trustees are offered support on a range of topics, ranging from governance and board effectiveness, through to other issues that in recent years have become more important for trustees to be aware of, such as fundraising.⁷ The survey sought to identify the extent to which providers cover a range of pre-defined topics, and asked providers to identify additional areas in which they offer advice and support.

Providers were asked to select from the following list:

- Accountability, transparency and reporting
- Accounting
- Board effectiveness and review
- Business planning
- Campaigning
- Conflict resolution
- Digital/online
- Document review/production
- Financial strategy
- Fundraising
- Governance
- Legal
- Marketing
- Monitoring and evaluation/impact
- Needs of clients/beneficiaries
- People/HR skills
- Risk management
- Safeguarding skills
- Service delivery
- Stakeholder management
- Strategy formulation
- Trading/commercial skills
- Training
- Trustee recruitment
- Understanding of the trustee role and responsibilities
- Volunteer management

Services around ‘governance’ is the most common (84%) category of support, followed by ‘understanding trustee role and responsibilities’ (77%) and ‘board effectiveness and review’ (60%). These were also the services most in demand too, along with fundraising.

⁷ On the issue of fundraising and lessons for trustees, see <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmpubadm/431/431.pdf>

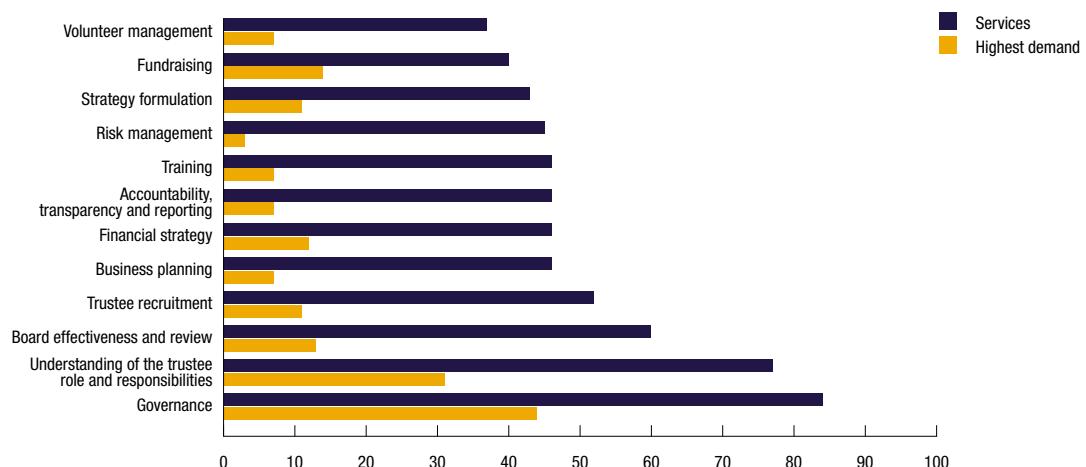
Support for trustee recruitment

Recruiting new trustees is widely reported to be problematic for charities, in terms of identifying potential trustees and poor practice in relation to recruitment.⁸ It has been reported that fewer than one in ten trustee vacancies are advertised.⁹

Over half the organisations (54%) in the survey played some role in the recruitment of trustees, if only posting listings. However, in the survey responses and telephone interviews (hereafter referred to as the ‘qualitative responses’) it was felt that there was little formal recruitment of trustees. This perceived focus on the informality in recruitment is consistent with existing evidence but nevertheless worthy of further exploration. For example, it might be inferred that informal procedures to identify trustees are accompanied by similarly informal approaches to selection and induction.

‘Many trustees are unaware of the basic responsibilities of trustees, of governance best practice. I set up my consultancy specifically to address the lack of good practice in board development and board practice in the NFP sector. One of the areas of most concern is the recruitment practices of most charities, that typically do not encourage diversity or the appropriate talents, experience, knowledge and resource on the board.’

Figure 2: support most commonly offered by providers & reported most demand (% of respondents)



8 Concerns are particularly acute in relation to board diversity. For example, see www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/youngtrusteesreport_1682a_web_080915.pdf?sfvrsn=80dc440_8

9 See www.gettingonboard.org/download/i/mark_dl/.../GOB_Crisisintrusterecruitment.pdf

How is support provided?

Support took different forms, most commonly: face-to-face training (73% of providers), email and phone support (65%). Relatively few support is delivered via digital channels (19% of providers), which may reflect providers' concerns about the readiness of trustees for new modes of support (see below).

"Whilst we provide for e.g. face-to-face training this is on an ad-hoc basis (due to our capacity). We generally respond positively in supporting board development, however we don't promote this widely as a service (again, due to capacity)."

Despite the widespread deployment of face-to-face support, several providers remain concerned that this type of support is becoming less accessible, particularly to small and local charities, because fewer organisations can afford to provide it. These concerns reflect the challenge of sustainability faced by local infrastructure organisations.¹⁰ There is also some scepticism that digital channels are seen by funders as a replacement for face to face support, rather than augmenting such support.

Who is support targeted at?

In developing the survey, we wanted to explore whether providers focused on trustees at different stages in their service (new trustees, new chairs), different times in the board calendar (year end, AGM), or trustees associated with organisations of a particular size.

Most respondents (88%) did not target their support at trustees by length of service. 95% targeted their support at all types of trustee role. Smaller numbers reported that they also provided specialist support for chairs (14%) and treasurers (11%).

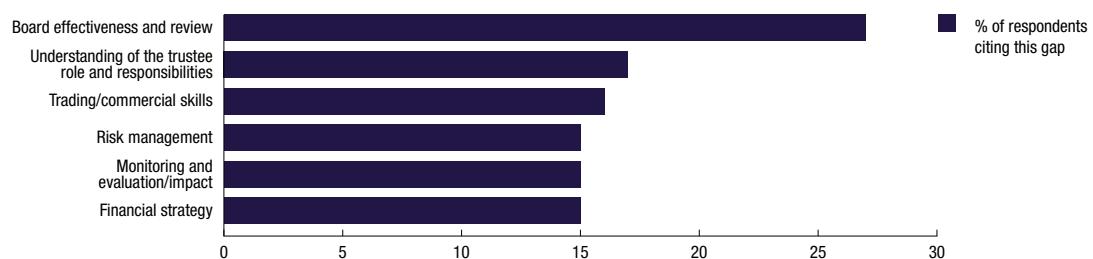
There did not seem to be a time of year that was especially busy for support, with 85% not having a busier time, although 11% cited the end of financial year. Only 23% provided support targeted at organisations of a certain size.

¹⁰ www.thirdsector.co.uk/changing-story-local-infrastructure/infrastructure/article/1356406

7. What do support providers perceive to be gaps in the support provided to trustees?

Support providers were asked what they perceived to be the biggest gaps in support provided to trustees. Over half of the respondents provide support (and, presumably, consultancy services) around board effectiveness and review, yet this was the gap in support most widely cited by the survey respondents (27%). Understanding trustee roles and responsibilities was the second most widely cited gap in provision.

Figure 3: what would you currently perceive to be the biggest gaps in general in support for trustees?



Providers were asked to further explain their answers in relation to gaps in provision. Several comments suggest that this was the wrong question and that most or all topic areas are covered, albeit with concerns about availability and usability. Comments were more likely to focus on the format of the guidance and its usability, with comments tending to suggest that providers are conscious there may in fact be too much guidance, or that what is available does not recognise the needs of the audience it is intended for.

"There is a lot of detailed advice, but for some trustees who are balancing other commitments (often a lot of commitments), it can be too much to take in. A useful summary of advice would be as useful as more detailed guidance in certain areas."

"There is good information available out there but lack of time and awareness of what is needed makes looking for the information difficult."

8. What barriers exist for trustees in finding advice and support?

The mapping exercise identified a substantial number of providers. The survey asked providers their perception of whether trustees find support hard to find, with responses almost equally split: 49% of respondents perceived trustees find it hard to find support. 70 providers further chose to address the question, ‘In what way is it hard for trustees to find and access support?’, with responses given as free text. This data was supported by evidence from telephone interviews. A number of themes emerged.

Demand	Supply
Time constraints	The Charity Commission website is too difficult to navigate
Trustees are not aware of what is available (possibly due to information not being circulated)	Face-to-face support at a local level is limited/fragmented
Trustees don't know where to look (especially if they don't work in the sector)	Support is not marketed/promoted
Trustees are overwhelmed by online resources	Support is only available to members, where the provider is an umbrella body
Cost	

Navigating support

The difficulty of navigating the available support was the most commonly cited barrier. Some providers argued that it is difficult for trustees and organisations to navigate the different support and material on offer. This was argued to be especially difficult for the time-poor, and those not working in the sector. Who to trust was also cited as an issue.

“Not knowing where to go. There are actually quite a few Trustee resources out there but without knowing about them it can be hard to navigate what’s available. The starting point should be via the Commission which could signpost charities to what’s available.”

“Support is disparate. There is no single hub for leadership development in the sector.”

“There is no simple, accessible source of guidance and information.”

“I think about where to go for advice and support. There needs to be better signposting and local CVSs are little mentioned by the Commission or other ‘national’ support providers and very often may be better able to offer one-to-one and individualised support.”

We have already observed that there is little market information for trustees seeking to select a provider of support, as is increasingly found in other marketplaces. The distributed, fragmented nature of this support may be inhibiting take up.

Time constraints

A few providers identified trustees' lack of time as a barrier to seeking or receiving support.

"I think the biggest barrier is people's perception of the time commitment involved with being a good trustee."

"Good support is available but is rarely accessed."

The literature on barriers to volunteering echoes such findings, though recent evidence suggests a more critical interrogation of such arguments may be appropriate: people may prefer alternative uses of their time to volunteering.¹¹ Several providers argued that better induction procedures, outlining the time commitment required to be an effective trustee, may address this barrier.

Cost of support

The cost of accessing training could be prohibitive, something seen as an issue for smaller organisations by some.

"For small charities, actually encouraging trustees to take on support where that may be a cost to the charity – there is the belief in smaller charities that all income should be spent on service delivery rather than 'support services'."

"There is always a lack of free advice in some areas and trustees are reluctant to invest in this area."

It is however worth noting that 46% of respondents continue to offer some support services that are free to all. Membership organisations provide discounted support for members.

Lack of local support

A lack of local support was frequently highlighted, which was sometimes contextualised in the decline of local infrastructure organisations, such as CVSs, due to funding cuts.

"HUGE loss of open training and support for individual organisations provided by CVSs and other infrastructure support organisations because of cuts, loss of staff, and indeed loss of CVSs etc."

¹¹ www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/satelliteaccounts/articles/changesinthevalueanddivisionofunpaidcare-workintheuk/2015

Other more contentious issues were raised by a smaller number of respondents and are worth noting as areas worth further investigation. These are set out below.

The role of paid staff and overall governance

In a small number of cases, paid staff were perceived be problematic because they lacked the confidence or commitment to provide support to trustees, or were not always good channels for passing information on development opportunities to trustees. This may be due to wider challenges around organisational development and understanding respective roles in relation to effective charity governance.

"In my (small charity) experience trustees are very easily manipulated by chief executives, who control the amount of information available. They cannot manage conflicts of interest or deal with confrontation."

"Charity management teams often act as gatekeepers, filtering information before it reaches the individual trustees."

It was felt by some that sometimes boards ended up being too passive, with them merely 'rubber stamping' the actions of the executive.

Trustees' awareness of their own support needs

There was also the issue of whether trustees even knew they needed a certain level of knowledge and who to ask about this.

"Not knowing entirely what questions to ask and of whom."

"Most people serving as trustees don't know what they don't know. They therefore don't know that they have a question or that there might be a way to support them. The culture also means they don't even think to ask unless their chair is proactive to cascade learning to them."

Providers expressed concern about trustees' understanding of their role:

"This varies considerably. For small volunteer run organisations, the issue is often confusion between the role of the volunteer and that of a trustee. For larger organisations, trustees are often not fully aware of their role as employers; they do not think strategically and their monitoring is patchy – they tend to accept information they are given rather than thinking about what they need."

"I think the breadth of the role and responsibility is a key issue. Even though they will have been recruited for their expertise (say in finance or risk management) they need to have a much broader knowledge of organisation/what it needs to be healthy and functional."

Support providers' awareness of trustees' needs

Some providers sometimes sought to identify those seeking support as a problem, but a few responses indicated an awareness that providers themselves may need to rethink their understanding of the needs of trustees.

"Support exists in many of these areas but there are issues around cost, quality, accessibility and timeliness. The biggest issue is whether the resources are tailored to the audience i.e. for trustees not staff and take account of relevant factors such as size and stage of development of the charity."

The quote above highlights a related problem that providing advice and support for a wide and diverse marketplace is challenging.

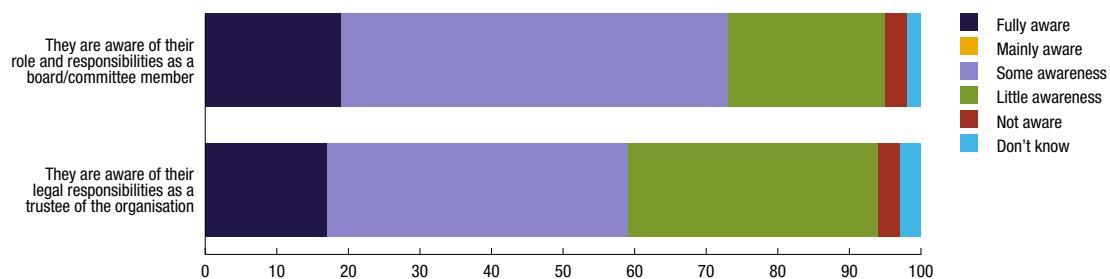
9. Providers' perceptions of trustees

New trustees

Several studies have argued that board effectiveness could be improved significantly if trustees were more aware of their roles and responsibilities, and that lack of awareness is an enduring issue.¹² Support providers were therefore asked about their perceptions of new trustees' skills and awareness of their responsibilities.

- **Legal responsibilities:** 19% of providers perceive trustees to be mainly/fully aware; 54% perceive the majority have some awareness; 25% little or no awareness.
- **Role and responsibilities:** 17% of providers perceive trustees to be mainly/full aware of their role and responsibilities; 43% perceive the majority have some awareness; 38% little or no awareness.

Figure 4: would you say the following statements reflect the majority of new trustees (e.g. in their first year) you encounter?



It would be surprising if support providers reported higher levels of awareness given the likely reason that they have been engaged to provide support. Nevertheless, a substantial minority of providers appear concerned about low levels of awareness, and these were illustrated by data from the interviews.

"For small charities or not for profit organisations – there is a general lack of awareness and understanding of the role and responsibilities of being a trustee/board member. This is especially true for trustees/board members who have not been involved with other charities or other public sector or private sector organisations at a board level or managerial level and for those small charities that exist within deprived urban communities. It may be their first and only exposure to being a trustee or having governance responsibilities."

12 For example, see www.thinknpc.org/board_matters/?post-parent=4916

There is longstanding evidence that due to the range of titles applied to trustee roles, some board members are not aware that in law they are charity trustees. Addressing this most basic aspect of trustee roles and responsibilities remains a support need for new trustees:

"Many don't realise they are trustees at all – they just see themselves as committee members. Most don't understand the difference between management and governance. Most don't understand what the role of a Trustee is, and the responsibilities and liabilities that come with the role."

Competency

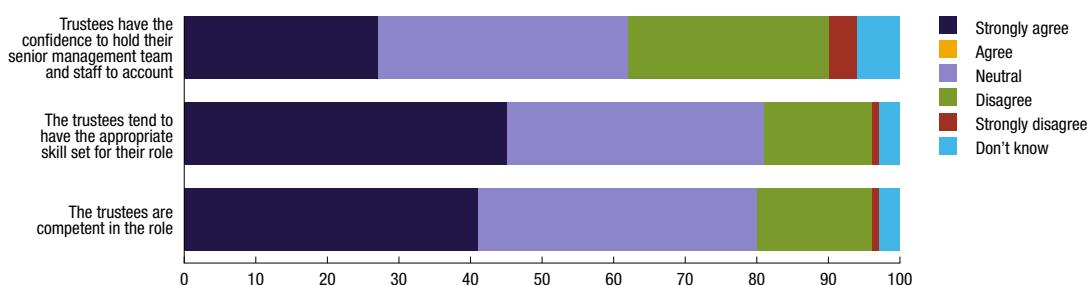
The respondents were also asked about the competence, skills and confidence of all trustees that they came into contact with. In contrast to feedback on new trustees, support providers were unsurprisingly more confident about those that they were dealing with:

- **Competence:** 41% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that trustees are competent in their role, compared to 17% who disagreed/strongly disagreed.
- **Appropriate skills:** 45% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that trustees had the right skills, 16% who disagreed/strongly disagreed.
- **Confidence to govern:** 28% agreed/strongly agreed that trustees had the confidence to hold the management team and staff to account, but 32% disagreed/strongly disagreed.

The final point was echoed in telephone interviews, with boards sometimes seen as too passive:

"They could do with more understanding. What tends to happen is that the agenda of board meetings is driven by the executive and largely driven by what the executive need to get signed off. Not enough of the agenda is driven by the trustees."

Figure 5: would you agree or disagree with the following statements about all the trustees accessing your support?



10. Digital skills and competency

Issues around digital cut across many of the previous sections. They are summarised below.

Provision of support/recognition of need

The lack of digital capability in trustee boards has been widely commented on.¹³ Simultaneously, there have been numerous calls to address the digital capacity and capability of organisations, including boards. The Marsh Review of Skills and Leadership called for boards to appoint a trustee with digital skills and knowledge.¹⁴

However, we observed relatively few providers referenced support in relation to digital, despite these widely-reported concerns. Moreover, digital did not appear in the list of priority gaps in support. This is worth further investigation. We are aware that some support providers themselves are struggling to achieve digital transformation and maturity and that this might translate into a lack of understanding of what trustees need.¹⁵ This may also reflect limitations in the survey – we have not captured suppliers of digital support aimed at trustees. If so, this might highlight the need to link to and ‘mainstream’ this category of providers.

Perceptions of trustees' digital skills and knowledge

Evidence from the telephone interviewees highlighted the concerns of some support providers' around the lack of digital awareness of trustees. They highlighted the increasing likelihood that they were unable to access certain support services that were only online.

“Boards need knowledge and confidence to enable digital transformation to ensure they are still relevant to future generations. Whether this enables them to reach new beneficiaries, supporters or improves efficiencies – too many charities are still way behind the digital curve and risk making themselves redundant.”

“Charity Commission provides everything online now days which is a great problem for people who do not have access to computers or knowledge of IT as well as unable to use computers (through lack of dexterity or visual/attention span).”

In turn, this is reflected in the mode of the services provided by support providers. There is currently very little digital delivery, with only 14% offering online training and 34% offering other online resources. A key issue for exploration is whether the sort of ‘channel shift’ currently widespread in other sectors is feasible for training and development in the charity sector, or whether such a shift might further exclude those who are already finding it difficult to navigate support.

¹³ For example www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2016/apr/11/charity-governance-digital-technology-trustees

¹⁴ See www.gov.uk/government/publications/skills-and-leadership-in-the-voluntary-sector-dame-mary-marsh-review

¹⁵ See Change for Good on local infrastructure, for example: www.navca.org.uk/assets/000/000/063/Change_for_Good_36_pp_final_aw_original.pdf?1449496913

Appendix

Methodology

The insights in this report were developed from an exercise to map support providers, scope the level of their activity, and seek their perspective on topics pertaining to supporting charity trustees. The research design comprised three specific activities:

- development of a list (or population frame) of organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors that provide advice and support to charity trustees as part of their normal activities – these organisations are referred to as support providers throughout the report
- a questionnaire survey of support providers identified by the initial scoping exercise, which received 167 valid responses overall – where individual questions received lower response levels, these are reported accordingly
- follow-up telephone interviews with a small number of support providers (N=10) to explore issues raised in the survey
- fieldwork was carried out in the period January-May 2017

Survey of support organisations

The survey was designed with two main objectives. Firstly, that it recorded the types of services provided and the number of organisations and trustees using them. Secondly, it looked to capture the support providers' views and perceptions of trustees' awareness and capabilities.

The survey received 167 valid responses. In the survey respondents could identify multiple descriptors of their organisation. Survey respondents comprised a broad range of suppliers (see below): generic infrastructure providers at both national and local level, including Councils for Voluntary Service were the largest categories of respondent. Local infrastructure organisations (42%) and specialist national infrastructure organisations (18%) form the two largest groups of respondents.

Figure 6: survey of support organisations



11% of the organisations were federated. Chief executives tended to complete the survey (35%) followed by another member of paid staff or consultant and/or trainer (depending on the organisation) (34%) and trustees (19%).

Trustee support organisations

Category	Organisation	Links to online resources
National umbrella bodies	NCVO	www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/consultancy/governance-and-trusteeship-consultancy
	WCVA	www.wcva.org.uk/members-partners/county-voluntary-councils
	ACEVO	www.acevo.org.uk/advice-support/governance
	Charity Finance Group	www.cfg.org.uk/resources.aspx
	NUS	www.nusconnect.org.uk/strong-students-unions/quality-students-unions/good-governance
Specialist national organisations	Reach	https://reachskills.org.uk/knowledge-centre/support-boards
	Cranfield Trust	www.cranfieldtrust.org/leadership-and-strategic-direction/trustees-and-governance
	Small Charities Coalition	www.smallcharities.org.uk/resources-governance/
	The Foundation for Social Improvement	www.thefsi.org/general-resources/governance/
	Association of Colleges	www.aoc.co.uk/term/governance
	Directory of social change	www.dsc.org.uk/category/governance/
	Good Governance Institute	/www.good-governance.org.uk/
	UnLtd	https://unltd.org.uk/legal-help-guides/
	Charity Leaders (Trustee Fellowship)	www.charityleaders.org.uk/trustee-academy/
	CES (NCVO)	www.ces-vol.org.uk/tools-and-resources.html
	Doing Good Leeds	https://doinggoodleeds.org.uk/governanceacademy/
	New Philanthropy Capital	www.thinknfp.org/events/
	Great Britain Wheelchair Rugby	http://gbwr.org.uk/
	Emmaus South Wales	www.emmaus.org.uk/south_wales
	St Barnabas Society	http://stbarnabassociety.org.uk/
	Hospital Broadcasting Association	www.hbauk.com/
	Pre-school Learning Alliance	www.pre-school.org.uk/
	Association of Independent Museums	www.aim-museums.co.uk/
	Practical governance	www.practicalgov.co.uk/
Trustee recruiters	Trustees Unlimited	https://trustees-unlimited.co.uk/become-a-trustee
	Do-it (Trustee Finder)	https://do-it.org/channels/trustee-finder
	Charity Job	www.charityjob.co.uk/volunteer-jobs/trustees
	TPP recruitment	www.tpp.co.uk/employers/trustee-recruitment
	Prospectus	https://prospect-us.co.uk/jobsearch/search
	Charity People	www.charitypeople.co.uk/jobs/
	The Bar Pro Bono Unit	www.barprobono.org.uk/overview.html
	Trustee Finders	www.trusteefinder.org.uk
	Trustee Works (Reach)	www.reachskills.org.uk/
	Charity Finance Group	www.cfg.org.uk/
	Harris Hill	www.harrishill.co.uk/
	Honorary Treasurers	
	Forum jobs board	www.treasurersforum.org.uk/
	Third Sector	http://jobs.thirdsector.co.uk/
	Civil Society Media	www.civilsociety.co.uk/job-listing.html
	The Smart Programme	www.careervolunteer.co.uk/trustee-academy/
	Recruit3 (Wales)	www.recruit3.org.uk/jobs/
	The Big Give Trustee Finder	/www.thebiggive.org.uk/other-services/trustee-finder/
	Women on board	https://womentheboard.net/en-GB/?gclid=Cj0KEQiA1b7CBRDjmIPL4u-Zy6gBEiQAsjhTMKtHSBZc-8o3y4fu59WTP8z2EoxtRAUVvATHwTjjciAaAqUi8P8HAQ
	Go Pro Bono	http://goprobono.org.uk/content/about-us
	Gatenby Sanderson	www.gatenbysanderson.com/our-people/person/juliet-taylor
	Green Park	

Category	Organisation	Links to online resources
Networks	Association of Chairs	www.associationofchairs.org.uk/
	Honorary Treasurers Forum	www.honorarytreasurers.org.uk/About1.html
	The Governance Pages	www.governancepages.org.uk/
Networks	Association of Chairs	www.associationofchairs.org.uk/
	Honorary Treasurers Forum	www.honorarytreasurers.org.uk/About1.html
	The Governance Pages	www.governancepages.org.uk/
	Greater Manchester Trustee Network	www.gmcvo.org.uk/trustees
	Jewish Volunteering Network	www.associationofchairs.org.uk/
	Network of Women Chairs (NWC)	www.charitygroundbreakers.org.uk/network-of-women-chairs/
	UK Charity Trustees	www.linkedin.com/groups/1853968/profile
	Young Charity Trustees	http://alexswallow.com/social-good/young-charity-trustees/
Federated organisations	The REME Charity	http://remecharity.org/
	Age UK	www.ageuk.org.uk/about-us/who-we-are-/age-uk-directors-and-trustees/
	Church of England	www.parishresources.org.uk/pccs/trusteeship/
	Mind	www.mind.org.uk/information-support/
	YMCA	www.ymca.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer
	Wildlife Trust	www.wildlifetrusts.org/jobs/become-trustee
	Relate	www.relate.org.uk/about-us/work-us/become-trustee
Local infrastructure	Hospice UK	www.hospiceuk.org/what-we-offer/governance-support-programme
	Community Southwark	www.communitysouthwark.org/
	Salford CVS	www.salfordcvs.co.uk/governance
	Hull CVS	http://hullcvs.org.uk/group-support-other-services/governance-factsheets/
	Community Voluntary Services for Broxbourne & East Herts	www.cvsbeh.org.uk/index.php/information-and-advice
	York CVS	www.yorkcvs.org.uk/how-we-help/trustees-week-2014/
	Centre for Voluntary Service St Albans District (SACVS)	www.volunteerstalbans.org.uk/about-us/governance/
	Knowsley Community & Voluntary Services	www.kcvs.org/trustees/
	Bradford CVS	www.bradfordcvs.org.uk/our-services/cvs-training
	Harrogate & Ripon Centres for Voluntary Service (HARCVS)	www.harcvs.org.uk/Support/trustees-governance
	CVS South Gloucestershire	www.cvs-sg.org.uk/good-governance
	Sutton CVS	www.suttoncvs.org.uk/what-we-offer/advice-and-guidance/
	Cumbria CVS	http://cumbriacvs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/CVS-Fact-Sheet-02-Management-Committee-Roles-and-Responsibilities.pdf
	Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service	https://thcvs.org.uk/support/governance-finance-and-impact-project
	Community Action Isle of Wight	www.communityactionisleofwight.org.uk/what-we-do/support-for-voluntary-groups-charities/governance/
	Teignbridge CVS	www.teigncvs.org.uk/support/develop
	Action East Devon	www.edvs.org.uk/development-support/
	Torridge CVS	www.torridgecvs.org.uk/support/
	North Devon Voluntary Services	www.ndvs.org.uk/training.html
	Engage (Somerset)	www.engageows.org.uk/index.php?page=charity-support
	Exeter CVS	www.exetercvs.org.uk/celebrating-success/learning-success/3163-ongoing-learning-for-trustees
	3VA Eastbourne	www.3va.org.uk/
	Northamptonshire CVS	www.cvsnorthamptonshire.org.uk/content/trustee-network-resources-6
	Pavo (Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations) Wales	www.pavo.org.uk/help-for-trustees/information-sheets.html

Category	Organisation	Links to online resources
	Richmond CVS	www.richmondcvs.org.uk/useful-online-resources/online-resources-guides
	Voluntary Action Rutland	www.varutland.org.uk/resource-library
	Shropshire RCC	www.shropshire-rcc.org.uk/services/community-groups/charity-trustee-network-ctn
	Tendring Trustee Network	www.cvstendring.org.uk/our-services/trustee-network.html
	Vale Centre for Voluntary Services (CVS) Wales	www.gvs.wales/support-for-groups/development-services
	Voluntary Action Swindon	http://vas-swindon.org/governance-advice/
	Watford CVS	http://w3rt.org/about-us/contact-us/
	Engage, West Somerset	www.engagews.org.uk/index.php?page=charity-support
	Community Action Wirral	http://communityactionWirral.org.uk/our-services/support/trustee-support/
	Dens Action Against Homelessness	Malcolm.lindo@yahoo.co.uk
	Winterton Disabled Club	http://wintertondisclub.weebly.com/
	Macc	www.macc.org.uk/
	Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service	www.cambridgecv.org.uk/
	Voluntary Action North East Lincolnshire (VANEL)	http://vanel.org.uk/va/
	North Tyneside VODA	www.voda.org.uk/
	Newcastle CVS	www.cvsnewcastle.org.uk/
	One Community	
Universities	The Centre for Charity Effectiveness at Cass Business School	www.cass.city.ac.uk/research-and-faculty/centres/cce/advisory-services/governance
	Open University	www.open.ac.uk/blogs/CharityWise/
Consultancies	CS Skills Centre	http://charityskills.org/
	Kinharvie Institute	www.kinharvie.org.uk/organisation_development/governance?gclid=CjwKEAiAvZTCRDvnoOaoa2j3xISJABxPjN9ZnHz97WDNq1RmXkyDKA3YjQjsRF78ZhHKRCBuTQzB oCr8jw_wcB
	Learn Together Cambridgeshire	www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/learntogether/homepage/347/support_for_childcare_business_and_governance
	OnBoard Governance development	www.on-board.org/
	Compass Partnership	
	Action Planning	
	The Clare Foundation	www.theclarefoundation.org/charity-services/charity-advisors-network
	The Kubernesis Partnership LLP	www.kubernesis.co.uk/partners/
	James Hambro and Partners LLP	www.jameshambro.com/
	Voluntary Sector Training (VST)	www.voluntarysectortraining.org.uk/en/
	Re-Solutions	
	TP Consultants	
	Mastering charity management	
	Career Volunteer	www.careervolunteer.co.uk/
Professional bodies	ICSA The Governance Institute	www.icsa.org.uk/knowledge
	Institute of Directors	www.iod.com/
Legal bodies	Bates Wells Braithwaite	www.bwbllp.com/charities-and-social-enterprises/services/charity/
	Hugh James	www.hughjames.com/sector/charities/#constitutional-matters
	Anthony Collins Solicitors	www.anthonycollins.com/who-we-help/charities/governance-and-constitutions/
	Russell Cooke Solicitors	www.russell-cooke.co.uk/sectors/charities/governance-and-commercial/governance-and-constitutional-issues-for-charities/
	Veale Wasbrough Vizards	www.vvv.co.uk/what-we-do/sector/charities/governance
	Harbottle and Lewis	www.harbottle.com/charities/

Category	Organisation	Links to online resources
	Central Law Training	www.clt.co.uk/course/an-introduction-to-the-governance-of-charities/
	Moira Protani	www.moiraprotani.com/services.php
	Sandy Adirondack	www.sandy-a.co.uk/courses.htm
	Pitmans	www.pitmans.com/sectors/charity-nonprofit-organisations
	Capsticks	www.capsticks.com/
	Whitehead Monckton	www.whitehead-monckton.co.uk/industry-sectors/charities/governance-issues
	Mills & Reeve	www.mills-reeve.com/charitylaw/
	Essex Legal Services	www.elslegal.org.uk/sectors/charities
	Pothecary Witham Weld	www.pwwsolicitors.co.uk/charities-not-for-profit-religious-organisations/69-constitutional-and-governance
	Kreston Reeves LLP	www.krestonreeves.com/
Accountancy and finance	Eric Southwick and Co	www.ericsouthwickaccountants.co.uk/?page_id=41
	Association of Charity Independent Examiners	www.acie.org.uk/
	Liberty Accounts	
	Andy Nash Accounting & Consultancy	www.andynashac.com/services
	Smith and Williamson	www.smith.williamson.co.uk/charities-education/support-for-trustees
	Rouse Chartered Accountants	www.rousepartners.co.uk/advise/specialist-services/charity-and-not-for-profit/
	ICAEW	www.icaew.com/en/technical/charity-and-voluntary-sector/charity-trustee/financial-management-and-fundingnew
	Haslers	www.haslersforcharities.com/services/support-for-trustees/
	ESW Chartered Accountants	www.esw.co.uk/ard/detail_doc.asp?ID=174210&AID=652&SID=10&FID=11216
	Lawworks	www.lawworks.org.uk/legal-advice-not-profits
	Sayer Vincent	www.sayervincent.co.uk/
	Mazars	
	RSM UK	www.rsmuk.com/
	BHP, Chartered Accountants	http://bhp.co.uk/
	BWMacfarlane – Chartered Accountants	www.bwm.co.uk/
	Haines Watts	http://remecharity.org/
	J E Butler & Co. Chartered Accountants	www.butler-co.co.uk/
	Blick Rothenberg	www.blickrothenberg.com/
	Mercer and Hole	www.mercerhole.co.uk/
Grant makers and livery companies	Worshipful Company of Management Consultants	http://wcomc.org/
	Impetus PEF	
	The Mercers' Company	www.mercers.co.uk/
	Clothworkers company	
	City Bridge Trust	www.citybridgetrust.org.uk/what-we-do/
Other	Association of MBAs	www.mba-world.com/
	Philia International	www.philia-intl.com/
	SEMDP	

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