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The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland

Data and Research strategy 2024-2026

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1. Introduction

The review of the 2020-2023 research strategy noted that all but two essential elements had been delivered, and recommended that in any future strategy the Commission focus its limited resources on:

- collecting and analysing data, providing access to the expanded CSV download of the *register of charities*

- sharing headline figures and data from reports with Commissioners as well as senior management

- where possible, carrying out some research in collaboration with others.

The development of the *Data and Research Strategy 2024-26* has been shaped by these recommendations, taking into account the Commission's strategic aims, relevant recommendations of the Independent Review of Charity Regulation, the planned introduction of a registration threshold, budget and staff resources. It has also been influenced by feedback from the Commission's stakeholder forum, the charity sector and critical friends.

The strategy has been designed to gather information:

- on whether charity trustees have noted a change in the Commission's culture towards being more enabling.
- that will inform the development of the Commission's policies and processes.
- that would be useful to the charity sector, other stakeholders and the public.

1.2 Structure of the strategy

The strategy is set out in five sections:

- Research objectives
- Resources
- Stakeholders
- Implementation
- Evaluation

2. Research objectives

The Commission's *Strategic plan 2023-2026* sets out four strategic aims which are designed to respond to recent legislative changes and the priority recommendations of the Independent Review of Charity Regulation.

The research objectives in this new strategy are focussed on monitoring and measuring the achievement of the Commission's strategic aims, as set out below.

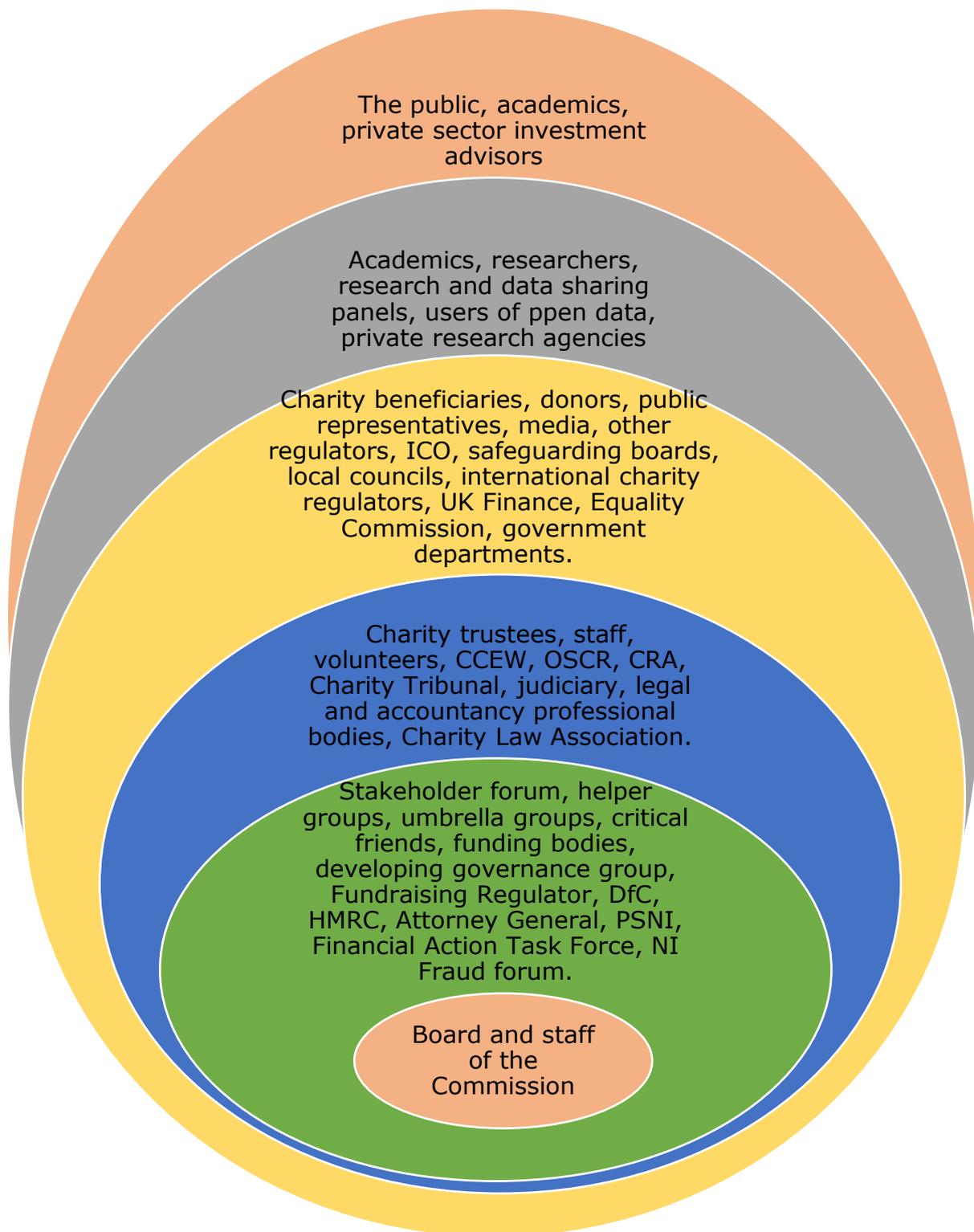| Strategic aim	Research objective
1. Progressing charity registration to enhance accountability.	Monitor the implementation of changes to registration processes including the impact of a registration threshold.
2. Progressing our development as an enabling regulator	Monitor awareness among the charity sector and other stakeholders of changes in the culture and approach of the Commission, including in its guidance and communication.
3. Continuing to develop proportionate regulation.	Analyse and report on impact of changes in monitoring & compliance processes on sector compliance.
4. Developing as a properly governed, transparent and independent decision-making body.	Gather and analyse internal data to identify evidence of the Commission's ongoing development as a properly governed, transparent and independent decision-making body.

3. Resources

A key assumption underlying the development of this strategy is that, given the fiscal situation confronting the public sector, there will not be a budget for research conducted by external agencies. In addition, implementing some of the recommendations of the Independent Review of Charity Regulation require changes which will consume a large portion of the Commission's budget for the next number of years. For example, the redesign of the website and changes to the Commission's IT system that will be required to manage a registration threshold when it comes into operation.

Therefore, the research strategy objectives will be achieved through analysis of data gathered by the Commission. The key resource will be staff time, enhanced, where possible, by collaboration with the sector and others, including academia where possible.

4. Stakeholders

In preparing the research strategy we have identified a range of stakeholders who have an interest in, or benefit from, the charity sector. In some cases, these groups and individuals are the audience for the research reports we publish. In other cases, they are a key source of information. A number are potential partners or collaborators on research projects. The diagram at Figure 1 shows the main stakeholders we have identified. A key to organisation names which have been shortened in the diagram, is below Figure 1.

Figure 1: Main stakeholders identified by the Commission.

The public, academics, private sector investment advisors

Academics, researchers, research and data sharing panels, users of ppen data, private research agencies

Charity beneficiaries, donors, public representatives, media, other regulators, ICO, safeguarding boards, local councils, international charity regulators, UK Finance, Equality Commission, government departments.

Charity trustees, staff, volunteers, CCEW, OSCR, CRA, Charity Tribunal, judiciary, legal and accountancy professional bodies, Charity Law Association.

Stakeholder forum, helper groups, umbrella groups, critical friends, funding bodies, developing governance group, Fundraising Regulator, DfC, HMRC, Attorney General, PSNI, Financial Action Task Force, NI Fraud forum.

Board and staff of the Commission

Key to shortened names

CCEW   Charity Commission for England and Wales

CRA   Charities Regulatory Authority

DfC   Department for Communities

HMRC   His Majesty's Revenue and Customs

ICO   Information Commissioner's Office

OSCR   Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator

PSNI   Police Service of Northern Ireland

5. Implementation

Implementation of the strategy is aligned with the Commission's strategic planning cycle. Delivery will be managed through the policy and research team.
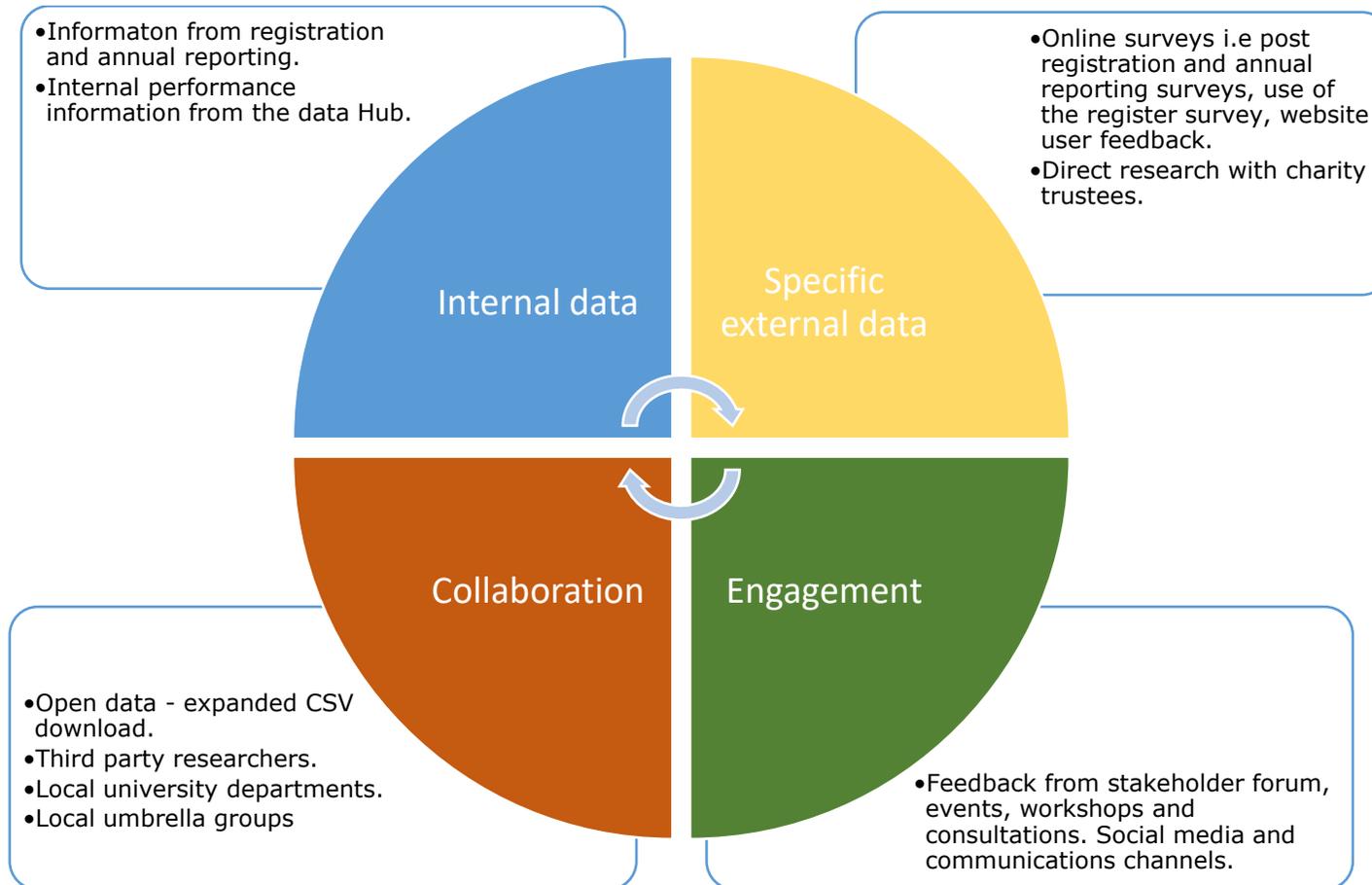
Specific tools that may be employed will include:

- analysis of Commission database information for specific programmes.
- pulse surveys with cohorts of charity trustees, officers and volunteers.
- online pop-up surveys for specific programmes.
- use of online surveys integrated with the expanded download of information from the *register of charities*.
- where possible, collaborative work with the sector.

The research methods used to deliver the strategy are primarily surveys and questionnaires, through which we will gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The Commission will invite cohorts of charity trustees to participate in Commission pulse surveys depending on the focus of the survey. For example, if questions concern smaller charities or charities with particular types of beneficiaries.

The research strategy may draw on four main sources of information as set out in the diagram below:

Figure 2: Potential sources of information

•Informaton from registration and annual reporting.
•Internal performance information from the data Hub.

•Online surveys i.e post registration and annual reporting surveys, use of the register survey, website user feedback.
•Direct research with charity trustees.

Internal data

Specific external data

Collaboration

Engagement

•Open data - expanded CSV download.
•Third party researchers.
•Local university departments.
•Local umbrella groups

•Feedback from stakeholder forum, events, workshops and consultations. Social media and communications channels.

5.1 Research plan

The tables below set out how we intend to achieve each of the research objectives, subject to internal resources. Each table links the research objective to the relevant strategic aim set out in the Commission's strategic plan and records the activities we will undertake to achieve the objective. This includes an indication of what we will measure and a timeline for completion. Each objective has also been assigned a level of priority, either essential or desirable. If internal resources become stretched, this prioritisation will help us to adapt the research strategy in response.

Research objective 1: Monitor the implementation of changes to registration processes including the impact of a registration threshold.					
Aim	**Strategic aim**	**How we will achieve this**	**What we will measure**	**Timeline**	**Priority**
Analyse and report on impact of changes in the registration process.	1a, 1b	Post registration pop up survey.	Respondents' level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the registration process, the online system and updated guidance.	Bi-annual report to Commissioners and SMT.	Essential
Provide a baseline of charity closures.		Analysis of closures since registration was introduced in 2013.	Number of closures and profile of closed charities including reasons for closures, type of governing document, number of staff and volunteers, income level, beneficiaries and charitable purposes.	Q.3 2024/25	Essential
Provide a picture of the *register of charities* since		Analysis of the register after 10	Number of registered charities in terms of size, income, charitable	Q.4 2024/25	Essential

registration was introduced in 2013.		years of charity registration.	purposes and beneficiaries. Link to closures research.		
Monitor implementation and impact of registration threshold.		Establish a baseline of organisations under the proposed 20k threshold continuing to apply for registration. By analysing the number of EOIs received from these organisations since a threshold was mooted.	The number of organisations with income below 20k threshold which have submitted an EOI to the Commission between 1 April 2022 – 30 Sept 2024.	Q.3 2024/25	Essential
When threshold is introduced quantify scale of smaller charities (below threshold) continuing to register.		Update post registration survey to capture information on organisations below £20k.	Analyse number of charities with income below the threshold, which are continuing to register.	Bi-annually, on introduction of threshold. If necessary, we will carry this into the next strategy.	Essential
		Record charities applying to de-register their charity due to the introduction of a threshold.	Numbers applying to de-register their charity due to the introduction of a threshold.	Bi-annually, on introduction of threshold. If necessary, we will carry this into the next strategy.	Essential

Research objective 2: Monitor awareness among the charity sector and other stakeholders of changes in the culture and approach of the Commission, including in its guidance and communication.					
Aim	**Strategic aim**	**How we will achieve this**	**What we will measure**	**Timeline**	**Priority**
Monitor engagement with the charity sector.	2b, 2c, 2d, 2e	Gather feedback on the sector and other stakeholders' perception of changes in the Commission. Via feedback sheets at events, workshops and information sessions.	Analyse responses to these questionnaires to measure levels of awareness and satisfaction/dissatisfaction.	Annually	Essential
		Conduct pulse surveys with a cohort of charity trustees. To include questions on their awareness of any changes in the Commission's culture and experience of the stakeholder forum.	Measure responses for levels of awareness of the Commission's culture becoming more enabling.	Bi-annually	Essential

Research objective 3: Monitor the impact of changes in monitoring & compliance processes.					
Aim	**Strategic aim**	**How we will achieve this**	**What we will measure**	**Timeline**	**Priority**
Analyse and report on impact of changes in monitoring & compliance processes on sector compliance.	3b, 3c	Post AMR pop up survey with questions designed to gather feedback on experience of online AMR, traffic light system and updated guidance. Use built-in functionality of new website (face icons to indicate, content, neutral or unhappy). If 'unhappy' icon is clicked, there will be an opportunity for the respondent to explain why they are discontent.	Analyse responses to measure levels of awareness and satisfaction/dissatisfaction. Clicks and comments on the face icons will be collated and analysed.	Annually Bi-annually	Essential
		Publish annual monitoring review to promote compliance.	Number of instances of regulatory guidance issued. Number of charities complying through their annual returns.	Annually in quarter 4.	Essential
Analyse and report on Concerns and enquiries received by the Commission	3d, 3e	Publish updated thematic report on *Concerns about charities* to inform stakeholders about the types of concerns that the Commission can pursue and those that it cannot.	Analyse number and type of concerns received by the Commission.	Q.4 2025/26	Desirable

Research objective 4: Gather and analyse internal data to identify evidence of the Commission's ongoing development as a properly governed, transparent and independent decision-making body.

Aim	Strategic aim	How we will achieve this	What we will measure	Timeline	Priority
Monitor Commission's development as a properly governed, transparent and independent decision-making body. Customer satisfaction	4d	Gather feedback on stakeholders' experience of the Commission moving to a more enabling culture. Questions seeking feedback to be included in pulse surveys, feedback sheets from events etc.	Analyse responses to measure levels of awareness and satisfaction/dissatisfaction.	Annually	Essential
Gather feedback on user experience of the website during development and after it goes live. Respondents will not just be charity trustees but users of the website in general.		Using mechanisms built into the system to monitor feedback on an ongoing /rolling basis (smiley faces)	Analyse results and record and report feedback.	Quarterly after website goes live	Essential
	4e	Staff survey/Pulse surveys	Staff experience of working at the Commission. Staff views on potential office move.	Q.4 2024/25	Essential

Where possible, gather quantitative data on Equality characteristics of Commission's clients.	4f	Define what is a policy for the purpose of screening. Where we can, produce easy-read versions of guidance. Where possible, gather quantitative data regarding clients of the Commission.	Questions seeking quantitative data via equality questions on pop up surveys and Pulse surveys.	Quarter 4 2024/25 Quarter 4 2025/26	Desirable

5.2 Implementation plan

As noted in the introduction, this strategy has been developed amid the dynamic and challenging context of the planned introduction of a registration threshold, continued implementation of recommendations from the Independent Review of Charity Regulation and ongoing budget constraints.

In response, the strategy sets out research objectives which have been designed to gather, analyse and report on feedback regarding the delivery and achievement of three of the Commission's strategic aims.

During the life of the strategy, elements may be reprioritised in response to changed circumstances for example limited resources, emerging priorities and stakeholder needs.

A detailed timeline for the implementation of this research strategy is set out below.

Implementation timeline – this timeline shows the key research activities that will be undertaken for each research objective. The activities are coloured coded: essential 🟩 and desirable 🟨.

Key research activities for objective 1	2024/25				2025/2026			
	Q.1	Q.2	Q.3	Q.4	Q.1	Q.2	Q.3	Q.4
Post registration submission pop up survey.		🟩		🟩		🟩		🟩
Analysis of closures since registration was introduced in 2013.			🟩					
Analysis of the register after 10 years of charity registration.				🟩				
Establish a baseline of organisations under the proposed £20k threshold continuing to indicate they would apply for registration – analyse EOIs.		🟩						
When threshold is introduced quantify scale of smaller charities (below threshold) continuing to register.						🟩		🟩
Track numbers applying to de-register their charity due to the introduction of the threshold.						🟩		🟩

Key research activities for objective 2	2024/25				2025/2026			
	Q.1	Q.2	Q.3	Q.4	Q.1	Q.2	Q.3	Q.4
Collate and analyse feedback from events, workshops and information sessions.				🟩				🟩
Conduct pulse surveys of charity trustees.			🟩		🟩		🟩	
Review working of the stakeholder forum.				🟩				🟩

Key research activities for objective 3	2024/25				2025/2026			
	Q.1	Q.2	Q.3	Q.4	Q.1	Q.2	Q.3	Q.4
Post AMR submission pop up survey				🟩				🟩
Analysis impact of changes to monitoring and compliance processes on sector from built-in functionality of new website.				🟩				🟩
Publish annual monitoring review to promote compliance.				🟩				🟩
Analyse number and type of concerns received by the Commission and publish thematic report on *Concerns about charities.*								🟨

Key research activities for objective 4	2024/25				2025/2026			
	Q.1	Q.2	Q.3	Q.4	Q.1	Q.2	Q.3	Q.4
Staff survey/Pulse surveys				🟩				
Analyse and report on feedback to new website using built-in functionality ongoing basis. (Quarterly after website goes live).	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
Where possible, gather quantitative data on Equality characteristics of Commission's clients.				🟨				🟨
Data and Research strategy progress reports to SMT.				🟩		🟩		🟩
Begin full review of the implementation of the *Data and Research strategy*.					Mini review			🟩

16

6. Evaluation of the strategy

The *Data and Research strategy 2024-2026* will be reviewed and amended throughout its duration. Key performance indicators will be mapped against objectives with progress monitored and reported to the Senior Management Team (SMT). Reports will be delivered to SMT:

- on completion of key elements of the strategy.
- in September and March each year. These update reports will include details of outputs and outcomes achieved.
- with any emerging challenges and proposed solutions being raised with the SMT through the policy development manager's monthly report.

A review of the strategy will be conducted to evaluate indicators of success, identify learning. This learning can then be integrated into the work of the Commission to inform any subsequent research strategy, especially the public trust and confidence survey to be carried out in 2026–2027.

This full review will be conducted within six months of the strategy's end date in 2026.

A mini review will be conducted at the end of year one of the strategy's implementation (by end of Quarter 1, 2025-26). The strategy will also be reviewed in response to a significant change in circumstances, for example if other priorities arise or internal resources become stretched. To try to avoid the need for major changes to the strategy, research identified as essential makes up the greater part of the strategy.