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Evaluation & Research Strategy 2026-2029



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1. Introduction

The *Evaluation and research strategy 2026–2029* sets out how the Commission will use the data it collects and conduct primary research to support the monitoring and evaluation of the Commission's strategic objectives. The Commission's strategic objectives are set out in its *Strategic Plan 2026–29*.

The strategy has been shaped by the review of the previous research strategy (2023-26), which recommended that:

- the new strategy aligns with, and support monitoring of, the strategic objectives in the Commission's Strategic Plan 2026–29.
- a key focus should be on the collection and analysis of internal data.
- access to the expanded CSV download of the *charity register* should be continued and, if resources allow, expanded to include information on charities with religious designation.
- key performance indicators of this research strategy and trends should be presented as quarterly headline reports to the Senior Management Team and, where relevant, incorporated into monthly updates provided by senior managers to the Board of Commissioners.
- a business case should be developed to try to secure the additional funding needed to undertake and publish public trust and confidence in charities research based on a survey of a representative sample of the local population.
- where possible, opportunities to collaborate with partners to deliver parts of the strategy, should be explored.

In developing the strategy, several other resource pressures have been taken into consideration. These include significant legislative changes which will come into operation during the life of the strategy. These are:

- the introduction of a registration threshold, to include a programme of de-registration, and anticipated changes in accounting and reporting requirements.

- the need to prepare new processes and materials to enable the delivery of a new Charities Bill.

The first two years of the strategy will prioritise research and evaluation activities that focus on monitoring the impact of these changes and carrying out the public trust and confidence research. If resources become available during this time activities currently marked as of medium or low importance will be carried out.

2. Resourcing

An effective research strategy requires committed resources. In the context of restricted public funding and the Commission's limited budget and resourcing, this presents a major challenge. As a result, delivery of some of this strategy is aspirational in nature. Any progress will rely heavily on internal resources and prioritisation.

The Commission will rely primarily on:

- Commission existing staff time
- internal data already collected in the course of the Commission's work
- utilising new data analysis software and AI
- a limited number of charity trustee surveys
- data gathered from feedback tools embedded in the upgraded website and social media.

3. Research objectives

The Commission's *Strategic plan 2026-2029* sets out five strategic aims. The research objectives in this new strategy focus on monitoring and measuring the achievement of the Commission's strategic aims, and in adopting a research approach that enhances understanding of the sector and the public's needs.

Strategic aim 2026-29	Research objective 2026-29
1. Strengthening charity compliance and governance	Establish the impact of the newly commenced powers introduced by the Charities Act by creating a baseline of usage. Monitor closures of enquiries cases and collaboration with other organisations to strengthen governance.
2. Build further public trust and confidence in charities	Monitor awareness and understanding of the charity register by gathering relevant information on registered and exempt charities and decisions of the regulator. Carry out a public trust and confidence survey of a representative sample of the local adult population.
3. Enable charities through better systems and support	Analyse feedback on the impact of changes to the Commission's engagement and enabling support to charities.

4. Deliver a more efficient and updated registration process	Monitor the impact of the registration threshold, from commencement, on the Commission's registration and other processes.
5. Being an excellent and expert organisation	Draw on and analyse internal data to identify evidence of the Commission's ongoing development as a properly governed, transparent and independent decision-making body.

4. How we will use our evaluation and research findings

We will use the findings from the strategy to help improve and develop the Commission by highlighting what is working well, where improvements are needed, and any new issues or opportunities that are emerging.

Relevant findings will be shared with the charity sector and other stakeholders to improve governance and compliance within the sector.

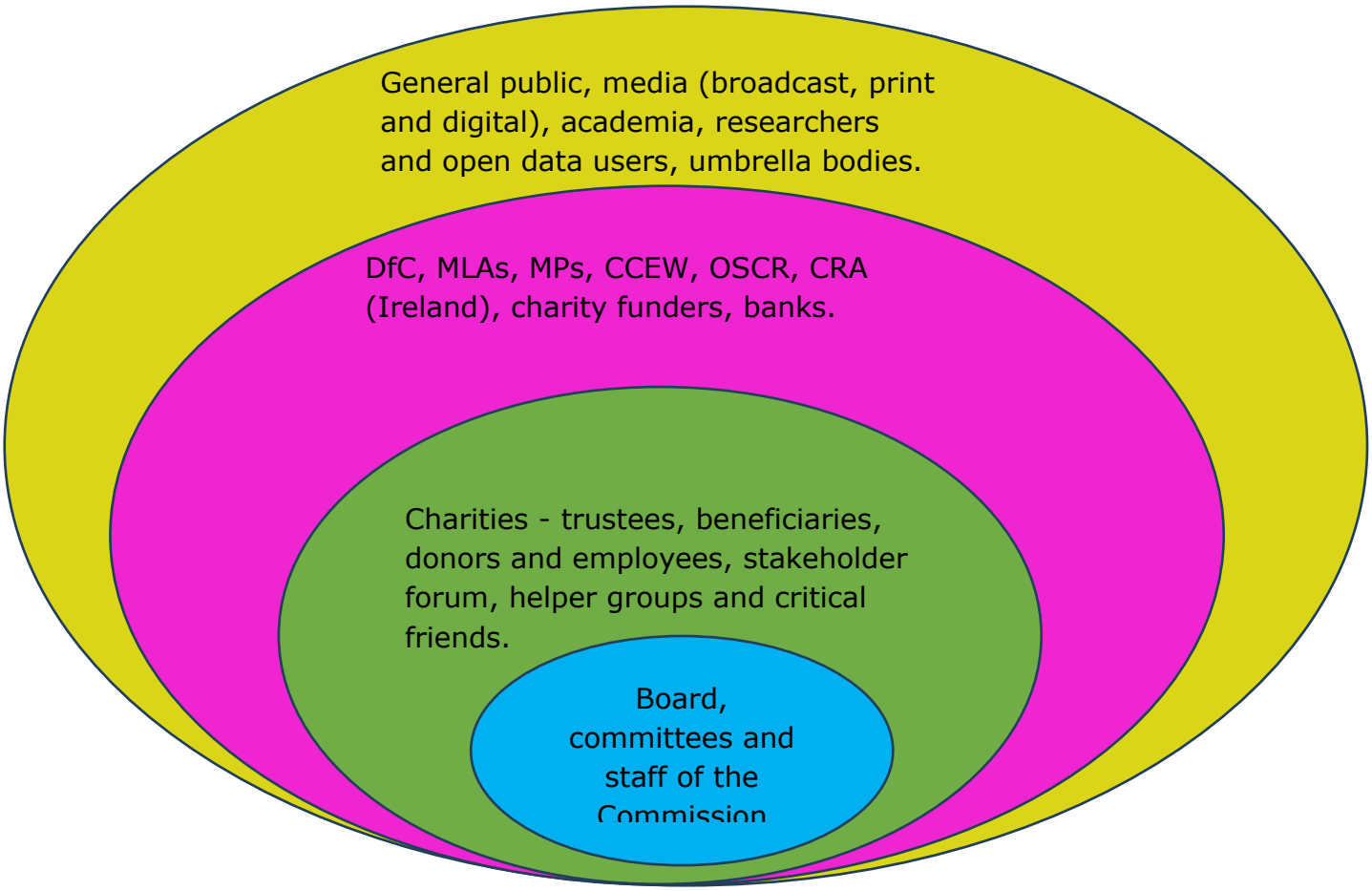
The findings will be shared with the Senior management team and Board of Commissioners to support informed decision-making.

Discussion of relevant research outputs will be a standing agenda item for Board and staff development sessions to help shape future plans, improve services, strengthen governance, and build organisational capacity.

5. Stakeholders

In preparing the research strategy we have identified a range of key 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, followed by a key to organisation names which have been shortened in the diagram.

Figure 1: Key stakeholders identified by the Commission.



Key to shortened names

- CCEW - Charity Commission for England and Wales
- CRA (Ireland) - Charities Regulatory Authority
- DfC - Department for Communities
- OSCR - Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator

Research methods

The primary research methods used to deliver the strategy are set out below.

Internal data information:

- collected by the Commission in the course of its work.
- from the website's feedback tools including emojis and 'Tell us more' function.

Pop up or snap surveys:

- online pop-up surveys for specific programmes which collect both quantitative and qualitative data.
- snap/pulse surveys with cohorts of charity trustees, charity staff and volunteers.

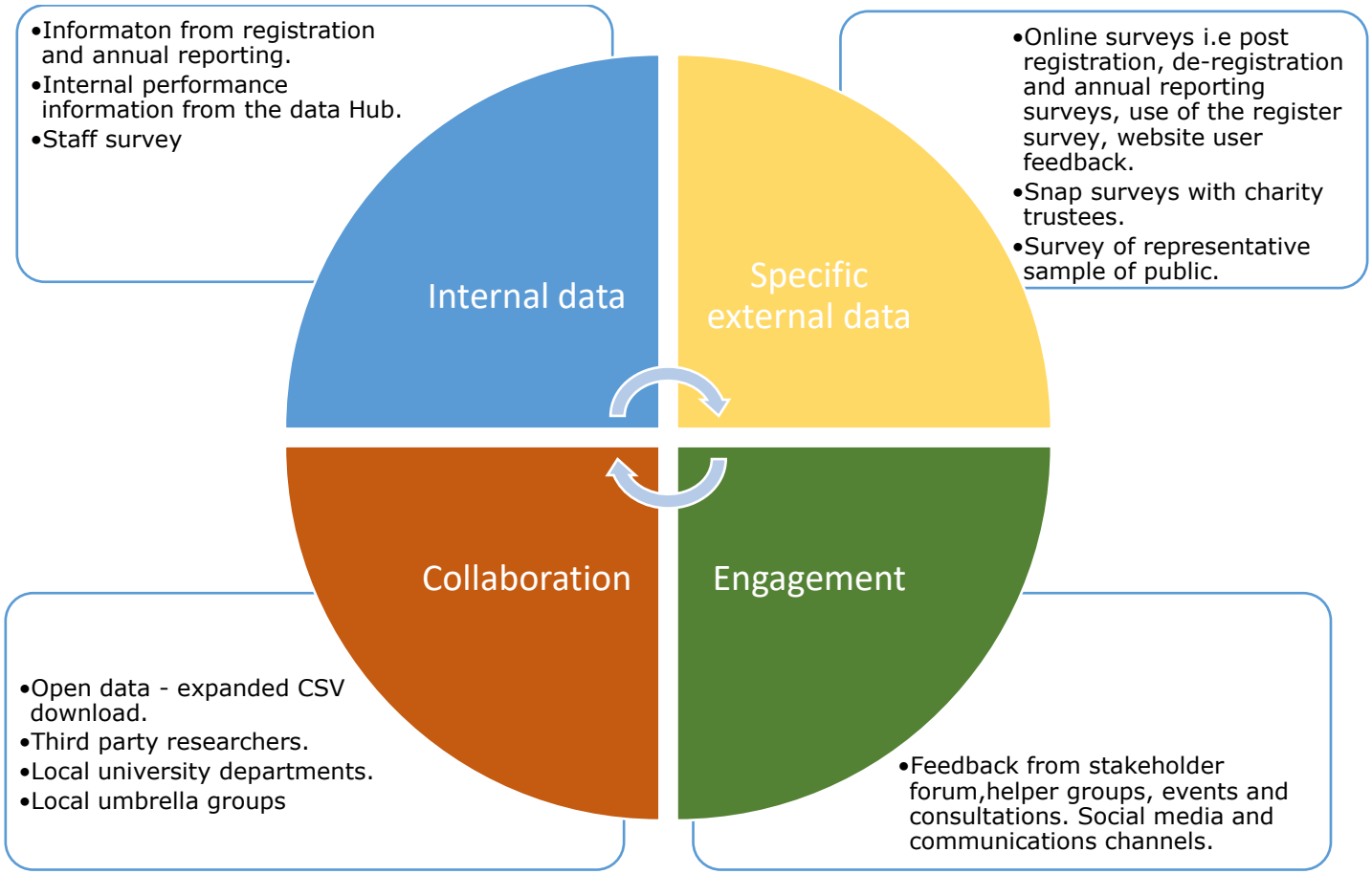
Collaborative work:

- where possible, collaborative work with the sector or research partners identified after a tender process.

Sources of information

The research strategy may draw on four main sources of information as set out in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Potential sources of information



Research plan

The tables below explain how we plan to achieve each research objective, taking account of the resources available. They show how each objective relates to the Commission's strategic aims and outline the activities needed to deliver it. The tables also set out how the Commission will measure progress and the expected timescale for completion. Each objective has a priority rating of **high**, **medium** or **low**. This will help us adjust the research programme against available resources, ensuring that the most important work is prioritised.

Strategic aim 1: Strengthening charity compliance and governance.			
Research objective: Establish the impact of the newly commenced powers introduced by the Charities Act by creating a baseline of usage. Monitor closures of enquiries cases and collaboration with other organisations to strengthen governance.			
How we will achieve this	**Sources of information**	**Timeline**	**Priority**
Create a baseline of accounting and reporting by analysing levels of compliance with requirements and profile of charities which comply and those which fail to comply or comply late.	Internal data Post AMR submission survey.	Yr 1	High
Repeat exercise to assess impact of new accounting and reporting regime.	Internal data Post AMR submission survey.	Yr 3	High

Analyse annual monitoring returns (AMRs) submitted less than three months late and survey charities to identify the reasons for the late returns and establish what support might help in the future.	Internal data Snap survey	Yr 2	High
Analyse the impact of the introduction of new powers to the Commission by measuring the use of the various new or amended powers, including the number of times they are used, the reasons for their use, and their impact.	Internal data	Yr 2,3	High
Analyse the level and types of collaboration with other organisations to contribute to a well governed charity sector over the course of the strategy	Internal data Feedback from helper groups and stakeholder forum.	Yr 3	Low

Strategic aim 2: Build further public trust and confidence in charities.			
Research objective: Monitor awareness and understanding of the charity register by gathering relevant information on registered and exempt charities and decisions of the regulator. Carry out a public trust and confidence survey of a representative sample of the local adult population.			
How we will achieve this	**Sources of information**	**Timeline**	**Priority**
By collating and analysing feedback from surveys, events, the Commission's stakeholder forum, helper groups, critical friends and online training sessions.	Pop up surveys - post registration, post AMR submission and post de-registration. Through the website's feedback tools.	Annually after commencement of threshold.	High
By exploring the expansion of the CSV download to enhance research information available to the public and other researchers.	Google analytics	Yr 1	Low
Prepare business case and secure resources to conduct public trust and confidence research. Drawing on the Commission's statutory objective to increase public trust and confidence in charities. The need for the Commission to be an evidence-based organisation and need to benchmark with other charity regulators.	Previous external survey procurements and rational.	Yr 1, Q.3	High

By delivering public trust and confidence research in the charity sector which identifies the drivers which influence the public's trust and confidence in the charity sector, subject to budget being available.	Survey of representative sample of 1,500 adults from the Northern Ireland population.	Yr 2	High
Publish a thematic report on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) by charities including, what AI is used for, the experience of using AI and how they manage the risks of using AI tools.	Snap survey of charities.	Yr 3 – Q.1	Low

Strategic aim 3: Enable charities through better systems and support.			
Research objective: Analyse feedback on the impact of changes to the Commission's engagement and enabling support to charities.			
How we will achieve this	**Sources of information**	**Timeline**	**Priority**
Monitor levels of use of Commission guidance and online tools and by analysing how accessible the trustees of both registered and exempt charities, and others find Commission guidance.	Pop-up surveys - post registration, post AMR submission, post de-registration snap survey and feedback from helper groups and stakeholder forum.	Annually	Medium
Monitor the quality, risks, barriers and viability of the mentoring programme that has emerged in Enquiries. Report to SMT with recommendations on how/if to formalise this programme.	Internal review Snap survey of participants (mentors and mentees)	Yr 1 – Q.3 & 4	High

Strategic aim 4: Deliver a more efficient and updated registration process.			
Research objective: Monitor the impact of the registration threshold, from commencement, on the efficiency of the Commission's registration and other processes.			
How we will achieve this	**Sources of information**	**Timeline**	**Priority**
By analysing why charities below the threshold continue to stay or apply to register.	Internal data - Expressions of Intent (EOIs) received. Those with an income less than £20k. Snap survey of charities below the threshold (£20k less & £100k assets) to identify the reasons why they did not de-register.	Annually, on introduction of threshold. Yr 2, 3	High
By exploring a methodology for ascertaining charities with assets of less than £100k	The register of charities.	Yr 2	High
By analysing charities that choose to de-register.	Internal data –application for de-registrations, from	Yr 3	Medium

	Customer Relationship Management systems. Pop-up survey – post de-registration application.		
By analysing the use of the jurisdiction step out to establish if an unregistered organisation is a charity in law.	Internal data	Yr 1 – Q.4 Yr 2 - Bi-annually Yr 3 - Annually	High
Conduct an analysis of the charity register for comparison with the baseline report carried out in Q.2 2025. To include profile of charity trustees, beneficiaries, employment and volunteer statistics, income and expenditure.	Charity register	Yr 3 – Q.2	High
Monitor whether any increase in concerns received by the Commission relate to the introduction of a registration threshold.	Internal data – Concerns log	Annually	High

Strategic aim 5: Being an excellent and expert organisation.			
Research objective: Draw on and analyse internal data to identify evidence of the Commission's ongoing development as a properly governed, transparent and independent decision-making body.			
How we will achieve this	**Sources of information**	**Timeline**	**Priority**
By surveying feedback from attendees at annual public meeting and other in-person and online events.	Feedback from events	Annually - Q.4	High
Through an Annual staff survey of experience of working at the Commission to include staff views and experience of office move.	Staff survey	Annually Q.4	High
By analysing quantitative data on Equality characteristics of Commission's clients and include in annual progress report to the Equality Commission.	Internal data Pop up surveys	Annually – Q.2	High

6. Implementation plan

Implementation of the strategy is aligned with the Commission's strategic planning cycle. Delivery will be managed through the policy and research team.

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: High Medium Low

Strategic aim 1: Strengthening charity compliance and governance.	**2026/27**				**2027/28**				**2028/29**			
	Q.1	**Q.2**	**Q.3**	**Q.4**	**Q.1**	**Q.2**	**Q.3**	**Q.4**	**Q.1**	**Q.2**	**Q.3**	**Q.4**
Research objective: Establish the impact of the newly commenced powers introduced by the Charities Act by creating a baseline of usage. Monitor closures of enquiries cases and collaboration with other organisations to strengthen governance.												
Key research activities: Create a baseline of accounting and reporting by analysing levels of compliance with requirements and profile of charities which comply and those which fail to comply or comply late.												
Repeat exercise to assess impact of new accounting and reporting regime.												
Analyse annual monitoring returns (AMRs) submitted less than three months late and snap survey charities to identify the reasons for the late returns and establish what support might help in the future.												
Analyse the impact of the introduction of new powers to the Commission by measuring the use of the various new or amended powers, including the number of times they are used, the reasons for their use, and their impact.												
Analyse the level and types of collaboration with other organisations to contribute to a well governed charity sector over the course of the strategy.												

Strategic aim 2: Build further public trust and confidence in charities.	**2026/27**				**2027/28**				**2028/29**			
	Q.1	**Q.2**	**Q.3**	**Q.4**	**Q.1**	**Q.2**	**Q.3**	**Q.4**	**Q.1**	**Q.2**	**Q.3**	**Q.4**
Research objective: Monitor awareness and understanding of the charity register by gathering relevant information on registered and exempt charities and decisions of the regulator. Carry out a public trust and confidence survey of a representative sample of the local adult population.												
Key research activities: By collating and analysing feedback from surveys, events, the Commission's stakeholder forum, helper groups, critical friends and online training sessions.												
By exploring the expansion of the CSV download to enhance research information available to the public and other researchers.												
Prepare business case and secure resources to conduct public trust and confidence research. Drawing on the Commission's statutory objective to increase public trust and confidence in charities. The need for the Commission to be an evidence-based organisation and need to benchmark with other charity regulators.				Draft tender								
By delivering public trust and confidence research in the charity sector which identifies the drivers which influence the public's trust and confidence in the charity sector, subject to budget being available.					Tender process	Tender awarded Fieldwork in Sept	Research report					
Publish a thematic report on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) by charities including, what AI is												

used for, the experience of using AI and how they manage the risks of using AI tools.												

Strategic aim 3: Enable charities through better systems and support.	**2026/27**				**2027/28**				**2028/29**			
	Q.1	**Q.2**	**Q.3**	**Q.4**	**Q.1**	**Q.2**	**Q.3**	**Q.4**	**Q.1**	**Q.2**	**Q.3**	**Q.4**
Research objective: Analyse feedback on the impact of changes to the Commission's engagement and enabling support to charities.												
Key research activities: Monitor levels of use of Commission guidance and online tools and by analysing how accessible the trustees of both registered and exempt charities, and others find Commission guidance.												
Monitor the quality, risks, barriers and viability of the mentoring programme that has emerged in Enquiries. Report to SMT with recommendations on how/if to formalise this programme.												

Strategic aim 4: Deliver a more efficient and updated registration process.	**2026/27**				**2027/28**				**2028/29**			
	Q.1	**Q.2**	**Q.3**	**Q.4**	**Q.1**	**Q.2**	**Q.3**	**Q.4**	**Q.1**	**Q.2**	**Q.3**	**Q.4**
Research objective: Monitor the impact of the registration threshold, from commencement, on the Commission's registration and other processes.												
Key research activities: By analysing why charities below the threshold continue to stay or apply to register.												
By exploring a methodology for ascertaining charities with assets of less than £100k.												
By analysing charities that choose to de-register.												
By analysing the use of the jurisdiction step out to establish if an unregistered organisation is a charity in law.												
Conduct an analysis of the charity register for comparison with the baseline report carried out in Q.2 2025. To include profile of charity trustees, beneficiaries, employment and volunteer statistics, income and expenditure.												
Monitor whether any increase in concerns received by the Commission relate to the introduction of a registration threshold.												

Strategic aim 5: Being an excellent and expert organisation.	**2026/27**				**2027/28**				**2028/29**			
	Q.1	**Q.2**	**Q.3**	**Q.4**	**Q.1**	**Q.2**	**Q.3**	**Q.4**	**Q.1**	**Q.2**	**Q.3**	**Q.4**
Research objective: Draw on and analyse internal data to identify evidence of the Commission's ongoing development as a properly governed, transparent and independent decision-making body.												
Key research activities: By surveying feedback from attendees at annual public meeting and other in-person and online events.												
Through an Annual staff survey of experience of working at the Commission to include staff views and experience of office move.												
By analysing quantitative data on Equality characteristics of Commission's clients and include in annual progress report to the Equality Commission.												
Begin full review of the implementation of the *Evaluation and Research strategy*.												

7. Progress Reporting and Review

Key performance indicators will be presented as quarterly headline reports to the Senior Management Team and, where relevant, incorporated into monthly updates provided by senior managers to the Board of Commissioners.

During the third quarter of 2028–29 the strategy will be reviewed to inform the next strategic planning process and to reflect learning from its delivery.