

UK public nearly twice more likely to trust hairdressers than charities

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The UK public is nearly three times more likely to trust a doctor (69%) than a charity (26%), according to a new research conducted for volunteering organisation Pro Bono Economics (<http://www.probonoeconomics.com/>) by FTI Consulting.

In itself, this might not seem especially surprising: when it comes down to it, we have no option but to put our trust in doctors, teachers (trusted by 56% of the public), scientists (52%), police (44%) and judges (38%) – all professions that score highly in the survey. But charities (26%) now rate well below hairdressers (45%) in the trust stakes, with four in ten people (45%) saying that they were cautious of charities, 18% suspicious of them, and 10% explicitly distrusting them.¹

Why, then, is trust in charities at an all-time low? Julia Grant (<http://www.probonoeconomics.com/people/julia-grant>), Chief Executive, Pro Bono Economics, throws some light on the situation:

“Over the last 12 months, much has been made of the apparently sharp practices used by certain charities to attract donations. In response to this criticism, charities have vowed to stamp out these methods, and are aiming to increase transparency with improved reporting. But transparency does not equal trustworthiness, nor does it of itself prove that an organisation is taking the right decisions or making the intended impact. Just look at the way things have gone in the financial sector. Although reporting has been ramped up, the survey found that only 9% of the public trusts bankers, which suggests that the world of finance is viewed as no more trustworthy than it was before the 2008 crash.

“The only way for charities to rebuild any trust they have lost is to demonstrate their impact on society with solid independent economic evidence. They are accountable to the public, who are the people who support them, so they need to communicate their impact in a way that engages with the public as stakeholders. Essentially, charities’ future stability and sustainability relies on their capacity to prove the importance of their work.”

A separate survey found that 81% of the UK public would prioritise donations to charities able to prove their economic impact; 82% said that charities need expert help in gaining an understanding of their impact and how to improve it, and 88% agreed that charities would attract more donations by proving their impact on society.²

Amplifying these findings are the views of charities and social enterprises with which Pro Bono economics has worked over the past eight years: eight out of ten of them (88%) agreed that – above all else – charities will continue to struggle with financial sustainability and producing figures to demonstrate their impact on society.³

Julia Grant continued:

“Pro Bono Economics has helped over 300 charities answer some of their big questions. We work with a diverse group of organisations – from Centrepoin to Place2Be (<http://www.probonoeconomics.com/cases>)

– to help them understand the impact of their work and the true value it represents. Over the next twelve months we will be placing a particular focus on charities in the fields of education, employment, mental health and complex needs.”

Charities seem to have their work cut out when it comes to (re)gaining public trust and guaranteeing their future, but they can take heart from the fact that 82% of respondents to the public survey believe that charities do important work in fields such as scientific research, services for people in need, and influencing Government policy.

The surveys by FTI Consulting were commissioned for an event that took place on Friday 7th July in the City of London, a panel discussion on Building Trust in a Post-Truth Era. Panellists included: Andy Haldane (<http://www.probonoeconomics.com/people/andy-haldane>), the Bank of England’s Chief Economist and a co-founder of Pro Bono Economics; Julia Grant, Chief Executive, Pro Bono Economics; Hetan Shah, Executive Director, Royal Statistical Society, and Dan Healy, Managing Director, Strategy Consulting & Research, FTI Consulting. The event examined the implications of the post-truth culture for professionals in the private sector, charitable sector and the media.

Since 2009, expert economist volunteers recruited through Pro Bono Economics, itself a charity, have helped more than 300 charities understand and improve the impact and value of their work, and hence present a more compelling case to funders.

Established by Martin Brookes (Tomorrow’s People) and Andy Haldane (Bank of England), Pro Bono Economics matches volunteer professional economists with charities that want to understand and improve the impact of their work. PBE has over 500 economists on its books and has helped over 300 charities large and small, covering a wide range of issues including health, homelessness, education and sport.

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References

1. FTI consulting survey, n=2,056 respondents representative of the UK adult general population, conducted 30th June - 4th July 2017
2. FTI Consulting survey, n=1,102 respondents representative of the UK adult general population, conducted December 2016
3. Pro Bono Economics survey of charities and volunteers it has worked with since 2009: n=73 respondents, conducted Dec 2016 - April 2017