THIRD SECTOR TRENDS IN ENGLAND AND WALES

Research ethics, personal privacy and data usage statement (May 2025)

Purpose of the study

Third Sector Trends was initiated in 2008 and now covers the whole of England and Wales. The study was conceived and originally commissioned by Northern Rock Foundation with research conducted by the universities of Durham, Southampton and Teesside. The Community Foundation North East was a co-founder of the research and is now responsible for its legacy.

Since 2012, the research programme has been run by Policy&Practice, St Chad's College, Durham University. Its geographical coverage has expanded, first to the whole of the North of England in 2016 and then to England and Wales in 2019. All data held from the study are owned by Community Foundation North East and St Chad's College Durham University.

The study was established to look at structure, resource, purpose, practice and impact of the Third Sector from an independent and as far as possible, an 'objective' point of view. As such, the study collects and analyses quantitative and qualitative data to explore issues of interest to government, local public sector and health organisations, the private sector, grant making foundations, Third Sector infrastructure organisations at national and local levels and, of course, individual TSOs.

To widen the scope of the study, Third Sector Trends has worked with many funding partners over the years. In 2025 the study is being supported by The Community Foundation North East, Lloyds Bank Foundation England and Wales, Wales Council for Voluntary Action and Millfield House Foundation.

If you would like more information on study purpose and its publications – there is more information here: https://www.stchads.ac.uk/research/third-sector-trends-in-england-and-wales/

If you want to know more about research methods, you can read this report (this is for 2022 and will be updated in 2025 once the fieldwork is complete): https://www.stchads.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Third-Sector-Trends-Research-Methods-2022.pdf

A report is also available on analytical techniques (also to be updated in 2025): https://www.stchads.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Structure-purpose-energy-and-impact-of-the-Third-Sector-in-the-West-Midlands-May-2023.pdf

Research ethics and compliance to data protection legislation

St Chad's College, Durham University is responsible for collecting data for Third Sector Trends which is used in accordance with UK GDPR/ Data Protection Act 2018. Our interpretation of these regulations has been obtained via https://ukdataservice.ac.uk/.

The ethical principles underlying the study are aligned with the British Sociological Association, Social Policy Association and Social Research Association.

The project is led by Professor Tony Chapman. If you would like to seek clarification or discuss any aspect of the project, data collection or usage, please contact him by email: tony.chapman@durham.ac.uk

Who participates in the study?

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary. That said, we undertake the fieldwork over an extended period from June to October and this may result in potential participants receiving several requests to take part.

Requests via Online Surveys can be stopped by writing to the lead researcher (as is indicated in the letter of invitation). Requests from other organisations such as community foundations and voluntary sector local infrastructure organisations is beyond the control of St Chad's College, Durham University and cannot be stopped.

Since its inception, over 18,500 responses have been given by voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSEs) and unincorporated organisations and groups. We invite people who are closely involved in such organisations (as, for example, trustees or senior employees) to take part in a triennial survey.

We do this by sending invitations to people identified on the Charity Commission Register and via other organisations who send invitations from their listings of VCSEs (such as local and national voluntary sector infrastructure organisations and community foundations).

What this involves is the completion of a survey questionnaire which takes about 15-20 minutes to complete using Online Surveys. The survey attracts a large number of respondents (over 6,000 in 2022) and collates data to undertake detailed statistical

analysis by organisational types, area types and so on.

This is the only large-scale representative study of its kind in the UK. It takes a lot of effort on the part of many organisations to build up a large enough sample for analysis. We apologise that this can be annoying to some people, but we ask them to recognise the benefits when considering the value and impact of the findings of the study.

Does the survey collect personal data?

No, Third Sector Trends is about organisations, not individuals. Complete anonymity of respondents is further ensured because we do not ask for the organisation's name nor do we ask for or retain any 'personal information' about the respondent (i.e. their name, home address, email, phone number or any biographical details).

We do ask for an email address at the end of the survey, should respondents wish to be informed about its publications – but this information is removed from the database and kept separately and used only for the stated purpose. The list of emails will not be shared with any other organisations (including Community Foundation North East).

We ask that respondents tell us the postcode of the main office of their organisation. These data (as the survey questionnaire makes clear) are used for geographical mapping using ONS Lookups - and once that is done the post code is permanently removed from the database.

Can I ask you to withdraw the responses I have given once submitted?

Unfortunately not. We cannot withdraw your data because it would be impossible for us to identify it from other responses as we collect and retain no information about organisational or respondents identity.

Can anyone else see the data that are collected?

We work closely at a local level with voluntary sector infrastructure organisations and community foundations. If they provide substantive and sustained support through the fieldwork period, we will consider releasing data to them for their local area providing that there are enough cases (i.e. lines of data for individual organisations) to do effective analysis and to ensure that anonymity is completely protected.

Any such agreements to share data will be made on the proviso that postcodes are removed to ensure that individual organisations cannot be identified. To date, such data has only been shared in spreadsheet format on one occasion (in 2019). Generally we prefer to share data only in tabular form.

Register data from our 2025 combined register dataset can be shared as these data are available in the public domain. The combined register includes data from Charity Commission Register, Community Interest Company register, Community Amateur Sports Club register and Registered Societies Register.

When and how can I find the results of the study once it is complete?

The results will be published over a period of six months starting in November/December 2025. If you have given us your email to receive these results, we will contact you and provide a link to the first report and tell you when other reports will be available and where to find them.

The findings from the study are also widely reported upon in the voluntary sector press (*Civil Society Media, Third Sector, UK Fundraising* and *Charity Times*).

All reports from the study will be available on the websites of Community Foundation North East, St Chad's College Durham University.