



European Research Council
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The Regulating Civil Society Project:

UK Association Survey

Summary Report

University of Exeter, March 2017

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1. Survey Characteristics

Survey:	UK Association Survey
Closing date:	February 2017
Coordinator:	The Regulating Civil Society Project
Population:	4066 organisations
Responses:	822 (20.2 % response rate)

2. Description of the Data

In this section, we present a first exploration of the survey data. Following the structure of the survey, we will – in a first section - present the main characteristics of the organisations covered, in a second section we will detail main aspects related to the organisations’ membership. In a third section, we will present information on resources and staffing. Finally, we will describe the main activities that organisations engage in and describe the main challenges that organisations covered face in the UK.

2.a. Characteristics of Organisations

According to our results organisations covered tend to aim primarily at benefitting members, were built from scratch by a group of citizens and are structured as a national organisation, with individual members. More specifically, over 80% of the organisations primarily benefit members and 18.85% of them primarily benefit non-members. When asked about the type of organisation they represent, 58.11% chose the category of interest/advocacy group to define themselves, while 41.89% chose to define themselves as a service-providing organisation. The average age of the organisations covered is 57 years. We find considerable age differences: indeed, we find organisations that were formed only very recently (in 2016) and those with very long trajectories. The oldest organisation has existed for more than 500 years.

Overview of typical characteristics

- **Primary purpose: To benefit members**
- **Average age: 57 years**
- **Formation: Built from scratch**
- **Founders: A group of citizens**
- **Structure: National organisation, with individual direct members**

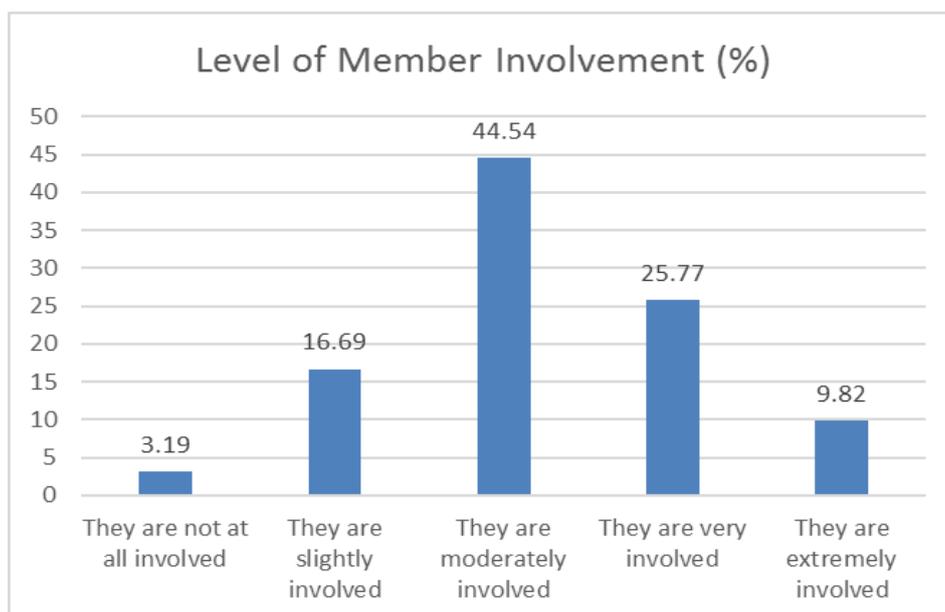
Our survey asked about the type of origin of the organisation and who participated in its foundation. Organisations can be built from scratch, an option chosen by most of the organisations covered (77.51%). Some formed out of a merger of older organisations (11.49%) or out of splits from pre-existing organisations (7.46%). Asking how the organisation was formed, more than half of the organisations were formed by a group of citizens (56.85%), 23.72% of the organisations were formed by a pre-existing societal organisation and 10.88% were founded by one individual citizen.

Concluding with the nature of organisational structure, 53.29% of respondent organisations have a national organisation, with individual direct members. Furthermore, 16.22% of the organisations did not qualify in any of the provided categories, while 9.76% of the organisations covered have a national structure with subunits located at regional and local level.

2.b. Membership Characteristics

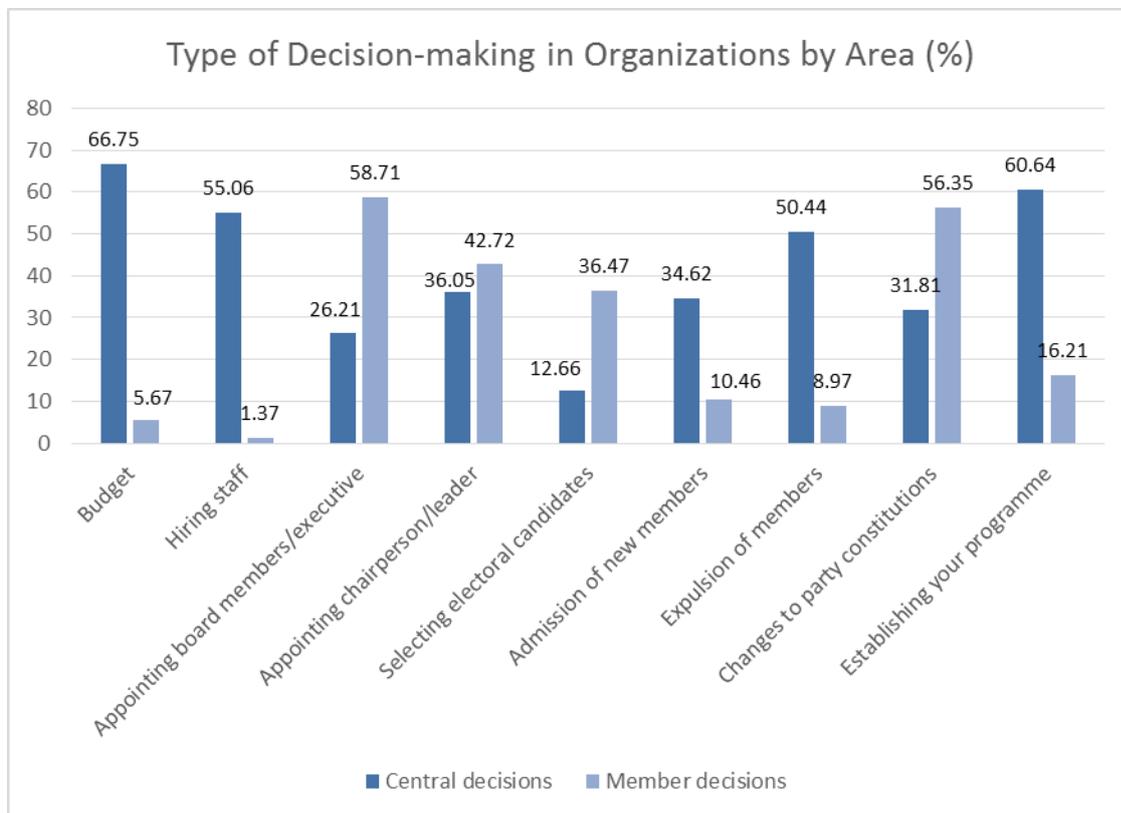
Members are important to organisations, as they are involved in central organisational activities such as campaigning, service provision, administrative tasks, internal decision making etc. (Jordan and Maloney 1997, Binderkrantz 2009). More than half of the organisations covered have individual members (52.68%), 21.46% are predominantly composed of organisations (i.e. firms, local authorities etc.) and 19.39% are predominantly comprised of a mixture of individuals and organisations. A very small number of organisations reported that they do not have members (2.44%). Membership sizes are quite diverse. The average size is 4,264 members, with a minimum of 0 and maximum of one million members. Membership in traditional associations (i.e. trade unions, organized religion) has been in decline across democracies (van Biezen and Poguntke 2014). Nevertheless, only a minority of organisations here report a decline: 34.19% of the organisations covered report stability in their membership size over the past five years and 29.77% report an increase.

How active are those members? Our results show that the biggest portion of organisations covered report a moderately involved membership (44.54%). Around 25.77% have a very involved membership, while only 9.82% have extremely involved members (the following figure shows an overview of the distribution). Over the last five years, the level of involvement has remained stable for 52.93% of the organisations covered. Another 24.94% report an increase in the involvement of their membership. Only 12.22% point out that their members are slightly less involved nowadays than they were five years ago.



When it comes to members' participation in decision-making, we find considerable differences depending on the area of decision-making looked at. For instance, most of the organisations covered involve members directly when it comes to the appointment of board members/executive and

adoption/changes in organisations’ constitutions. In those areas, most of the organisations reported that decisions are made by the voting of members. However, other areas like the expulsion of members, the hiring of personnel, handling of financial matters (budget) and importantly, establishment of programme and policy positions are more often decided centrally by the executive board, the chairperson/leader or senior staff. The type of decision-making mechanism used in each of the areas has been stable in the majority of the organisations covered (85.03 %). Only 14.97% of the organisations mentioned changes over the last five years.

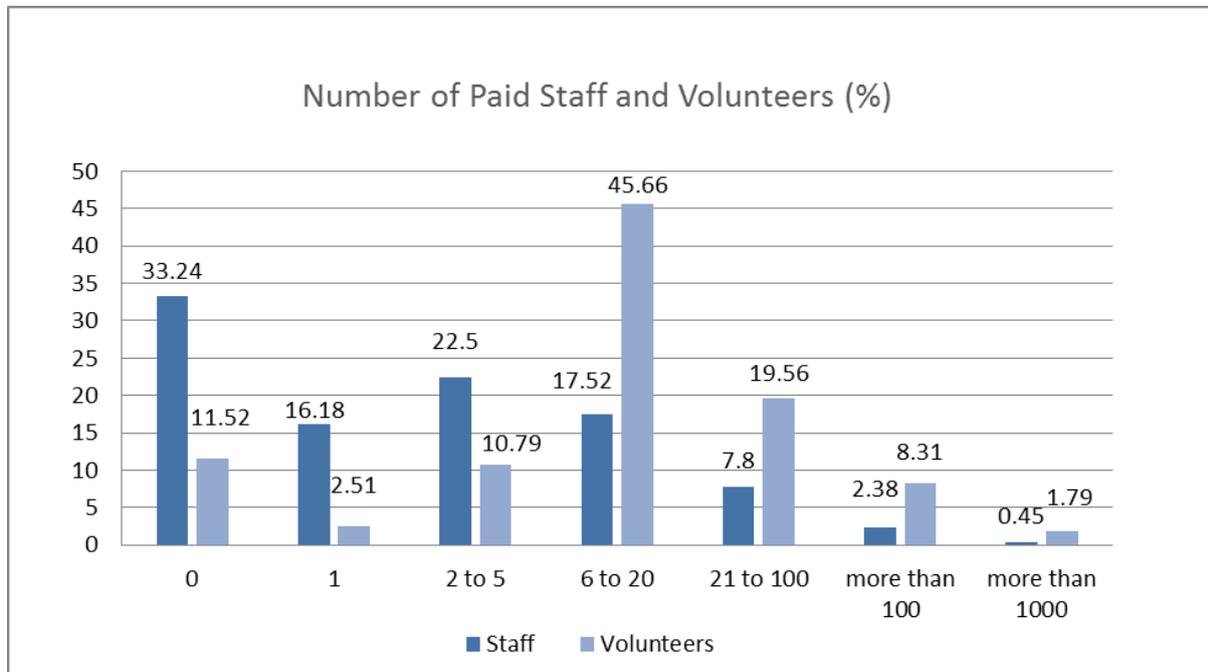


2.c. Income Sources and Staffing

Access to resources is vital for organisations to maintain their activities. They need resources to pursue their goals and maintain their day-to-day operations. Generally, resources allow organisations to hire staff and professionalise (Jordan and Maloney 1997, Binder 2007).

Starting with the question of how organisations finance themselves, our results show that private sources of funding seem to be most relevant for them. The majority of organisations highlight the importance of membership subscriptions/fees. More specifically, 86.35% of the organisations covered consider membership subscriptions as important (combining the options of 'important' and 'very important'). Furthermore, 49.39% of the organisations reported that other income generating activities (i.e. services and sales to members, savings/investments etc.) are important or very important, while 24.93% of the organisations reported that individual donations are an important or very important source of income. In contrast, 81.33% of the organisations reported that public funding from national government is not at all important for their current budget. Similarly, public funding from other levels of government like the local or European levels is mostly not important at all (80.63%). Indirect state funding (i.e. tax credits) is considered not important by more than half of the organisations (56.79%). Consequently, only a minority of organisations consider administrative costs related to applying or receiving public funds as very burdensome (7.48%), while 47.63% of the organisations consider them as not burdensome at all. Over the last five years, the funding situation for most organisations has been stable (75.48%).

Moving to the question of staffing, over half of the organisations have paid staff (66.76%) and 33.24% do not have any paid staff. The average number of paid staff is 21 full time paid staff members and 2 full time external staff. The number of paid staff ranges from 0 to 3000 staff. Over the last five years, the number of staff remained the same for more than half of the organisations covered (58.49%) and for 26% of the organisations the number of staff increased somewhat or increased very much.



Furthermore, most organisations have unpaid volunteers (88.48%). The average number of volunteers is 201 and volunteer numbers range from 0 to 60,000. Over the last five years, most of the organisations have maintained similar levels of volunteers (66.53%).

If organisations have paid staff, what are they doing? Interestingly, more than half of the organisations do not have full-time staff dealing with political and policy-oriented work (54.94%). However, most of the organisations have administrative staff (68.07%). On average three full-time staff deal with political and policy-oriented work, while four full-time positions deal with administrative work. Considering staff dealing with political and/or policy-oriented functions, the numbers range from 0 to 1000 full-time staff. Considering staff dealing with administrative functions, the numbers range from 0 to 400 full-time equivalent staff. Over the last five years, most of the organisations covered have maintained similar numbers of political and/or policy-oriented staff (78.76%) and administrative-oriented staff (73.79%).

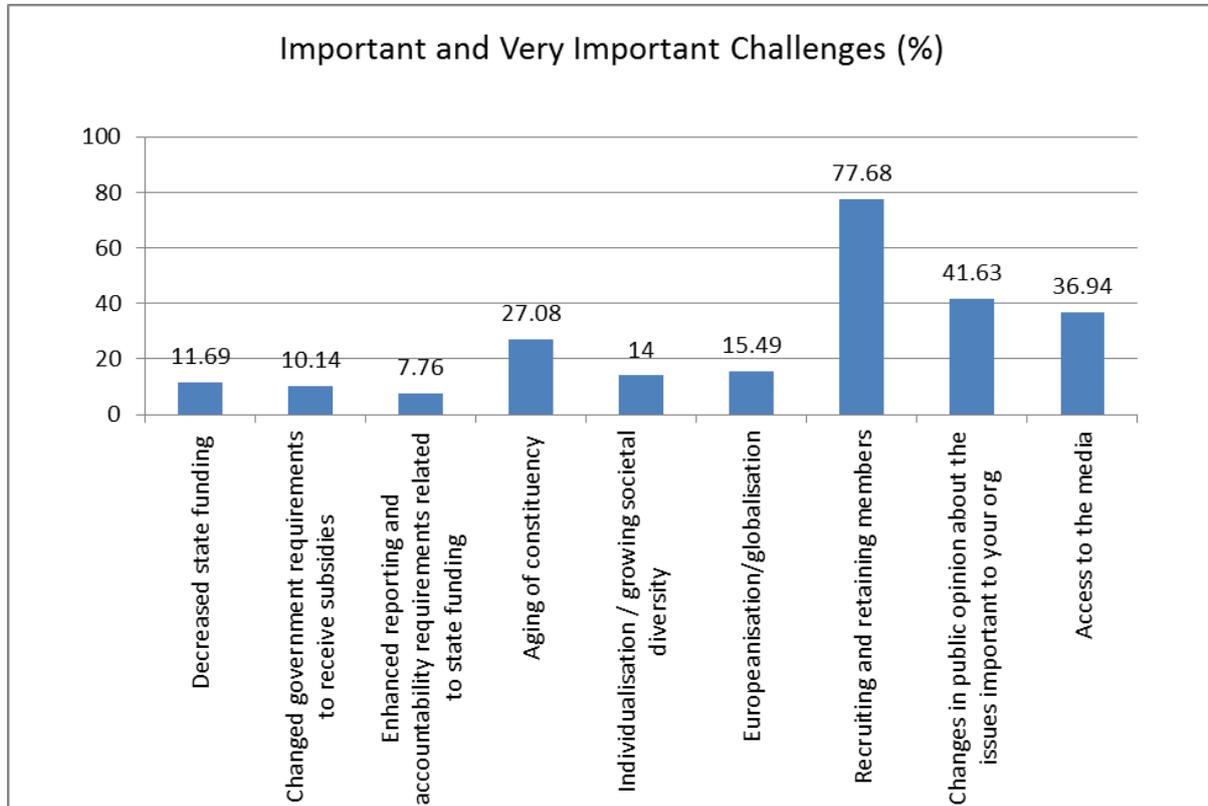
2.d. Core Activities and Challenges

Non-profit organisations are key actors in democracies, representing diverse societal interests. To achieve this, they can use insider or outsider strategies to exercise political influence (Beyers et al. 2008). Insider strategies include activities directed towards public institutions and office holders, while outsider strategies include activities directed towards the media and the public (Weiler and Brändli 2015).

Organisations in the UK tend to engage more in insider strategies than outsider strategies to exercise political influence. Considering outsider strategies, the majority of organisations covered never engage in legal direct action (i.e. authorised strike) and public demonstrations (94.03%) or civil disobedience and illegal direct action (97.96%). The biggest portion of the organisations never publishes paid advertisements in media outlets (63.18 %) and never arranges debates/hold press conferences (48.85%). More than half of the organisations contact reporters, write letters to editors and issue press releases (57.39 %), and 47.51% publish analyses and research reports (percentages are combining options of 'sometimes', 'often' and 'very often'). Considering insider strategies, around 65% of the organisations in the UK participate in public consultations, 55.04% of the organisations contact government officials and 60.68% are encouraging members and others to contact decision-makers (percentages are combining options of 'sometimes', 'often' and 'very often').

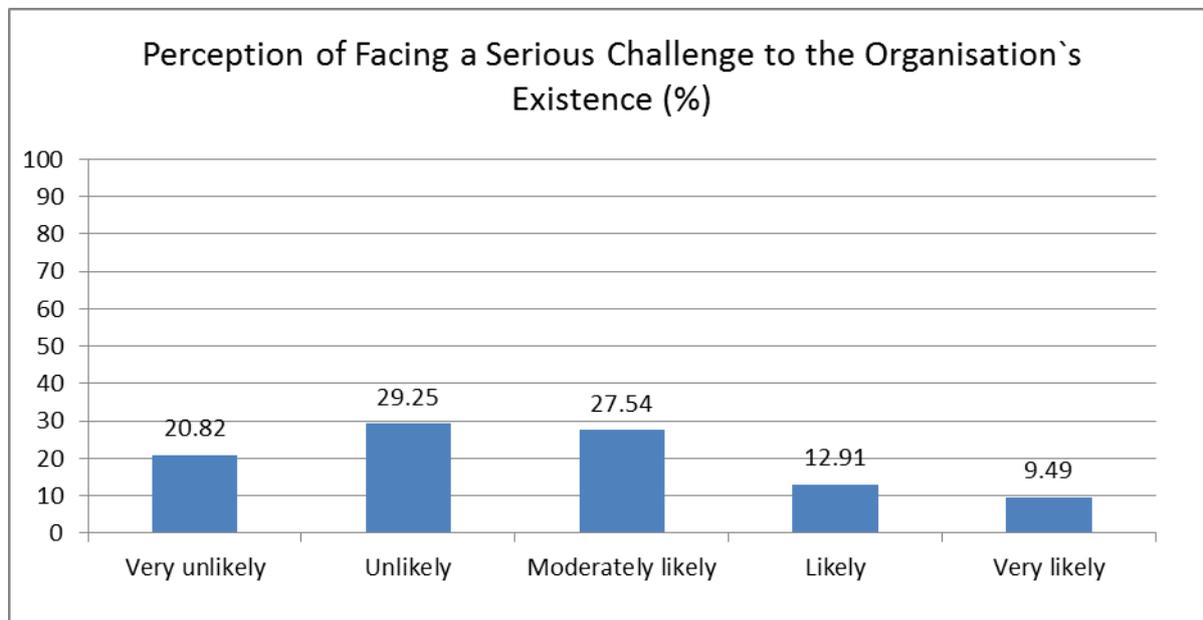
In addition to outsider and insider strategies, organisations may engage in campaigning activities and donate to parties in order to influence the process of selecting office holders (Salamon and Flaherty 1996). Most of the organisations covered in the UK do not engage in electoral and/ or referenda campaigns (91.30%). Moreover, almost all of the organisations never make donations to political parties (99.32%). In terms of cooperation with other actors, around 47% (combining options of 'sometimes', 'often' and 'very often') of the organisations are cooperating with specific interest or advocacy groups and 83.74% of the organisations never cooperate with political parties. Most of the organisations have not changed the way they engage in the political process over the last five years (86.90%).

Moving to the challenges organisations reported, more than half of the organisations (54.28%) indicated that they do not face a competitor with similar goals with whom they compete with for members, funds or other resources, while 45.72% of the organisations indicated that they face a competitor. More specifically, the majority of the organisations identified the recruitment and retention of members as an 'important' or 'very important' challenge (77.68%). A considerable number of organisations (41.63%) identified the changes in the public opinion about the issues of importance to the organisation as an 'important' and 'very important' challenge. In line with earlier findings on the very limited relevance of state funding, most of the organisations reported that their survival is not at all challenged by the decrease of state funding (75.92%), the change of government requirements to receive subsidies (76.90%) and the enhanced reporting and accountability requirements related to state funding (77.29%).



To enhance their survival prospects, organisations have most commonly enhanced the opportunities for their members to participate in their work (60.41%). Moreover, 45.20% of the organisations have broadened the range of issues upon which they focus, 44.64% have changed the services they offer and 43.35% have reinforced investments in the recruitment of members.

When it comes to organisations' expectations regarding their survival in the next five years, half of the organisations covered indicate that it is 'very unlikely' or 'unlikely' that their survival will be threatened within the next five years (50.07%). The other half of the organisations (49.93%) indicates that their organisation could face a serious challenge to its existence (considering this as 'moderately likely', 'likely' or 'very likely'). The following figure shows an overview of the distribution.



2.e. References

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