

Charity CEOs paid least in UK

Northern Ireland charities are the glue that holds our divided society together.

They feed the hungry, house the homeless, promote the rights of those with disabilities, protect the environment and hold a flame up for a better, shared future. Without charity, we would all be the poorer.

Of course the Chief Executives of those complex, flexible, creative organisations should be paid the rate for the job.

Many top management consultants have concluded that running a charity is even more difficult than managing a public sector or private organisation. It's what we call the '*triple bottom line*' – financial success, positive social outcomes and environmental protection. Gone are the days when notions of Victorian philanthropy ruled and the well-heeled volunteered to help the poor with their hand-outs. We live in a modern, commercial, hopefully sustainable world.

Recent research demonstrates that in N. Ireland our 'third sector' (after the state and the private sectors) generates twice the GDP of our counterparts across the water, yet CEO salaries are the lowest of any UK region.

This *Belfast Telegraph* research shows the range of the top 50 charities identified – and the variety of salaries awarded by independent, volunteer trustees; and that point is important – remuneration is decided trustee boards, charged under charity law to be guardians of the organisation's mission; they usually undertake rigorous comparisons, benchmarking and assessments to reach their decisions. Often they link salaries to public sector scales.

Accountability is paramount. Our charities know they need public support, public money and public confidence. That is why we have supported all recent moves for greater transparency in our accounts, and accountability to the new Charity Commission, for which we have argued for three decades.

In return, we also ask for some acknowledgment of the brave, difficult work we do, caring for victims of horrendous abuse, sexual offences, and emotional neglect; for the complexity of our tasks, balancing publicly tendered contracts, with publicly sought donations and privately volunteered time.

We are not politically-appointed public agencies or huge multinational PLCs traded on the stock market. We are charities who uphold society's values.

Nora Smith is the chief officer of CO3, the support body for charity Chief Executives in N. Ireland

