

The Foundation Practice Rating 2025/26

Year Five

Full report

**Assessing diversity, accountability and
transparency in grant-making foundations**

**Friends Provident Foundation
March 2026**



Further information

This is the full report of the Foundation Practice Rating, 2025/26.

The appendices to this report and a summary are available on the FPR website at www.foundationpracticering.org.uk

Published in 2026 by

Friends Provident Foundation
15 Priory Street
York YO1 6ET

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About Friends Provident Foundation

Friends Provident Foundation is an independent charity that makes grants and uses its endowment towards a fair and sustainable economic system that serves people and planet. We connect, fund, support and invest in new thinking to shape a future economy that works for all. Since 2004, we've pioneered the creation of a fair economy for a better world. Already, we've helped improve access to financial services for people who were once excluded, and supported the development of resilient economic communities across the UK.

We're a catalyst for wider change, making an impact through continuous experimentation and shared learning. And we do all we can to embody the change we want to see. We invest in great social enterprises, and use our money in line with our values. Tomorrow, we'll continue to fund more new thinking, connect new ideas, invest our capital in line with our aims and values, and create better systems so that in the future the economy will serve both people and planet.

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Friends Provident Foundation registered charity number: 1087053

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Acknowledgements

The Foundation Practice Rating requires considerable collaboration by many people and organisations. We would like to thank:

- the foundations whose financial support enables this work. The Funders Group consists of the following foundations: City Bridge Foundation, Friends Provident Foundation, The Indigo Trust, John Ellerman Foundation, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and The Robertson Trust. We thank the trustees and staff that have supported this collaborative effort;
- various membership bodies which provide support in various ways. The Association of Charitable Foundations and UK Community Foundations are two of them;
- the researchers, who are in the UK, India, Uganda and Kenya, and all bring relevant expertise and diligence;
- the designer and editor who help to produce the report, data visualisations and explanatory graphics; and
- the press and journalists who help to bring the findings to a wider audience.

Foreword

This report marks the fifth year of assessment, analysis and discussion of foundation governance, management and practice relating to diversity, accountability and transparency in the UK. The Foundation Practice Rating once again offers unique insights into how we fund – not only what we give, but how we give it. I am pleased to report that overall performance continues to improve, with statistically significant gains across all three domains.

We are particularly encouraged by the progress made in diversity practice and disclosure. In previous years, only one foundation achieved an A rating in this domain; this year, three foundations have reached that standard. It is important to note that our diversity criteria include accessibility considerations, ensuring that information and materials are available to the widest possible range of applicants.

As in earlier years, community foundations have performed above the cohort average and represent two of the three foundations receiving top marks across all domains. Over five years of research, we have seen the breadth of ways in which community foundations respond to local needs while achieving operational excellence – often with fewer resources than their private counterparts. This report highlights many examples of the good practice they continue to model.

A notable pattern emerging this year is the number of foundations that paused or suspended grant-making during the assessment period. While temporary pauses during periods of review or transition are not new, the proportion doing so in this stratified random sample appears higher than in previous years. This trend sits alongside anecdotal reports of more funders spending out their capital and closing. From the perspective of applicants – the lens through which the FPR is designed – a shrinking pool of available funding sources risks compounding the pressures already faced by voluntary sector organisations.

This year has also seen renewed debate about the principle of transparency, both among FPR funders and across the wider sector. The context in which foundations operate has shifted significantly since we first consulted on the three domains. Funders supporting social justice, democracy, climate, geopolitical and other charitable causes have increasingly been targeted for their work. In some cases, this has raised concerns about staff and trustee safety, and prompted questions about whether public commitments to diversity and transparency may retreat in response.

At Friends Provident Foundation, and among the funders supporting the FPR, our commitment to these values remains firm. We recognise that the ability to withdraw from public scrutiny is itself a form of privilege. Many of those we support – and many of our own leaders of colour – cannot step back from their identities or the risks they face. We

stand in solidarity with them and with all those working to build a fairer and more just society.

Looking ahead, we have an ambitious programme of work planned for the coming year. First, we will undertake a full review of the FPR criteria to ensure they continue to reflect the realities of foundation practice and anticipate emerging challenges. Second, we are raising funds to support an independent evaluation of the FPR. With five years of data now available, we believe the time is right to assess the impact the initiative has had on practice across the sector.

We hope you find this year's report – and its findings – both interesting and useful as you plan your work for 2026.

Danielle Walker Palmour
Director, Friends Provident Foundation
March 2026

Executive summary

About the Foundation Practice Rating and this report

This is the fifth year of the **Foundation Practice Rating (FPR)**. It is an objective assessment of UK-based charitable grant-making foundations.* It looks at foundations' practices in three important and interlinked domains: **diversity, accountability and transparency**. It runs and publishes annually, in order to incentivise foundations to improve their practices. The first set of results was published in March 2022, based on data gathered in autumn 2021 (September–December), and then on an annual cycle.

This report covers the ratings from Year Five, and is based on data gathered during August and September 2025. It describes how the FPR works and why, the findings from Year Five, and comparisons with previous years. The report is designed to be self-standing, so, as with the previous reports, it explains for new readers the development of the rating and the principles by which it operates.

In Year Five, the FPR operated as it did in previous years, as far as possible. Whereas in Year Four the sampling frame (the list from which the included foundations were randomly selected) had to be changed, no such change was required this year.

The main body of this report comprises the background to the FPR, and the Year Five results and analysis: all details about the research method are in Appendix A.

The Foundation Practice Rating is a groundbreaking initiative which assesses grant-making charitable foundations on their diversity, accountability and transparency. It is believed to be unlike anything else in the foundation sector in any country, in that foundations cannot opt out of being assessed: it is free of selection bias. The FPR therefore gives a more representative view of the performance of the sector than most analyses of funders. It uses only publicly available information, and the included foundations have no influence over the findings.

* In fact, one non-charitable grant-making foundation is included: the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust. This is because it contributes funding to the FPR, i.e. it is in the Funders Group. The research and analysis of JRRT is exactly the same as for the charitable foundations, including for its investment policy.

Each year, the FPR assesses 100 UK-based charitable grant-making foundations. Each year's cohort* comprises:

- the foundations funding this work (eight of them this year). They are called 'the Funders Group';[†]
- the five largest UK foundations by giving budget; and
- a random sample of other grant-making foundations, including community foundations. This random sample was taken from the data published by UK Grantmaking,[‡] specifically the organisations which it classifies as 'grant-makers', which are active, give over £1.17 million per year[§] and are not benevolent funds.

By chance, this year's cohort has nine foundations in Scotland, two in Northern Ireland, and the rest in England. None is in Wales.

Each included foundation is assigned a rating (of A, B, C or D: A is top) on each of the three 'domains' of diversity, accountability and transparency, and also given an overall rating.

This project was initiated by Friends Provident Foundation. The research and assessment are carried out each year by Giving Evidence, a consultancy specialised in the production and use of rigorous evidence to guide effective charitable giving.

The FPR's research involves answering 101 questions about each of those 100 foundations. Fifty-six of these questions are 'criteria' which contribute to the foundation's score and rating. The others are either information used in the process (e.g. the web address used), or where the team is testing questions on which they may add scoring criteria in future: these latter come up through the consultation process (discussed later).

So that is over 10,000 data points. In fact, the FPR gathers many more data points than this. First, several criteria have multiple parts so multiple data points (e.g. which of a list of five communications channels the foundation uses). Each is scored by two researchers – so that is >20,000 – and there is a moderated answer – so that is 30,000. Plus sometimes moderation involves a third researcher, and then debate between researchers. Furthermore, foundations are given their data and invited to 'appeal' it, which some do, prompting further research and decisions. So the FPR probably

* Though the set of foundations assessed in each year is referred to as that year's 'cohort', the FPR is not a cohort study. Rather, it is a repeated cross-sectional study: a fresh cohort being drawn each year. A repeated cross-sectional study is the correct method for assessing population-level changes, which is one of the FPR's aims. This method is very similar to that used in political polling. This article explains why the method is robust:

www.foundationpracticering.org.uk/fpr-sampling

† Friends Provident Foundation; John Ellerman Foundation; Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust; Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust; Paul Hamlyn Foundation; The Indigo Trust; The Robertson Trust; City Bridge Foundation.

‡ www.ukgrantmaking.org

§ This is the figure from last year (£1 million) increased to reflect UK inflation.

generates over 33,000 data points each year. The FPR has now run for five years, so there are now over 170,000 data points. This report contains a graph (Figure 9) showing findings over the full period: that summarises most of them.

In addition to the selected cohort, any foundation can ‘opt in’ to be assessed. This option was introduced in response to demand. These foundations are researched in the same way as the main cohort of 100, but reported separately. This year, five foundations opted in.

A fresh sample of foundations is drawn each year, so the set of assessed foundations changes each year. In Year Five, 61 foundations were assessed for the first time. Of the other 39 foundations reviewed this year, 15 had been assessed in just one previous year, nine in two previous years, eight in three previous years, and seven had been assessed in all four previous years. Year Four saw a major change, because the sampling frame (the list from which the research team drew the cohort) had to be changed. In Years One to Three the FPR had used the annual Foundation Giving Trends report published by ACF (‘the ACF list’), but that was discontinued, and so from Year Four onward the research team has used data from UK Grantmaking. This change is detailed in last year’s report.

The FPR uses only publicly available information because this is all that is visible to outsiders such as prospective applicants for grants or work: just as astronomers have to infer what is happening inside a distant star based only on the light that emanates from it, outsiders can only infer how a foundation works and what it values from publications and statements that emerge from it. The criteria are determined as objectively as possible, drawing where possible on other rating systems in the voluntary sector and beyond. Each year the research team runs a public consultation to inform the criteria and process. That is described in detail in Appendix A.

The method and criteria used in Year Five were deliberately very similar to those in previous years, with only a few minor changes since last year.

Because of the unavoidable change in sampling frame between Years Three and Four, care is needed to interpret the time-series of results. That change of sampling frame is marked on all relevant graphs, and, where possible, results are shown for a more comparable set alongside results for the full cohort.

Headline findings

Foundation practices have improved. This year saw the highest number of overall A grades to date. Hitherto, the highest was 11, whereas this year, 12 foundations achieved that. Also, three foundations achieved a clean sweep – A grades in all three domains: hitherto only one foundation had achieved that. (The one which achieved it before was not in the cohort this year, so these are all additions.) The number of foundations scoring D on all three domains dropped, from 12 last year to seven this year.

The researchers noticed this qualitatively. For instance, one commented that ‘many more foundations have now properly listed their grant making procedures compared to the early years of the FPR. Quite refreshing to see.’

In Year Five, **every criterion was achieved by at least one foundation** in the cohort. This was also true in previous years. This shows that **the FPR is not requiring anything impossible**. Appendix D lists each criterion and, for each, a foundation which achieves it. Foundations can use that to find strong practice to emulate.

Furthermore, there is now evidence of a change in practices (scores) since the FPR began. Though the change in numerical score year-on-year is sometimes not statistically significant (it wasn’t this year), the change since the FPR began is statistically significant, i.e. **it can confidently be stated that there is a real change since the FPR began**.

The results for this year’s cohort are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Summary of ratings in Year Five (2025/26)



The 12 foundations which achieved A overall this year are:

City Bridge Foundation	These are currently in the Funders Group
Friends Provident Foundation	
John Ellerman Foundation	
Paul Hamlyn Foundation	
The Robertson Trust	
Wellcome	The largest foundation in the UK (by far) which has been included and achieved A every year.
Barnwood Trust	
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation	Was previously in the Funders Group
Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales	
Mission 44 *	
Cheshire Community Foundation *	Community foundations
Wiltshire and Swindon Community Foundation *	

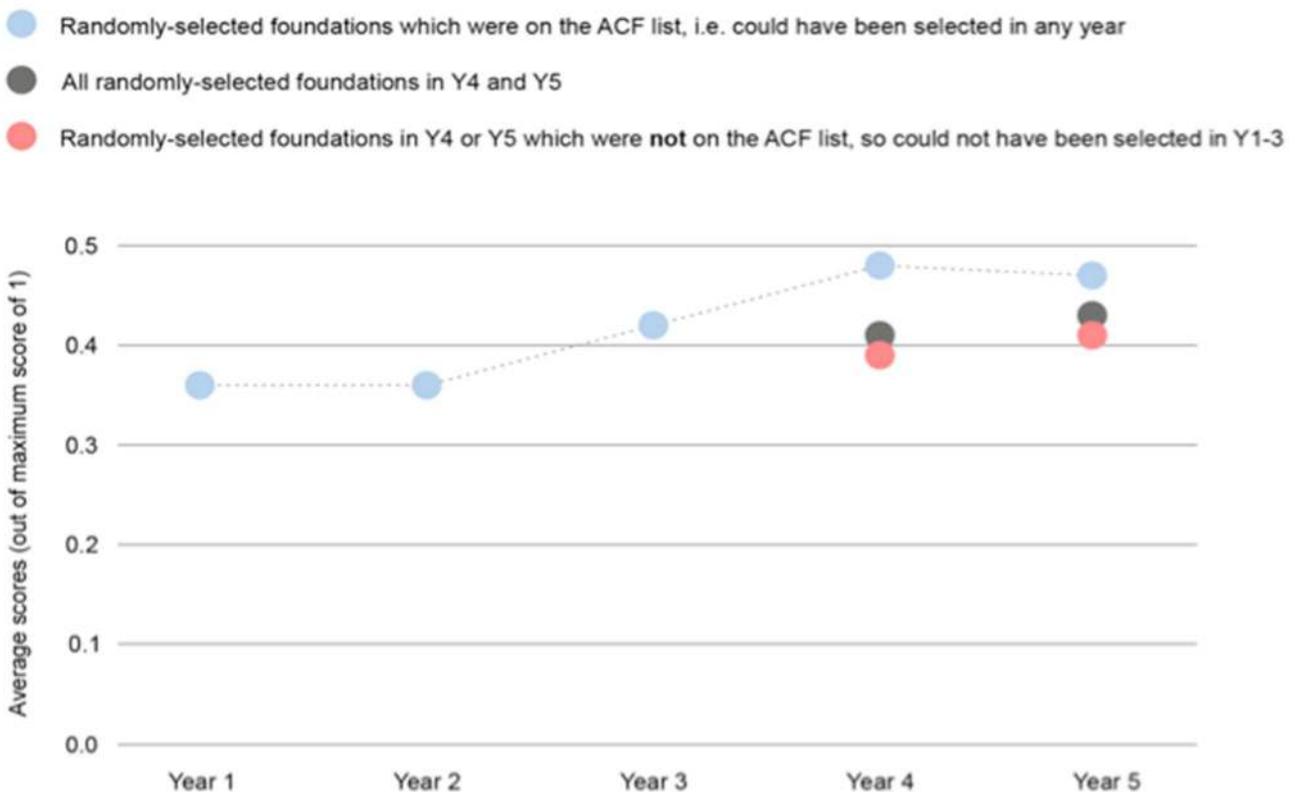
* Mission 44 and both community foundations achieved A in all three domains, so A(AAA) overall. Congratulations to them.

In interpreting the changes in results from one year to the next, attention must be paid to two factors. First, the FPR draws a fresh cohort every year: it is a repeated cross-sectional study, and therefore the same foundations are not analysed each year. Though the sample size is pretty large (100), it is conceivable that, by random chance, some years will have a higher-performing cohort and other years will have a lower-performing cohort. Second, between Years Three and Four, there was an unavoidable change of sampling frame (the list from which most of the cohort is drawn). In short, for the FPR's first three years, the cohort was drawn mainly from the list of foundations in the annual Foundations Giving Trends report published by ACF ('the ACF list'). That report discontinued after Year Three and was replaced by UK Grantmaking, created by 360Giving, so, since Year Four, the FPR's cohort has been drawn mainly from (the

relevant part of) that instead. That set of foundations ('UK Grantmaking') is materially different from the ACF list: it includes many smaller foundations.

To make a fair comparison over time, the researchers look at foundations which were chosen randomly from the ACF list (i.e. foundations which could have been selected in any year. The ACF list did not include community foundations), and their numerical scores over time. As shown in Figure 2, the changes *since last year* are not statistically significant for either the cohort overall or the ACF list foundations or the new foundations, but there is statistically significant change *since Year One*. This also happened last year: the performance of the 'new' foundations (on the UK Grantmaking list but not on the ACF list, i.e. which could not have been assessed previously) is lower and has pulled downwards the performance of the Year Five cohort overall.

Figure 2: Overall scores in each year of the FPR, showing the effect of the set of foundations newly included because of the change of sampling frame between Years Three and Four (randomly selected non-community foundations)



In all three FPR domains, the performance of these ‘newly in-scope’ foundations is lower than that of the foundations which were on the ACF list, i.e. foundations which could have been assessed in previous years. This was also the case in Year Four.

Other main findings:

- **The improvement in performance since the FPR began is material** and statistically significant.*
- As in previous years, **the foundations scoring A overall are diverse in size and structure**. As in previous years, they include the largest foundation (Wellcome, formerly called Wellcome Trust), a mid-size one (Barnwood Trust) and at least one with few staff, such as John Ellerman Foundation, which has six. They include some endowed foundations and some community foundations, one founded over 800 years ago (City Bridge Foundation) and a much younger one (Mission 44, founded by racing driver Lewis Hamilton).
- **Financial size does not predict high rating**. Some small foundations score well, and some large ones score relatively poorly: two of the largest foundations (by giving budget) scored C overall, and, for the first time, one of the largest five scored D overall.
- In other words, **the FPR is not a tacit measure of a foundation’s size**.
- **Diversity remains the weakest domain**. This is consistent with all previous years. That said, scores here have improved. Whereas only one foundation had ever previously achieved A on diversity, three did so this year; the number of foundations scoring zero in diversity fell – from 13 last year to five this year; and most of the criteria on which average scores climbed the most were in diversity. However, diversity was the sole domain on which any foundation scored zero.
- **A foundation’s ratings can vary quite markedly on the various domains**. Some foundations get A on one domain but only C or D on another. This also happened in each previous year.
- **Number of staff**. Ratings of D overall are unique to foundations with 10 or fewer staff – as happened last year.
- **Number of trustees**. Ratings of D overall are concentrated in foundations with 10 or fewer trustees; and only one foundation with 10 or more trustees scored D overall (the same pattern as in Years Three and Four).†
- **Community foundations continue to outperform the broader sector**. This year, all seven included scored A or B overall. By Year Three, there were enough

* This refers to the average numerical scores of the randomly selected foundations which were on the ACF list, i.e. non-community foundations which could have been selected in any of the FPR’s five years.

† There are 21 of the 100 foundations in the cohort which have 10 or more trustees. So if D ratings were equally spread, four foundations with 10 or more trustees might score D.

data for the research team to be confident that this is statistically robust, and this year it remained so.*

- **Still, many foundations have no website.** As in Year Four, this year, 21 of the cohort had no website (vs 13 in Year Three and 22 in Year Two, none of them community foundations). Most striking among these is CH Foundation, the fifth largest funder by giving budget.† Having no website is a strong predictor of poor FPR performance: over five years, only one foundation without a website has ever scored above D overall: that was this year.
- **The paucity of foundations' websites** was again striking. Some foundations have overly cluttered or limited websites that impede finding basic information. This matters because the website is often how potential applicants view a foundation, as well as how others see the sector. None of the seven foundations rated D on all three domains had a website.
- **Few foundations publish quantitative analysis of their own effectiveness** (as opposed to just where their grants go or what grantees achieve). Eleven were scored as publishing systematic feedback from grantees and/or applicants, though only four were scored as publishing analysis of their own effectiveness. Foundations could usefully do and publish more to investigate their own impact and how to improve it: they and the field could probably learn considerably from this.

Collectively, the criteria on which the 100 included foundations scored best were:

- whether the foundation gave any information on who or what it has funded (99% did so). This criterion has always been one of the highest scoring in the FPR;
- for approximately what percentage of the foundation's funding is information given on who makes the funding decisions (84% had this information). This criterion was always one of the highest scoring in the FPR except for Year One;
- whether the foundation publishes any eligibility criteria for what it funds; that is, who as a potential recipient would be eligible for a particular grant (82% had this information). This criterion was always one of the highest scoring in the FPR except for Year One;
- whether the foundation publishes on its website who its staff are (82% of those foundations that had staff did so). This criterion was always one of the highest scoring in the FPR;
- for approximately what percentage of all funding were eligibility criteria presented (this information was available for 80% of foundations). This was one of the top scoring criteria in Year Four as well, but not in any year before that.

* The difference is almost comically robust. On t-tests comparing the scores of community foundations vs others on overall scores, and scores on each of the three domains, the p values (reminder: anything below 5% is statistically significant) are about 0.001%. One of them is zero: Excel doesn't have enough space to show it precisely!

† There are entities called 'CH Foundation' in various other countries. This report refers to the UK charity, registered number 1156222.

Conversely, they collectively scored worst on the following criteria:

- publishing information about what the foundation is doing differently as a consequence of analysis of its own effectiveness. This information was published by just one of 100 foundations assessed. This was among the lowest scoring criteria in Years Three and Four as well;
- publishing any analysis of its own effectiveness: only four of 100 foundations did this. This was a low-scoring criterion in Year Four as well;
- having a plan with numerical targets to improve the diversity of trustees or board members (5.3% of available points scored, up from just 2% in Year Four);
- publishing any actions (however minimal) foundations will take to address the feedback they received from grant seekers and/or grantees: just eight foundations did so. This criterion has never before scored among the lowest;
- having a plan to improve the diversity of staff with numerical targets (9% of possible points scored, up from 4% in Year Four).

1. Recap of the background to the FPR

Charitable foundations have historically not been very diverse. Recent survey research published in 2025 found that trustees of foundations in England and Wales are predominantly male (61%), aged 65+ (65%), retired (54%, against 22% in the population) and white (94%, against 82% in the population).¹ They are less likely to be disabled than is the general population (85% vs 76%), more likely to have high household income and twice as likely to have a degree or post-school qualification as the general population (68% vs 34%).

This shows little change from 2017, at least on gender, age² and ethnicity.³

Clearly, 2025 has seen assaults on attempts by some organisations and in some countries to increase their diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). The funders behind the FPR continue to believe in the importance of these issues – plus transparency and accountability, which the FPR also assesses.

As do others. For instance, the Python Software Foundation in the US turned down a major grant – of \$1.5 million, which is about a third of its revenue – from the US National Science Foundation because that would have required it to drop all DEI work.⁴

We continue to think that diversity, accountability and transparency matter, for various reasons. One is that plenty of research shows that less diverse groups make less good decisions than more diverse groups.⁵ Foundations often seek to support less advantaged people, yet the data above show that they are mainly not from those groups, so may not fully understand the issues they seek to ameliorate. Furthermore, homogeneity within foundation staff teams could prevent them from finding, recognising or funding the best work and organisations. Equally, if foundations' materials and processes are not accessible to diverse groups, the foundation will be unlikely to reach these groups. This is why the FPR's diversity 'domain' includes foundations' accessibility.

Another is that foundations are in effect supported by the taxpayer, through various tax breaks (e.g. not paying Corporation Tax on retained profit). However, foundations lack accountability because, apart from regulators, most foundations are accountable only to their boards, which do not always reflect the population as a whole or the communities they serve.⁶

Thirdly, this weak accountability can reduce the potential for learning and improvement. Charities and non-profits seeking or receiving funding are often unwilling to tell a foundation how they really feel about its practices, even if things have gone wrong, or if there are important lessons for a foundation. Non-profits can understandably worry that

giving feedback could impair their relationship with a foundation, jeopardising future funding, and even, thereby, the viability of their organisation.

Lack of transparency about what foundations do can leave charities and individuals in the dark about how foundations work – meaning that dealing with foundations can be unnecessarily costly, which wastes scarce resources. Over 300 UK funders (including public sector funders) publish their grant data in an accessible format through 360 Giving,⁷ and there are no common standards for reporting on grants, investment holdings or other activities, other than the regulatory standards. This has been addressed at various times, most recently by the Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF) as part of its Stronger Foundations initiative.⁸

At the heart of these issues is power – philanthropic funders and foundations tend to be powerful in the relationships in which they operate. Organisations seeking funds are rarely able to question the legitimacy or practices of the funder.

Given that there is no market mechanism to force the accountability of charitable foundations, a group of foundations came together to create the Foundation Practice Rating to assess themselves and encourage reflection and improvements across the sector.

The genesis of this project

The Foundation Practice Rating was launched in mid 2021. Ten UK foundations recognised the importance of diversity, accountability and transparency for foundations, and wanted to support the trust and foundation sector to improve on them, encouraging and celebrating examples of good practice, and challenging current practices where necessary. They were the FPR's initial funders. Since then, some have joined and others have left.*

These funders commissioned Giving Evidence to develop and implement a system for rating UK foundations on diversity, accountability and transparency. The result is the FPR's objective third-party assessment of foundations. The FPR uses a technique often used to increase accountability amongst corporates: a published rating, created using only publicly available information. It draws on other ratings and indices, such as the Social Mobility Employer Index.⁹

This report describes how the FPR was developed and implemented, its Year Five results, and some patterns of changes from previous years.

* One of the foundations that funded the FPR in its first three years (and therefore automatically included in the cohort for those years) was randomly selected for inclusion in the Year Four cohort: Lankelly Chase.

The foundations assessed in Year Five

The main cohort

The 100 foundations assessed in the Year Five main cohort collectively had:

- net assets of £47.3 billion (compared to £48.6 billion in Year Four, £61.6 billion in Year Three and £68.1 billion in Year Two);
- annual giving of £2.92 billion (compared to £2.25 billion in Year Four, £2.0 billion in Year Three and £1.8 billion in Year Two); and
- an average pay-out rate (i.e. the amount given annually as a proportion of assets) of 6.1%. (This has increased in each of the last four years. It was 4.6% in Year Four, 3.2% in Year Three and 2.6% in Year Two).*

This last point is worth noting. There is some clamour in the sector for foundations to each pay out at least 5% of their net assets each year: this cohort overall exceeds that. Total net assets have shrunk, even in nominal terms. Perhaps these factors are related, and/or relate to more foundations spending down. Equally, there was a big drop in net assets after Year Three, when the FPR switched to a sampling frame with a larger number of smaller foundations.

Seven foundations have been included in all five years:

- two large foundations that were in the top five by giving budget in each year so included automatically (e.g. Wellcome, the UK's largest foundation);
- four who have consistently been part of the Funders Group from Year One;† and
- one (The Indigo Trust) that was randomly selected for Year One and then joined the Funders Group.

This is the first year for which no randomly selected foundation has been included in every previous year (last year there was one).

Overall, in Year Five, 13 foundations were automatically included (by being either amongst the five largest in the land or in the Funders Group), meaning that 87 were selected randomly. Of the random ones, 28 had been included by random chance in at least one previous year (13 were included in just one previous year, nine in two previous years and six in three previous years).

* This figure is the sum of the giving budgets of all the included foundations divided by the sum of their net assets. It is therefore the average across the whole cohort, and does not represent (say) the modal foundation.

† Paul Hamlyn Foundation, John Ellerman Foundation, Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, Friends Provident Foundation.

In total over its five years, the FPR has assessed 363 foundations* at least once.

Appendix F sets out the composition of the cohort each year, indicating which foundations were included in more than one year.

Figure 3: Composition of the Year Five cohort (of 100 foundations)

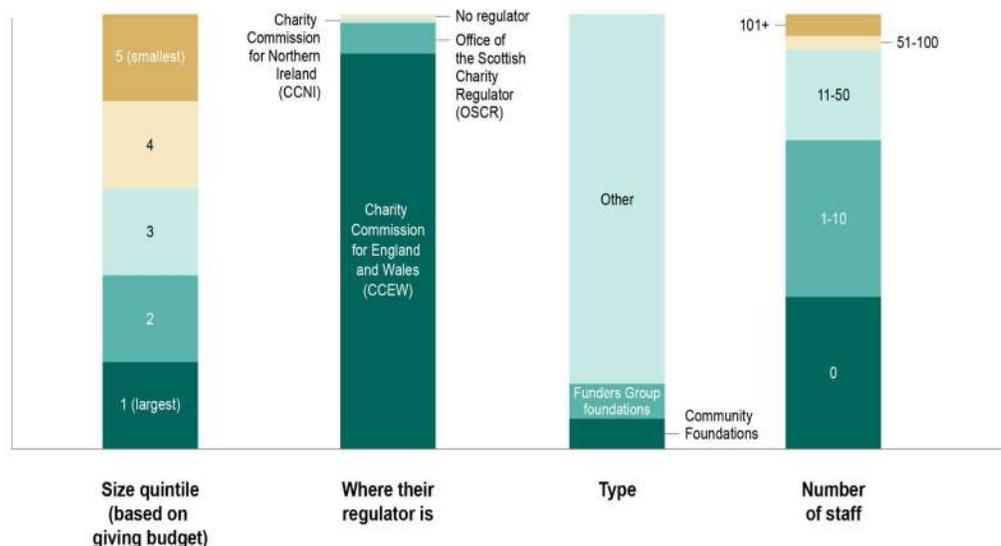
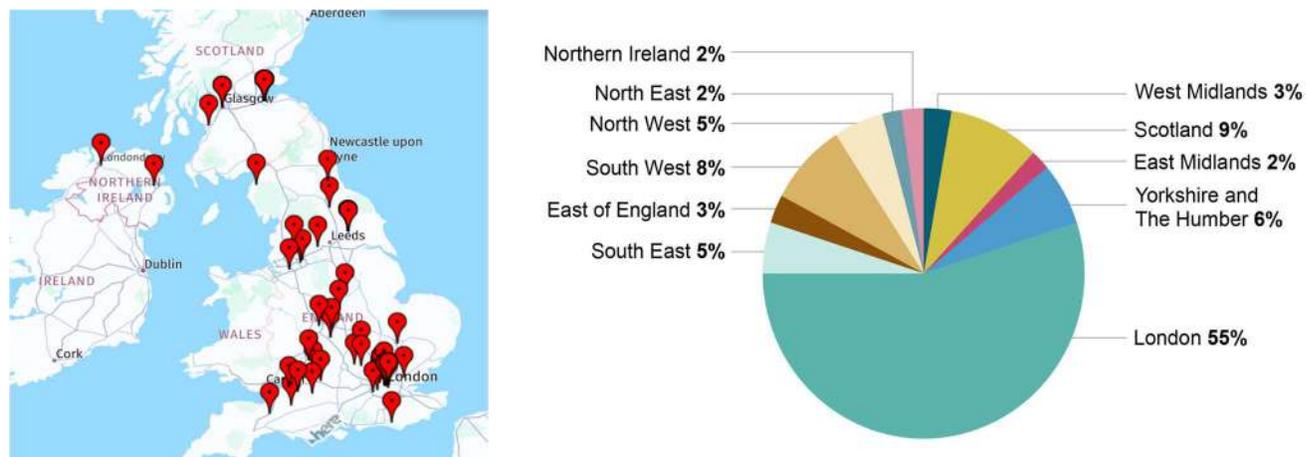


Figure 4 show the location of the headquarters of the Year Five foundations. As in previous years, London was the most common location for foundations included (55 compared with 59 in Year Four). Nine are headquartered in Scotland (eight in Year Four), two in Northern Ireland (Year Four had one), and none in Wales (Year Four also had none, Year Three had one).

* This is the cumulative total up to Year Four, of 302, plus 61 that were entirely new this year.

Figure 4: Location of the foundations in the Year Five cohort

The foundations which opted in

Some foundations requested to be assessed: normally in order to aid their understanding of where their practice could improve. In response to these requests after Year One, the FPR started in Year Two to allow any UK-based foundation to 'opt in': they pay a small fee to cover the research and analysis work, and are assessed in exactly the same way as the main cohort of 100 foundations.

Obviously, foundations which opt in are likely to be unusually motivated to have good practices. Therefore the results for 'opt-in foundations' are reported separately from the results of the main cohort in order to avoid biasing the data set. If a foundation which wants to opt in happens to be randomly selected into the main cohort, then it stays in the main cohort (in order to preserve the randomness), does not pay, and its results are reported in those of the main cohort.

This year, five foundations opted in: The Mercers' Charitable Foundation (which opted in last year), Leathersellers' Foundation, Cloudesley, Cripplegate Foundation and the Wimbledon Foundation.

We report in this document the results for opt-in foundations, but do not compare them or analyse them as a set because they are self-selecting.

All data in this report refer to the main cohort of 100 foundations (or subsets of it, such as the Funders Group or community foundations) unless otherwise stated.

Changes to the FPR's method in Year Five

The FPR method is described in detail in Appendix A. The method is deliberately changed as little as possible from year to year, to enable year-on-year comparisons, and to avoid 'chopping and changing' and confusion for the foundation sector.

In Year Five, the same method and data sources were used for selecting the cohort as in Year Four (which unavoidably had to change from Year Three and before).

There were two minor changes to criteria. First, the research team tightened up what was meant by a trustee recruitment policy.¹⁰ They felt they were perhaps overly generous in previous years, allowing the very brief statements in some foundations' annual reports, which talk mainly about how new trustees are inducted. It is unlikely that this affected any foundation's grades. Second, foundations which operate globally / internationally were exempted from publishing in Welsh, since they cannot be expected to publish in every official language of all their countries.* This change may have benefited some foundations.

One issue which arose this year, which has not been seen before, was various foundations[†] being closed for applications – apparently temporarily. This phenomenon is now so common that there is 'The List' which tracks them.[‡] Foundations being closed – even if temporarily – is part of applicants' experience, and so that was reflected: those foundations were assessed in the FPR's normal timeframe, and they were marked as not accepting applications if that was the case at the time of assessment. It is possible that that may be atypical for that particular foundation.

In some years non-scoring questions were added in response to feedback in the annual consultation. This year, none was added.

* Re. publishing in Welsh: the King Charles III Charitable Fund does not publish in Welsh, despite having been founded and 'patroned' for years by the then Prince of Wales.

† One (Burdett Trust for Nursing) said on its website that it was closed for the whole of 2025 for a strategic review; City Bridge Foundation was not taking applications when it was assessed in August / September before a new 'funding programme' opened; John Lyon's Charity was closed to new applications as it moved to a new portal; and the Access to Justice Foundation appeared to also be not taking applications. For completeness, BBC Children in Need was closed when researchers first looked but said that it was re-opening two weeks later – which was still within the data-collection period – so its assessment was delayed for those two weeks. Other foundations which were closed during this research included Lloyds Bank Foundation, and Asda Foundation.

‡ Jo J, LinkedIn. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jo-j-79296419a_the-list-changes-to-trust-and-foundations-activity-7242789609200390144-e2c1

2. Results (ratings) for individual foundations

Figure 5 sets out the ratings for each included foundation in Year Five, by domain and overall. It presents the Funders Group first, then the five largest foundations by giving budget, then the set of randomly selected foundations other than community foundations, and then the set of randomly selected community foundations.

Figure 5: Ratings of foundations assessed in Year Five in the main cohort

Foundation	Diversity	Accountability	Transparency	Overall rating
Funders group				
City Bridge Foundation	B	A	A	A
Friends Provident Charitable Foundation	B	B	A	A
The Indigo Trust	B	B	A	B
John Ellerman Foundation	B	A	A	A
Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust	C	B	A	B
Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust	B	B	A	B
Paul Hamlyn Foundation	B	A	A	A
The Robertson Trust	B	B	A	A
Largest five foundations by giving budget				
CH Foundation (UK)	D	D	D	D

Foundation	Diversity	Accountability	Transparency	Overall rating
Children's Investment Fund Foundation (UK)	C	B	A	B
Quadrature Climate Foundation	D	C	A	C
UBS Optimus Foundation UK	D	D	A	C
Wellcome	B	A	A	A
Randomly selected foundations other than community foundations				
A B Charitable Trust	C	B	A	B
Access to Justice Foundation	C	B	A	B
Aim Foundation	D	B	A	C
Asda Foundation	C	C	B	B
Baily Thomas Charitable Fund	C	C	A	B
Band Aid Charitable Trust	D	D	C	D
Bank of Scotland Foundation	C	C	A	B
Barnwood Trust	B	A	A	A
BBC Children in Need	C	B	A	B
Becht Foundation	D	B	B	C
Burdett Trust for Nursing	D	C	C	C
Caretech Charitable Foundation	B	B	A	B
Carpenters Company Charitable Trust	C	D	B	C
Charles Wolfson Charitable Trust	D	D	C	D
Clore Duffield Foundation	D	B	A	C

Foundation	Diversity	Accountability	Transparency	Overall rating
Corporation of Trinity House of Deptford Strond	C	B	B	C
CRIS Cancer Foundation	D	D	C	C
Derbyshire Environmental Trust Limited	C	D	C	C
Developing Healthy Communities (DHC) Limited	D	C	A	C
Disrupt Foundation	C	D	B	C
Dulwich Estate	D	C	A	C
Enthuse Charitable Trust	C	B	C	C
Entindale Limited	D	D	C	D
Esmée Fairbairn Foundation	B	A	A	A
Galilee Foundation	D	C	A	C
Global Greengrants Fund UK	C	B	A	B
Guarantors of Brain	D	C	A	C
Hampton Fuel Allotment	C	A	A	B
Hiscox Foundation	D	D	B	C
Hospital Saturday Fund	C	D	A	C
Hunter Foundation	D	D	C	C
Jamma International	D	D	D	D
Jerusalem Foundation	C	D	C	C
John Armitage Charitable Trust	C	C	B	C

Foundation	Diversity	Accountability	Transparency	Overall rating
The John Lewis Partnership Foundation	C	C	A	C
John Lyon's Charity	C	B	A	B
John Swire 1989 Charitable Trust	D	C	C	D
Kahal Chassidim Bobov	D	D	C	D
King Charles III Charitable Fund	C	B	A	B
Lempriere Pringle 2015	D	D	C	D
Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales	B	A	A	A
Lonia Limited	D	C	D	D
LTPP	D	D	C	D
Lucille Foundation	C	D	A	C
Manoukian Charitable Foundation	D	D	D	D
Maurice and Vivienne Wohl Philanthropic Foundation	C	C	A	B
Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation	C	C	A	B
Melow Charitable Trust	D	D	C	D
Millennium Trust	D	D	D	D
Mission 44	A	A	A	A
Montpelier Foundation Limited	C	B	B	B
Muslim Hands	C	C	B	C
National Assistance Fund	D	D	C	D

Foundation	Diversity	Accountability	Transparency	Overall rating
Nisbet Trust	D	C	A	C
North London Welfare and Educational Foundation	D	D	C	D
Pimco Foundation Europe	D	D	C	D
Postcode Care Trust	C	C	A	B
Postcode Neighbourhood Trust	B	C	A	B
Postcode Places Trust	B	C	A	B
Rachel Charitable Trust	D	C	C	C
Rayne Foundation	C	C	A	B
Road Safety Trust	C	B	A	B
Sequoia Trust	D	D	D	D
SF Foundation	D	D	D	D
ShareGift	C	B	A	B
Shine: Support and Help in Education	C	A	A	B
St John's Foundation Est. 1174	C	B	B	B
St Martin-in-the-Fields Trust	D	C	C	C
Standard Chartered Foundation	D	C	A	C
Stelios Philanthropic Foundation	D	D	B	C
Stewards Company Ltd	D	D	D	D
The Joseph Rank Trust	C	C	B	C

Foundation	Diversity	Accountability	Transparency	Overall rating
This Day Foundation	C	C	A	B
Three Guineas Trust	B	B	A	B
Three Pillars Trust	D	D	C	D
Variety the Children's Charity	C	B	B	B
Walcot Educational Foundation	B	B	A	B
Wolfson Family Charitable Trust	D	D	B	C
Yusuf and Farida Hamied Foundation	D	D	C	D
Zurich Community Trust (UK) Limited	D	C	A	C
Community foundations				
Buckinghamshire Community Foundation	C	B	A	B
Cheshire Community Foundation Limited	A	A	A	A
Community Foundation for Calderdale	C	B	A	B
Wiltshire and Swindon Community Foundation	A	A	A	A
Cumbria Community Foundation	B	B	A	B
Foundation Scotland	C	A	A	B

Foundation	Diversity	Accountability	Transparency	Overall rating
Point North Community Foundation	C	B	A	B

Foundations which opted in

The results for the five foundations which opted in are shown in Figure 6. As mentioned, they are not compared to each other, nor to the set which opted in to previous years, because the set itself was small and self-selecting, which prevents meaningful conclusions about the set. Where they were included in a previous year, the change in performance is explained below.

Figure 6: Ratings of foundations which opted in to Year Five

	Diversity	Accountability	Transparency	Overall rating
Cloudesley	B	A	A	A
Cripplegate Foundation	A	A	A	A
The Leathersellers' Foundation	C	B	A	B
The Mercers' Charitable Foundation	C	B	A	B
The Wimbledon Foundation	C	B	A	B
Average for foundations randomly selected in Year Five cohort, other than community foundations	C	C	B	C

The final line in Figure 6 provides, for comparison, the average grade for the foundations randomly selected for the Year Five cohort, omitting the community foundations.

Cripplegate Foundation and Cloudesley were assessed for the first time this year. Both scored A overall, with Cripplegate Foundation being rated A in every domain. Cloudesley was rated A for accountability and transparency: its diversity rating was B, but with a high score: higher than 95 of 100 of the main cohort.

The Leathersellers' Foundation was previously randomly selected in Year Three. Since then its accountability rating has increased from C to B. Other grades are unchanged, although there were some changes in scores. Notably, its transparency score this year

was 100%, and its overall score had increased, though within the FPR's grade boundaries.

The Mercers' Charitable Foundation has been assessed twice in the random selection (in Years One and Two) and twice as an opt-in (in Years Three and Four). Its grades have not changed since last year though it clearly has improved some practices: for example, last year, its website was not legible when zoomed to 400% but now is. Its scores have increased though within the FPR's grade boundaries. On diversity, it is now close to the boundary for B, and, like Cripplegate, scored maximum marks on transparency.

The Wimbledon Foundation was randomly selected in Year Four and opted in this year. Since last year, its grade on accountability has risen from C to B. It also increased its numerical scores across the board, while remaining within the grade boundaries on diversity and transparency. Its overall grade is unchanged.

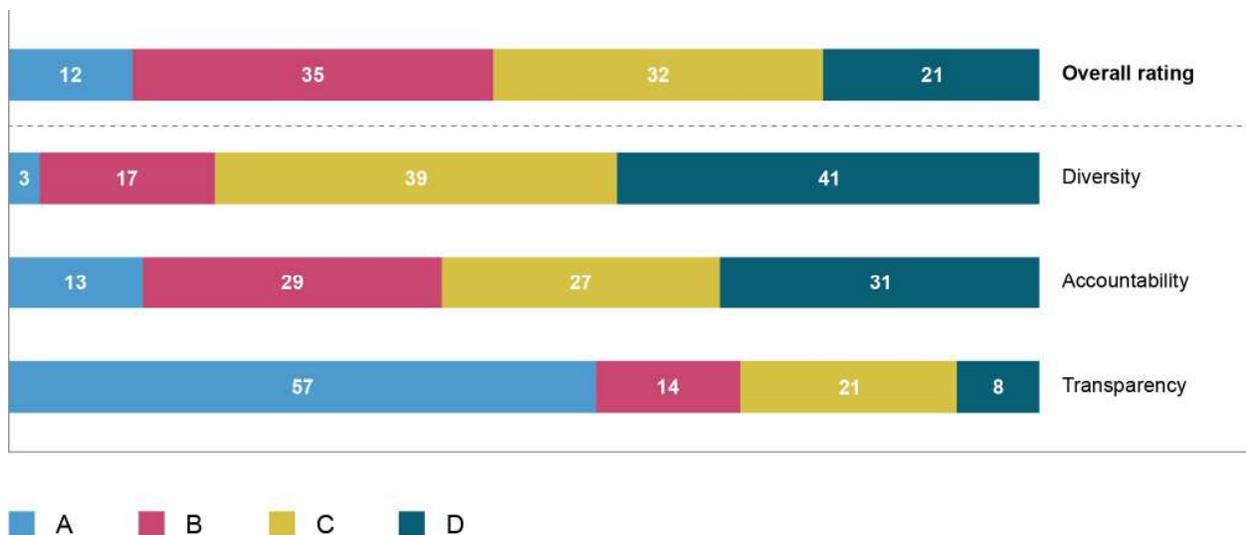
To reiterate, unless otherwise stated, all data in this report refer to the main cohort of 100 foundations (or subsets of it, such as the Funders Group or community foundations), i.e. exclude the opt-in foundations.

3. Analysis of ratings results

Year Five: Distribution of overall ratings, and domain ratings

Figure 7 shows a breakdown of the ratings for the Year Five cohort, with the distribution of As to Ds in both the overall ratings and in each domain.

Figure 7: Number of foundations achieving each rating in Year Five

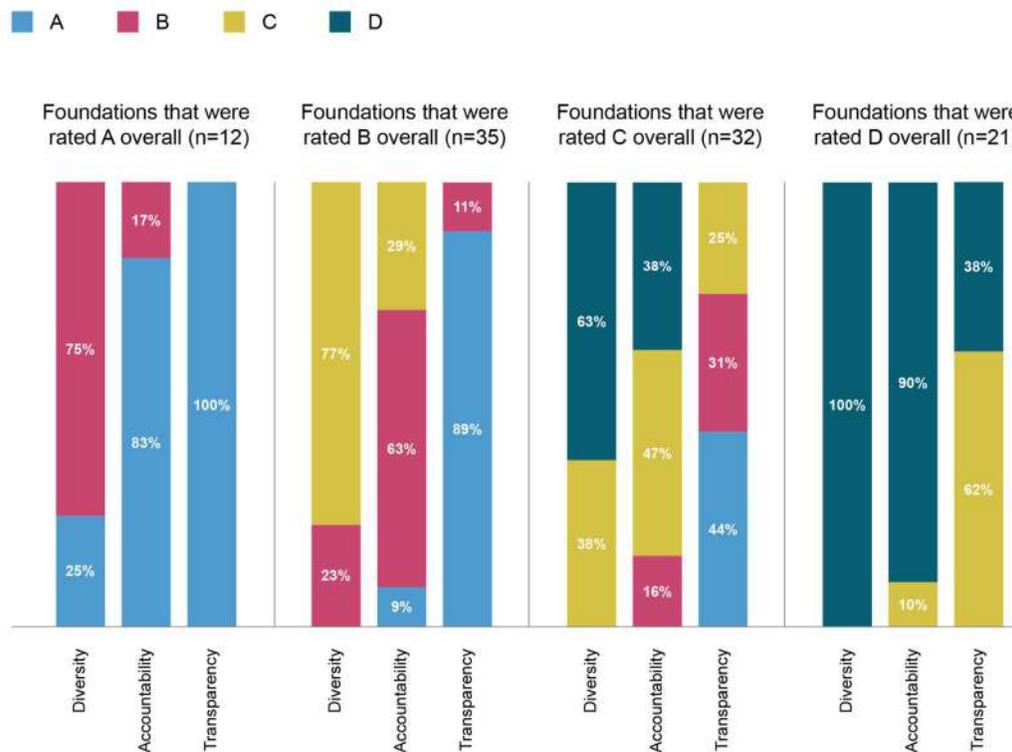


The major headlines are:

- as in previous years, the **foundations rated A overall in Year Five are diverse** in financial size, number of personnel and focus areas;
- as in previous years, **the strongest domain was transparency**; and
- as in previous years, **the weakest domain by far was diversity** (which includes accessibility).

Figure 8 shows the breakdown of domain ratings for foundations achieving each overall rating. As per last year, all the foundations which scored A overall scored A on transparency and most of them did so on accountability. But most of them scored B on diversity. Foundations which score D overall (many of which have no website) all score either C or D on every domain: all of them scored D on diversity.

Figure 8: Breakdown of domain scores of foundations with each overall rating in Year Five



Are the criteria reasonable?

Every item that the criteria sought (e.g. a diversity plan with numerical targets, a complaints policy, an analysis of its own performance) was found in at least one foundation in Year Five. This shows that they are all attainable. This has happened in each cycle of the FPR.

As discussed elsewhere, criteria vary widely in the number of foundations who meet them. This implies (but does not prove) that some are easier to meet than others.

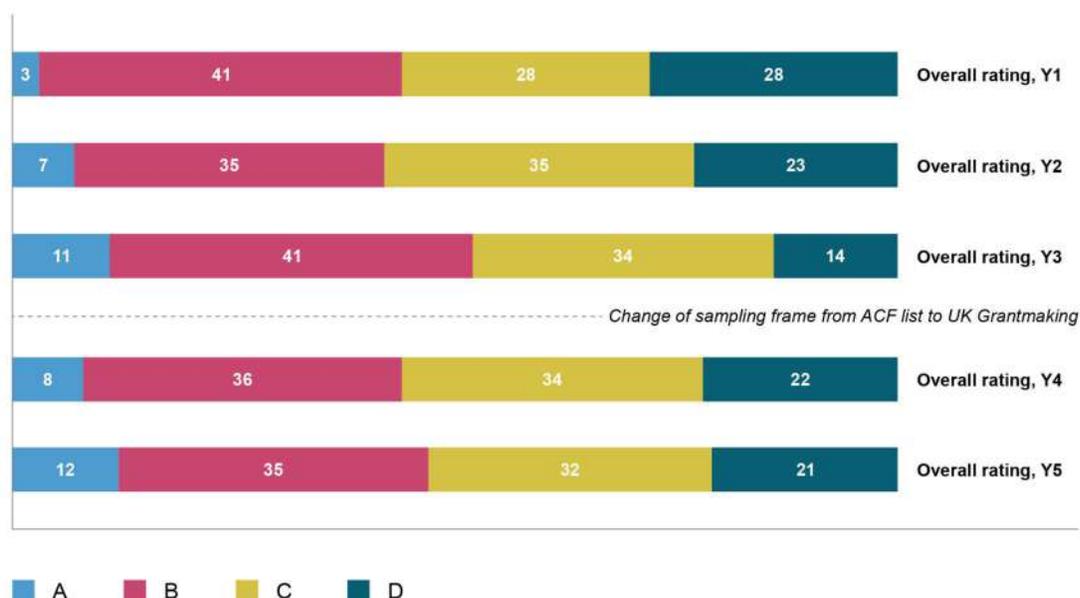
Appendix D lists the criteria and, for each, cites a foundation which met it. Readers looking for examples of practices which meet the criteria can use that table.

Observations from overall ratings and domain ratings

Overall ratings and relationship with domain ratings

Figure 9 compares the overall ratings in each year. As discussed, there was an important change last year in the sampling frame which invalidates simple year-on-year comparisons: results for more comparable sets of foundations are examined below.

Figure 9: Comparison of overall ratings in Years One to Five



There is evidence of improvement in practices (scores) since the FPR began. This was evident by Year Three, and has continued. As a whole, the ratings have risen a little this year: the number of overall As has risen by four.

To make fair year-on-year comparisons of results, the characteristics and performance of two groups are compared:*

- the randomly selected foundations in the Year Five cohort that were previously on the ACF list; and

* This comparison leaves aside: (a) the foundations that are included automatically (the largest five by giving budget and the Funders Group), and (b) community foundations.

- the randomly selected foundations in the Year Five cohort that are newly in-scope, i.e. were not previously on the ACF list, so could not have been assessed in Years One to Three.

These two groups are materially different, as shown in Figure 10: on average, the latter foundations are financially much smaller, have many fewer staff and are a little less likely to have a website. [Note, though, that Year Five included some large randomly selected foundations, including Sequoia Trust (assets of £488 million), and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (assets of >£1.3 billion) which was included randomly this year but was previously a funder.] Foundations with few staff tend to perform weakly,* and having no website strongly predicts poor performance.

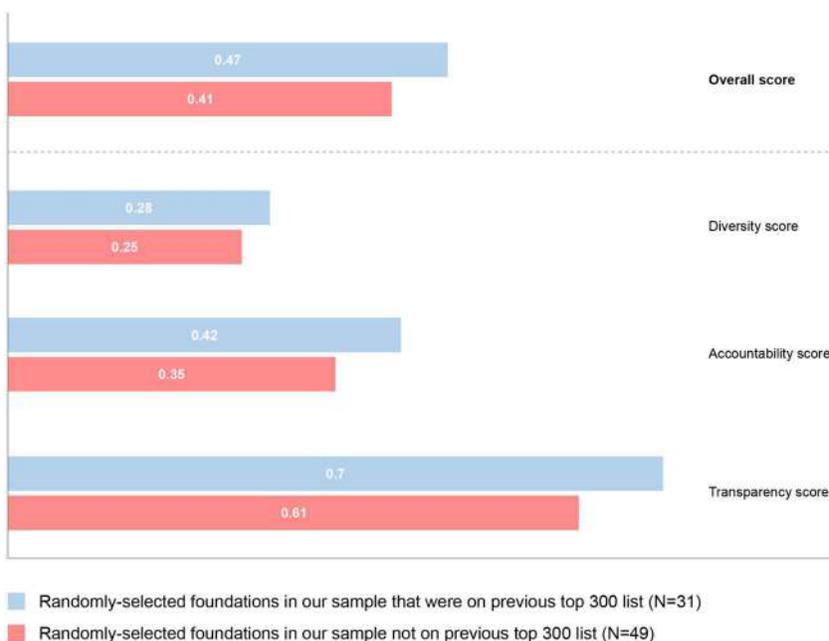
Figure 10: Comparing characteristics of the randomly selected foundations in the Year Five cohort, aside from community foundations

Average...	Randomly selected foundations in Y5 cohort that were on previous ACF list (N=31)	Randomly selected foundations in Y5 cohort <i>not</i> on previous ACF list (N=49)
...giving budget	£9.1 million (Year Four: £5.9 million)	£4.3 million (Year Four: £3.9 million)
...net assets	£127 million (Year Four: £87 million)	£26.1 million (Year Four: £19 million)
...number of staff	16.2 (Year Four: 14)	6.7 (Year Four: 6)
...number of trustees	6.7 (Year Four: 7)	6.3 (Year Four: 7)
% with a website	77% (Year Four: 83%)	73% (Year Four: 70%)

The actual Year Five performance of these two groups is set out in Figure 11.

* In all previous years, the FPR found that foundations with no staff tended to score lower than foundations with some staff; and, to some degree, foundations with few staff tended to score lower than foundations with more staff. (Comparing the scores of the set of foundations which have zero staff with that of those which have staff, the p value is very close to zero, i.e. a strongly statistically significant difference.)

Figure 11: Performance of randomly selected foundations in Year Five cohort, aside from community foundations: those which were in-scope in previous years vs those which are newly in-scope



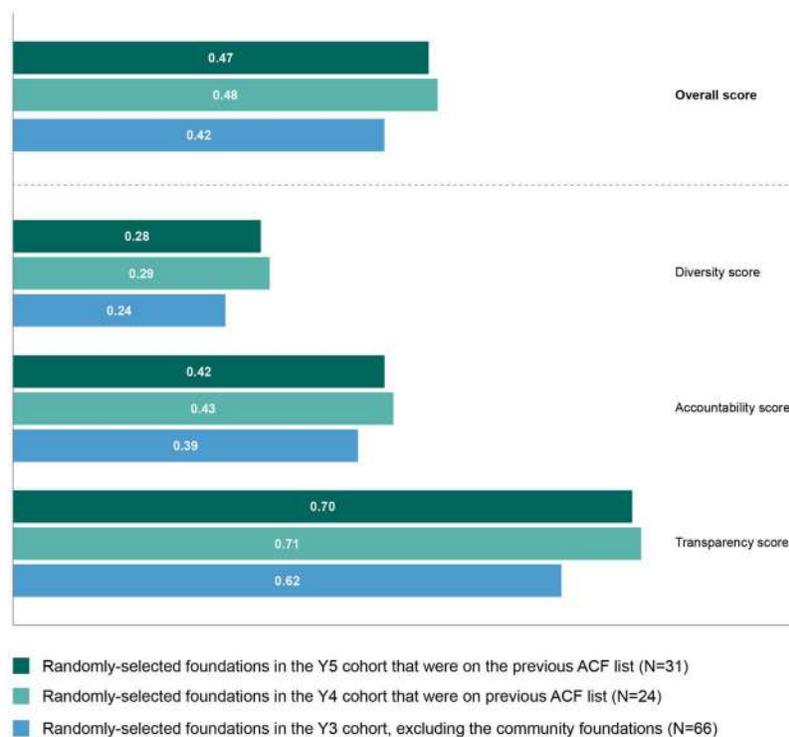
This shows that the newly in-scope foundations selected performed less well than the others. (One can see that also in Figure 2: the red dots there are below the blue ones.) This happened in Year Four as well, though the gap has narrowed over time.

Statistical analysis confirms that there has been improvement in practices (scores) of the assessed foundations which were on the ACF list since the FPR began. This is a meaningful comparison because there is no change in the sampling frame.

A fair indicator of overall sector performance over time is to compare the performance of the randomly selected non-community foundations from Year Four with the randomly selected non-community foundations from Year Five. This will show any large movements over the last year. This shows that average overall scores across the cohort (and average scores on each domain) are a shade higher in Year Five than in Year Four, but the change is not statistically significant.

Another way is to extend the comparison back through time, but to make any comparison with Year Three or before it is necessary to consider only the random selections from Year Four and Year Five that were on the previous ACF list. That comparison is shown in Figure 12. (Community foundations are omitted because they were not on the ACF list.)

Figure 12: Comparing the performance of Year Five randomly selected ACF list foundations, with randomly selected Year Three and Year Four ACF list foundations (which had no non-community foundations)



This shows that the performance of randomly selected foundations from the ACF list has dropped a tiny bit between Year Four and Year Five, on average, but the change is so small that it is most likely to be the result of random variation rather than a systematic effect.*

Looking further back, the performance of the random non-community foundations from Year One can be compared with the random non-community foundations from the ACF list in either Year Five or as a combined set with those from Years Four and Five.† Either way, there is strong statistical evidence of an improvement in practice in overall scores and in diversity and transparency.

* On a t-test comparing the two sets, $p > 0.7$. In other words, it is not possible to conclude that there is a difference here.

† On t-tests comparing numerical scores for randomly selected non-community foundations in Year One with those of Year Five: the scores for diversity and transparency show statistically significant differences, as do the overall scores ($p < 0.02$ for all of those three). For accountability, the change is not found to be statistically significant ($p=0.17$).

Comparing the numerical scores for randomly selected non-community foundations in Year One with those of Years Four and Five together: the scores for diversity and transparency show a stronger and statistically significant differences, as do the overall scores ($p < 0.002$ for all of those three). For the accountability domain, the $p=0.07$.

Individual foundation performance by domain

As in all previous years, individual foundations can show quite varied performance across the FPR's various domains.

The graphs in Figure 13 show the *numerical* scores in each domain for each included foundation. The bars are coloured according to the foundation's *overall* rating (i.e. not its rating on that domain). The graphs all have the same y axis scale: notice how the scores on diversity are lower than those on the other domains.

The graphs show that performance on the various domains is not consistent between individual foundations. On all three domains, some foundations which score B overall are out-performed on that domain by foundations which score C overall. On transparency, a foundation scores highly yet scores C overall.

The graphs also show that there are not big gaps in the scores: it is not the case that there are, say, foundations which score 50–60% and then none scoring 60–68% before scores resume at 68–85%. This pattern has held in previous years too.

Last year, one foundation scored nothing on transparency. This year, no foundation did so on either accountability or transparency, though five did so on diversity.

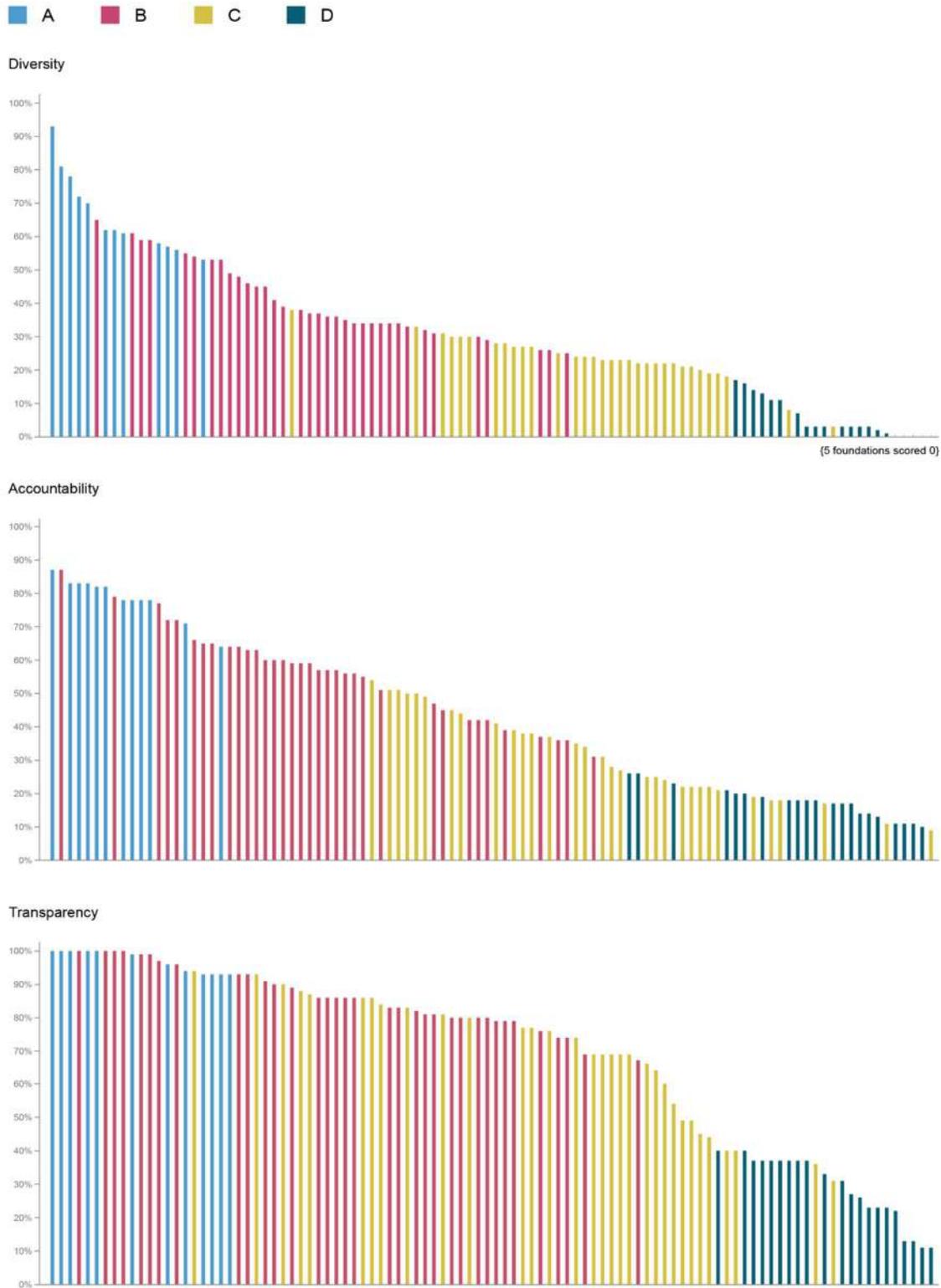
Of the 21 foundations rated D overall this year:

- seven were rated D on all three of the domains (compared to 12 of 22 in Year Four);
- 18 had no staff (compared to 12 of 22 in Year Four);
- there were foundations from each quintile of giving income, as there were in every previous year.*

None of the seven foundations rated D on all three domains had a website, and three of those did not provide an email address – so the data about them had to be sent to them by post.

* Example foundations rated D overall in each quintile by giving budget: CH Foundation (in the top quintile by size); SF Foundation (2nd quintile); LTTP (3rd quintile) ; Entindale Limited (4th quintile); and Yusuf and Farida Hamied Foundation (the bottom quintile).

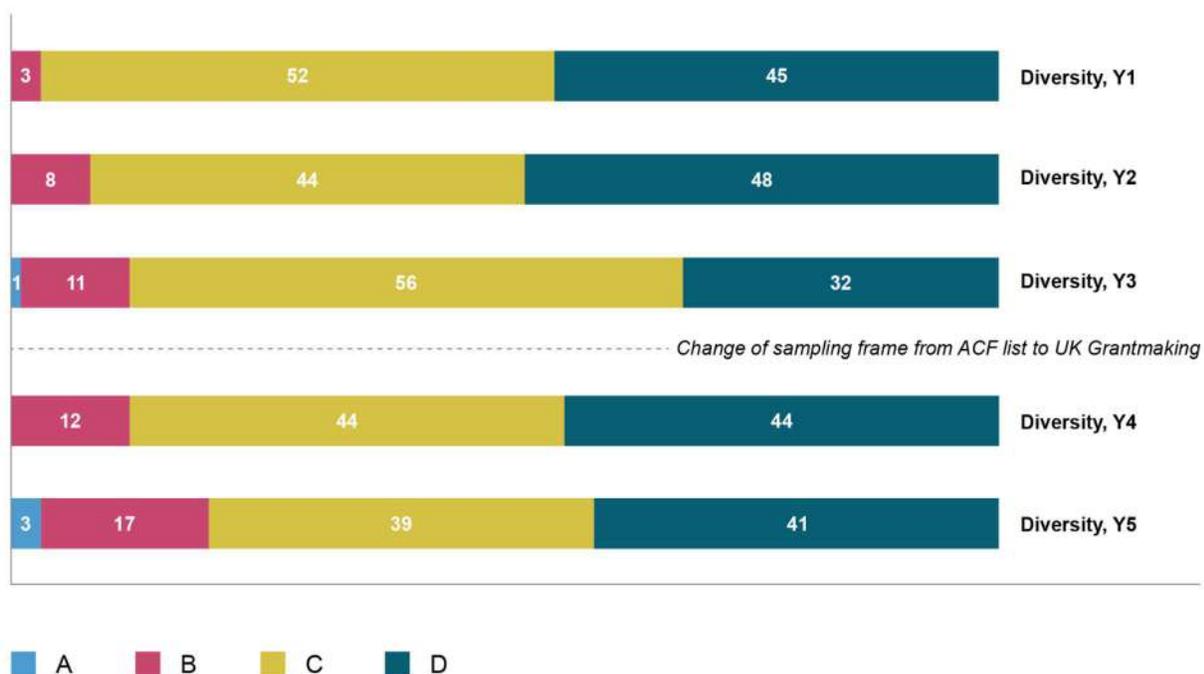
Figure 13: Numerical scores in each domain in Year Five, with overall score indicated by colour



Diversity

The diversity grades this year were the highest yet: three foundations achieved A whereas only one has done so previously. Figure 14 shows the ratings in diversity each year.*

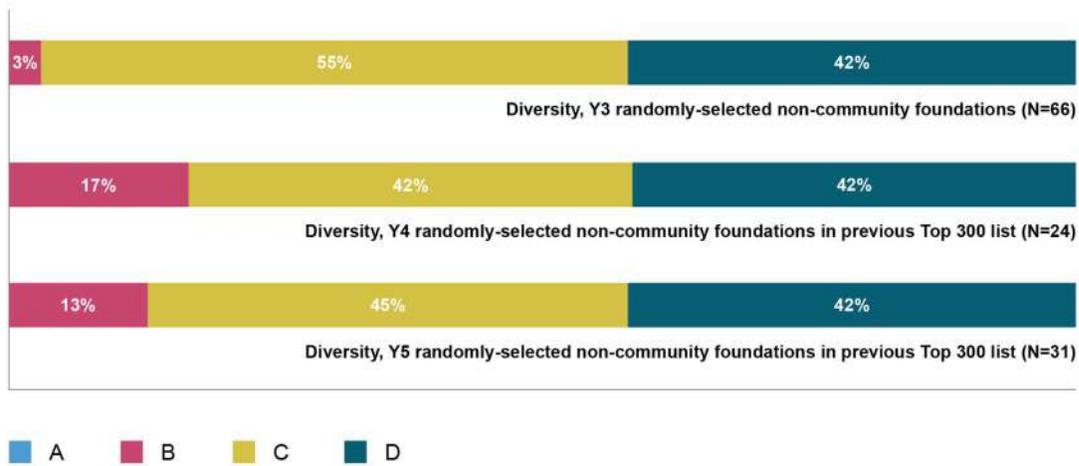
Figure 14: Diversity ratings in Years One to Five



* As mentioned in last year’s report, in Year Two one criterion in diversity was changed: the exemption for reporting staff diversity breakdowns was reduced from 10 or fewer staff in Year One, to five or fewer staff. That change affected some foundations’ scores: it caused four foundations to drop by one grade in their diversity score in Year Two; and five foundations to drop by one grade in their overall assessment (those four, plus one other whose numerical average score fell because of that change, but this foundation still received the same grade as in Year One). Year-on-year comparisons of diversity should be read with this in mind.

Figure 15 shows the like-for-like comparison between Years Three, Four and Five, which again implies improvement.

Figure 15: Performance on diversity between randomly selected Year Three, Year Four and Year Five foundations that were previously on the ACF list

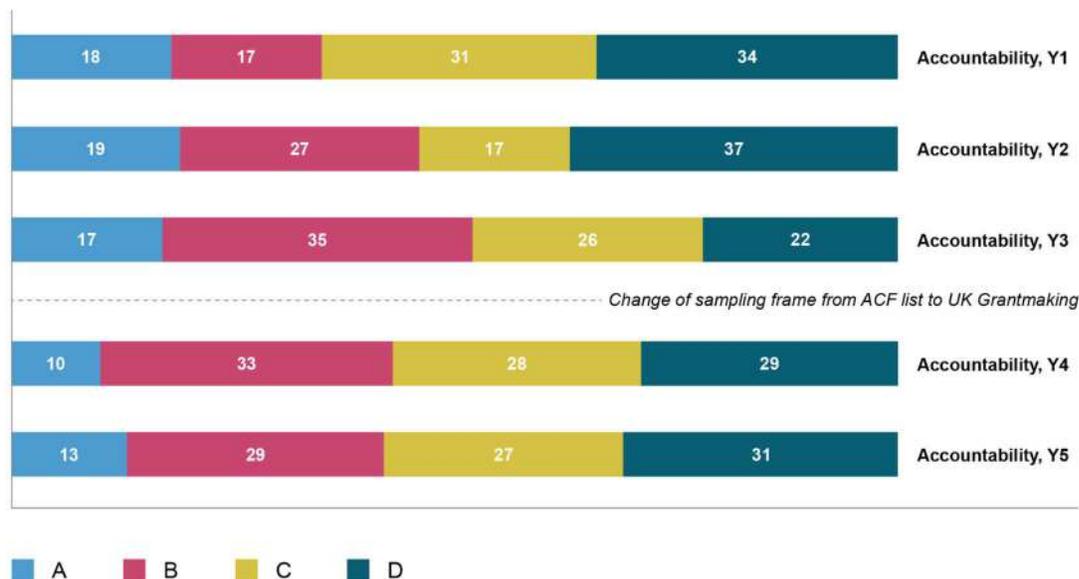


Because poor performance on diversity has been a theme in every year of the FPR, there is a more detailed commentary in the section ‘Poor performance on diversity’.

Accountability

Figure 16 shows the number of foundations which achieved each grade in accountability in the five years of the FPR. Grades improved slightly since last year.

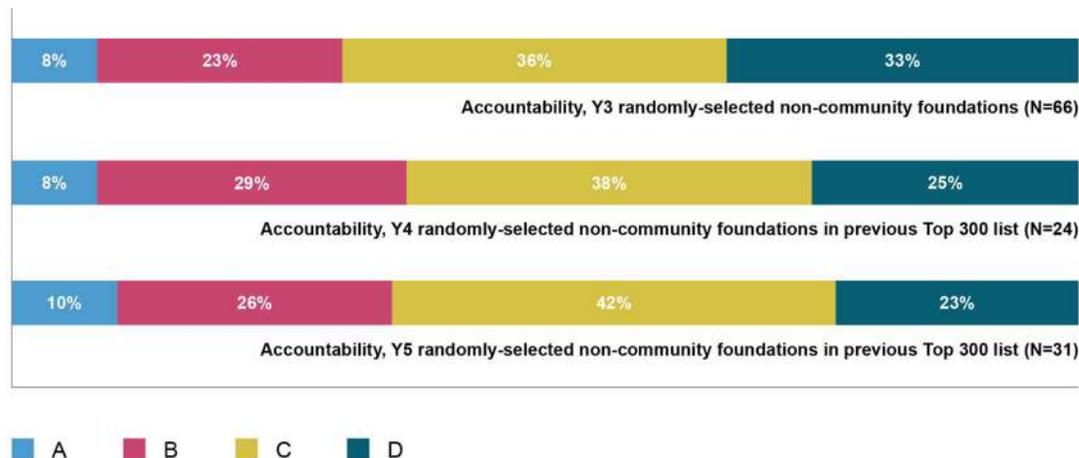
Figure 16: Accountability ratings in Years One to Five



As noted above, the change in sampling frame has brought in a set of foundations that probably perform less well on the FPR than in the sampling frame in previous years.

Given the change in sampling frame, a fairer comparison is between the grades of randomly selected non-community foundations across time. This is shown in Figure 17, and implies a slight improvement. (The numbers here are small, so the pattern is not definitive.)

Figure 17: Performance on accountability between randomly selected Year Three, Year Four and Year Five foundations that were on the ACF list (the ‘Top 300 list’)



Transparency

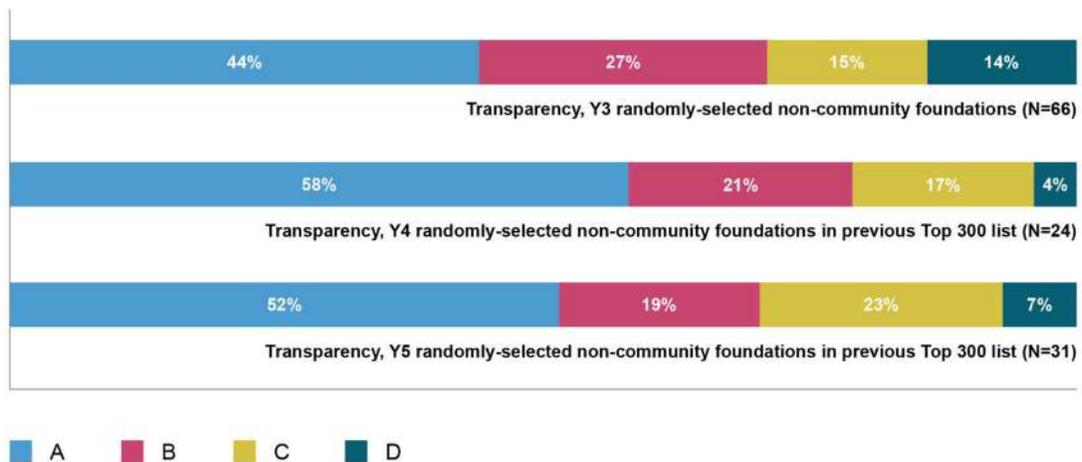
Figure 18 shows the number of foundations which achieved each grade in transparency in the five years of the FPR. These have declined slightly this year for the first time.

Figure 18: Transparency ratings in Years One to Five



Again, the fairer comparison between ratings of randomly selected non-community foundations shows a slight decline, as shown in Figure 19.

Figure 19: Performance on transparency between randomly selected Year Three, Year Four and Year Five foundations that were on the ACF list (the ‘Top 300 list’)



Results for particular groups of foundations

The five largest foundations by giving budget: an A, a B, two Cs and a D

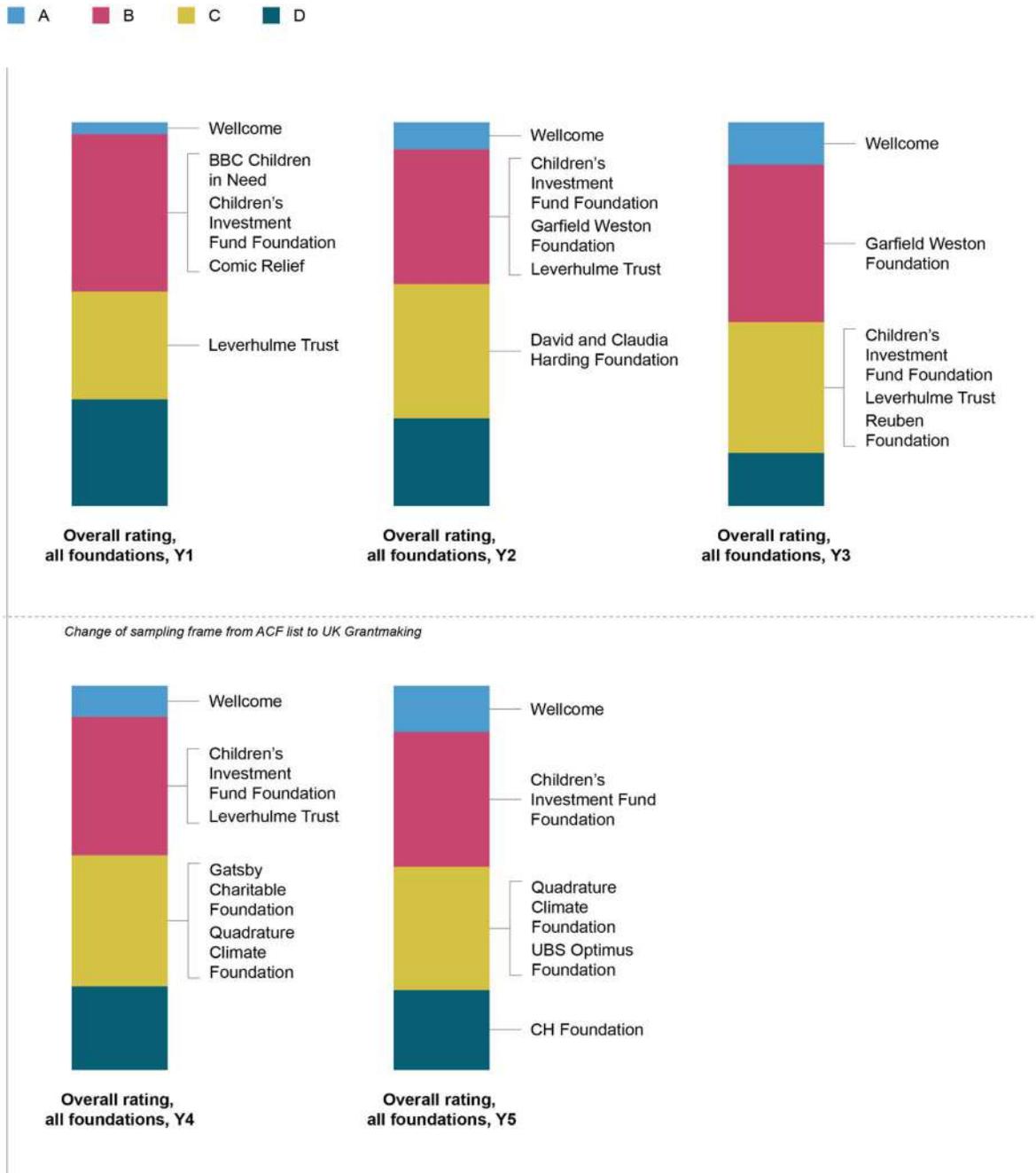
There is a fair amount of churn amongst the five foundations with the largest giving budgets: as Figure 20 shows, two are unchanged during the FPR's five years, some others have joined this set and others left.

Figure 20: The UK's largest grant-making foundations (by giving budget) over the five years of the FPR

		Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year Four	Year Five
Largest by giving budget	1	Wellcome	Wellcome	Wellcome	Wellcome	Wellcome
	2	Children's Investment Fund Foundation	Children's Investment Fund Foundation	Children's Investment Fund Foundation	Children's Investment Fund Foundation	Children's Investment Fund Foundation
	3	Leverhulme Trust	The David and Claudia Harding Foundation	Leverhulme Trust	Gatsby Charitable Foundation	Quadrature Climate Foundation
	4	Comic Relief	Leverhulme Trust	Garfield Weston Foundation	Quadrature Climate Foundation	UBS Optimus Foundation UK
Smallest by giving budget	5	BBC Children in Need Appeal	Garfield Weston Foundation	Reuben Foundation	Leverhulme Trust	CH Foundation (UK)
Source		ACF Giving Trends 2019	ACF Giving Trends 2019	ACF Giving Trends 2019	UK Grantmaking	UK Grantmaking

Figure 21 shows how the five largest foundations (by giving budget) performed relative to the rest of the cohort in each year. It shows the distribution of overall ratings of the full cohort, and the overall ratings of those five largest foundations.

Figure 21: Overall ratings of the five largest foundations by giving budget in each year (Shown against the distribution of grades for the whole cohort of 100 foundations)



Wellcome has been rated A in every year so far. The Children's Investment Fund Foundation has been rated B each year, except for a dip to C in Year Three. The Quadrature Climate Foundation is rated C this year, as it was rated last year. For the first time, Leverhulme Trust is not in the top five funders list this year. Two others were included for the first time in the largest five, which are UBS Optimus Foundation and CH foundation: UBS Optimus Foundation is rated C, whereas CH foundation is rated D. This is the first time that one of the largest five foundations has been rated D overall.

As in previous years, it is clearly possible to be very large and still score poorly, and it is possible to be quite small and score well. FPR ratings do not reflect a foundation's financial size.

Foundations which fund the FPR

This year again saw high ratings for this group, though not quite as high as in Year Three.

Again, foundations funding the FPR perform better than the average foundation, all achieving A or B overall, and more As than last year. (There is some churn within this group, as mentioned.)

Figure 22 shows how the Funders Group performed relative to the rest of the cohort: it shows the distribution of overall ratings in each year, and the overall ratings of the Funders Group.

Figure 22: Overall ratings of Funders Group in Years One to Five (compared to the overall ratings for the whole cohort)
 (Shown against the distribution of grades for the whole cohort of 100 foundations.)

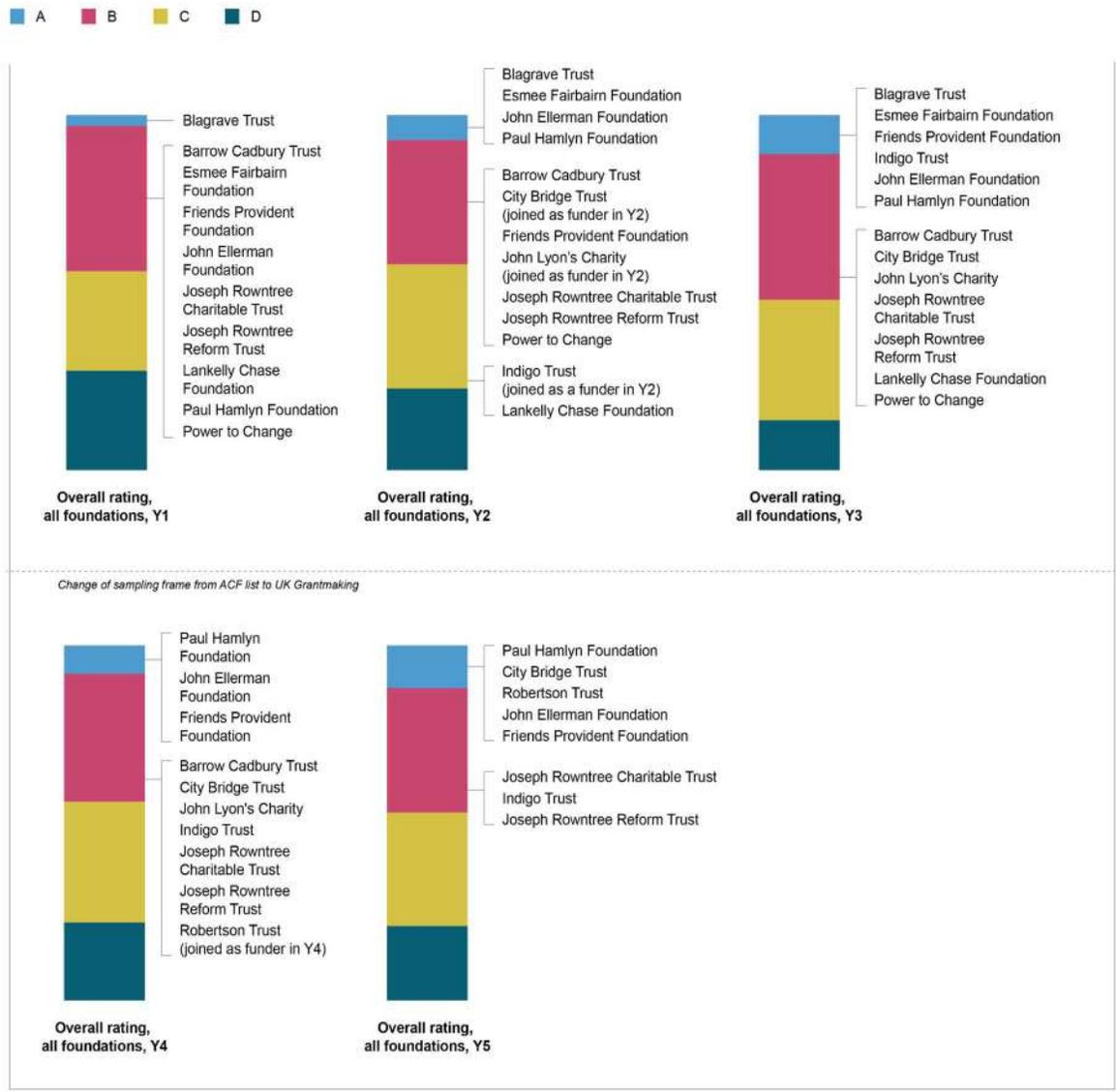
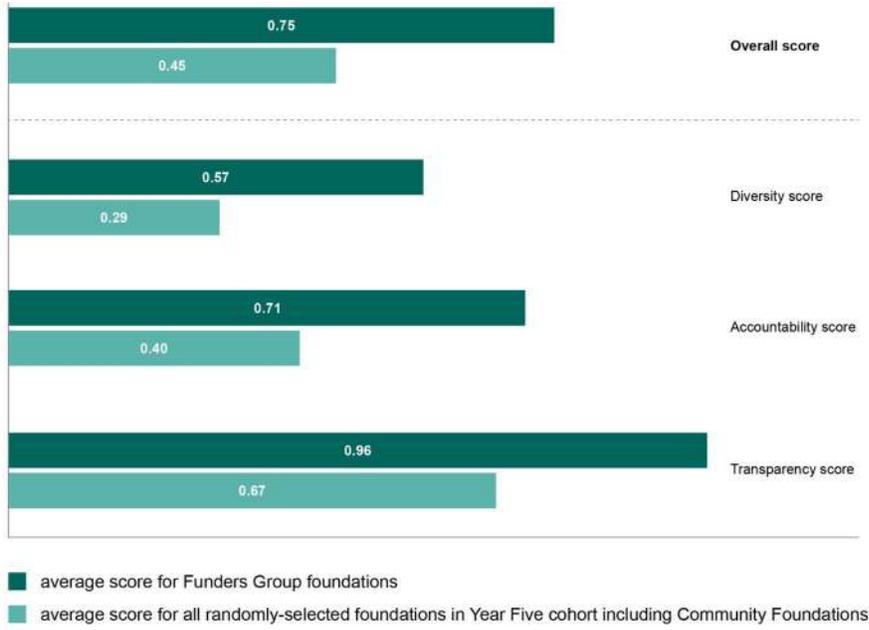


Figure 23: Numerical scores of the Funders Group compared to the randomly selected foundations (including community foundations)



However, the picture is more subtle when the grades are examined in detail. Figure 24 shows the change in grades since last year. There is limited change, though five risers and two fallers. Note that foundations can (and do) make considerable improvements even if these do not put them across a grade boundary: obviously foundations already scoring A can still have much to do but will not rise a grade.

Figure 24: Changes in ratings of Funders Group foundations between Year Four and Year Five

	Overall grade	D grade	A grade	T grade
City Bridge Foundation	Improved	Improved	Same	Same
Friends Provident Charitable Foundation	Same	Same	Declined	Same
The Indigo Trust	Same	Same	Same	Same
John Ellerman Foundation	Same	Same	Same	Same
Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust	Same	Declined	Same	Same
Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust	Same	Improved	Same	Same
Paul Hamlyn Foundation	Same	Same	Same	Same
The Robertson Trust	Improved	Improved	Same	Same

Community foundations: Continue to out-perform

Community foundations out-perform the average foundation. This has happened every year and the difference is highly statistically significant.*

Figure 25 shows how community foundations performed relative to the rest of the cohort: it shows the distribution of overall ratings in each year, and the overall ratings of the assessed community foundations.†

As a reminder, during Years One to Three, the number of community foundations included was random, and changed each year: in Year One there were five, in Year Two there were eight, and in Year Three there were 16. Since Year Four, the number of them has been fixed at a proportionate level because community foundations consistently scored better on average than other foundations, which skewed the overall results. Now, the proportion of community foundations in the cohort is the same as the proportion of community foundations in the sampling frame. This is a probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling strategy and reduces fluctuations. This PPS method dictated having six community foundations in Year Four and seven in Year Five.

* The p values are < 0.00001 (!)

† Point North was included in Year Five. It was also included in Year Three under its previous name, the County Durham Community Foundation.

Figure 25: Overall ratings of community foundations in Years One to Five



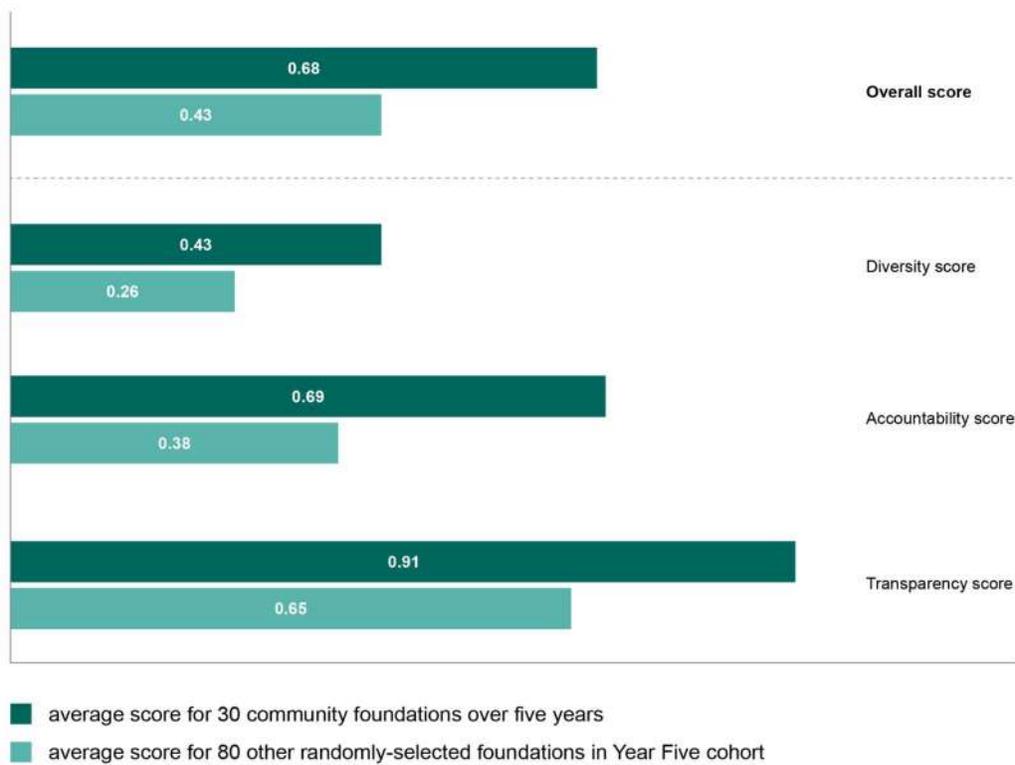
Community foundation grades have improved, and they continue to out-perform other foundations by an appreciable margin.

All community foundations in the Year Five cohort were rated A or B overall whereas last year it was all B or C overall. Cheshire Community Foundation, for example, has risen from B to A.

Over the FPR’s five years, 30 community foundations have been assessed. Figure 26 shows the average score for that set, as compared to the rest of the random sample from Year Five. Where community foundations have been included more than once, the average takes their most recent score.

Community foundations’ scores are noticeably higher in all three domains. This may be because, unlike most foundations (endowed ones, family ones or corporate foundations), community foundations compete for most of their resources, and therefore are scrutinised and have strong incentives to perform well. The difference in scores is statistically significant.

Figure 26: Comparison of average numerical scores of community foundations with those of other randomly selected foundations in Year Five



First time vs repeated assessments of randomly selected foundations

Do foundations which have been assessed before perform better than those which are assessed for the first time? No effect has been detected.

Figure 27 shows that non-community foundations assessed in Year Five which had been included in a previous year (18 foundations) have a better *overall average* score than non-community foundations that were randomly selected in Year Five, but had not been previously included (13 foundations). The same is true on the individual domains as well. However, the number of foundations involved is small, and the differences are not statistically significant.

Figure 27: Comparing the performance of randomly selected non-community foundations on the ACF list that were assessed for the first time in Year Five, with randomly selected non-community foundations (on the ACF list) which had been assessed previously

	Overall average score	Diversity score	Accountability score	Transparency score
Non-community foundations that were randomly selected in Year Five, which had been included in a previous year (18 foundations)	0.49	0.32	0.45	0.71
Non-community foundations that were randomly selected in Year Five, which had not been previously included but were on the ACF list (13 foundations)	0.43	0.22	0.38	0.68

Performance by criteria in Year Five

Criteria on which foundations collectively scored highest

Figure 28 shows the 10 criteria on which the foundations collectively performed best in Year Five, taking into account that some foundations were exempt from some criteria.

High-scoring questions are fairly consistent with those in previous years.

Figure 28: The 10 criteria on which the foundations collectively scored highest in Year Five, ordered by score achieved, with the highest first

Criterion on which foundations scored well in Y5 (with question number for ease of reference)	Domain	% of points scored by non-exempt foundations	Top 10 scoring question in Year One?	Top 10 scoring question in Year Two?	Top 10 scoring question in Year Three?	Top 10 scoring question in Year Four?
26. Does the foundation give any information on who or what it funded?	T	99%	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Criterion on which foundations scored well in Y5 (with question number for ease of reference)	Domain	% of points scored by non-exempt foundations	Top 10 scoring question in Year One?	Top 10 scoring question in Year Two?	Top 10 scoring question in Year Three?	Top 10 scoring question in Year Four?
25. For approximately what percentage of the foundation's funding is information given on who makes the funding decisions? (Does the foundation specify the individual, or, if it is a panel, who is on that panel?)	A	84%	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
15. Does the foundation publish any eligibility criteria for what it funds? (That is, who as a potential recipient would be eligible for a particular grant.) Answer N/A if the foundation only accepts solicited proposals.	T	82%	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
36. Does the foundation publish who its staff are on its website? N/A if they have no staff.	A	82%	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
17. For approximately what percentage of all funding are eligibility criteria presented? Answer N/A if the foundation only accepts solicited proposals.	T	80%	No	No	No	Yes
75. Does the foundation have an investment policy?	A	80%	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Criterion on which foundations scored well in Y5 (with question number for ease of reference)	Domain	% of points scored by non-exempt foundations	Top 10 scoring question in Year One?	Top 10 scoring question in Year Two?	Top 10 scoring question in Year Three?	Top 10 scoring question in Year Four?
2. Does the foundation have a website?	T	79%	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4. Can you navigate the foundation's website using only the keyboard (without a mouse)? Answer N/A if there is no website.	D	79%	Yes	No	Yes	No
8. Does the foundation publish on its website any information about its funding priorities? Answer N/A if there is no website.	T	78%	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
28. Is the following information provided about the awarded grants? Please tick any that apply.	T	78%	Yes	Yes	No	No

Criteria on which foundations collectively scored lowest

Figure 29 shows the 10 criteria on which the foundations collectively performed least well in Year Five, again taking account of the fact that some foundations were exempt from some criteria. As with previous years, most of them concern diversity.

Figure 29: Criteria on which the foundations collectively scored lowest in Year Five, ordered by score achieved (lowest first)

Criterion on which foundations scored poorly in Y5 (with question number for ease of reference)	Domain	% of points scored by non-exempt foundations	Lowest 10 scoring question in Year One?	Lowest 10 scoring question in Year Two?	Lowest 10 scoring question in Year Three?	Lowest 10 scoring question in Year Four?
69. Does the foundation publish some information of what it is doing differently as a consequence of analysis of its own effectiveness?	A	1%	No	No	Yes	Yes
67. Does the foundation publish any analysis of its own effectiveness? (This is effectiveness of the foundation not analysis from the grantees of what they are doing with the funding.)	A	4%	No	No	No	Yes
54. Any specific, numerical targets to improve the diversity of its trustees or board members?	D	5.3%	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Criterion on which foundations scored poorly in Y5 (with question number for ease of reference)	Domain	% of points scored by non-exempt foundations	Lowest 10 scoring question in Year One?	Lowest 10 scoring question in Year Two?	Lowest 10 scoring question in Year Three?	Lowest 10 scoring question in Year Four?
66. Does the foundation publish any actions (however minimal) it will take to address this feedback? (What they are doing differently as a consequence?)	A	8%	No	No	No	No
47. Any specific, numerical targets to improve the diversity of its staff?	D	8.9%	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
64. Different ways given for contacting the foundation concerning malpractice?	D	10%	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
60. Does the foundation give ways to contact them for people who have disabilities?	D	10%	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
65. Does the foundation publish any feedback it receives from grant seekers and/or grantees? (This must be feedback, e.g. suggestions for the foundations.)	A	11%	No	No	No	No

Criterion on which foundations scored poorly in Y5 (with question number for ease of reference)	Domain	% of points scored by non-exempt foundations	Lowest 10 scoring question in Year One?	Lowest 10 scoring question in Year Two?	Lowest 10 scoring question in Year Three?	Lowest 10 scoring question in Year Four?
31. If the foundation funds recipients in Wales, is a Welsh language format provided?	D	11.4%	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
55. Please tick all of the following targets that are included in the diversity plan for trustees.	D	11.7%	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Criteria on which scores changed most in Year Five

To examine changes between Year Four and Year Five, the research team identified the criteria with the greatest increases and decreases in scores. These are shown in Figure 30.

Figure 30: Criteria showing largest **percentage increase** in scores (i.e. greatest proportional improvement) between Year Four and Year Five, ordered by change in score (Note that some of these are starting from a very small base, and remain small)

Question	Domain	Percentage change
55. Please tick all of the following targets that are included in the diversity plan for trustees.	D	(Very large % increase, from tiny base. Overall it is still very small.)
54. Does this plan include specific, numerical targets to improve the diversity of its trustees or board members? Answer N/A if there are 5 or fewer trustee / board members	D	237%
48. Please tick all of the following targets that are in the diversity plan for staff. 'N/A' if there are five or fewer members of staff.	D	188%

Question	Domain	Percentage change
60. Does the foundation give ways to contact them for people who have disabilities? (text relay, BSL or other) Please tick the different types of accessible contact (do not repeat any information from above).	D	150%
31. If the foundation funds recipients in Wales, is a Welsh language format provided? 'N/A' if the foundation does not have a presence in Wales.	D	136%

These all concern diversity. But that may be because they had low baseline scores, so any change in performance creates a high percentage change – even to a still-low score. To complement it, Figure 31 looks at where there have been absolute changes in scores.

Figure 31: Criteria showing largest **absolute** increase in scores between Year Four and Year Five, ordered by size of absolute change

Question	Domain	Absolute change in score between Year Four and Year Five
23. Does the foundation cite any criteria on which its funding decisions are made?	A	0.160
55. Please tick all of the following targets that are included in the diversity plan for trustees.	D	0.112
48. Please tick all of the following targets that are in the diversity plan for staff. 'N/A' if there are five or fewer members of staff.	D	0.111
62. Please tick the different ways given for contacting the foundation concerning complaints. Email, phone number, online form, mailing address, web chat, or any others. Be sure to include BSL, text relay, etc., if available. Please add a comment in the next question if no contact for complaints is provided.	D	0.103

Question	Domain	Absolute change in score between Year Four and Year Five
4. Can you navigate the foundation's website using only the keyboard (without a mouse)? Answer N/A if there is no website.	D	0.090

The questions showing the highest absolute changes from Year Four to Year Five mainly concern diversity.

Figure 32: Criteria showing the largest percentage decrease in scores between Year Four and Year Five, ordered by change in score. The largest proportionate fallers mainly concern accountability, though some start from a small base, e.g. Q 69.

Question	Domain	Change in score between Year Four and Year Five
69. Does the foundation publish some information of what it is doing differently as a consequence of this analysis (analysis of their own effectiveness: Q 67)?	A	-83%
67. Does the foundation publish any analysis of its own effectiveness? (This is effectiveness of the foundation, not analysis from the grantees of what they are doing with the funding.)	A	-43%
22. Does the foundation say how soon a successful applicant will receive the funds? Answer N/A if the foundation only accepts solicited proposals.	T	-35%
66. Does the foundation publish any actions (however minimal) it will take to address feedback from grantees / applicants (Q 65)? (What they are doing differently as a consequence?)	A	-33%
71. Does the foundation cite any evidence that it has consulted the communities it seeks to support in determining its funding priorities?	A	-32%

Figure 33: Criteria showing the largest **absolute** decrease in scores (i.e. greatest fall) from Year Four to Year Five

Question	Domain	Absolute change in score between Year Four and Year Five
22. Does the foundation say how soon a successful applicant will receive the funds? Answer N/A if the foundation only accepts solicited proposals.	T	-0.156
35. Does the foundation publish information about branding requirements for its grantees?	T	-0.120
37. Does the foundation provide a bio for its senior staff? 'N/A' if there are no staff.	A	-0.108
46. Does the foundation have a plan to improve the diversity of its staff? This can include tackling systematic racism or sexism within the institution. Please give details in the comments. 'N/A' if there are five or fewer members of staff.	D	-0.089
71. Does the foundation cite any evidence that it has consulted the communities it seeks to support in determining its funding priorities?	A	-0.080

The criteria where scores fell the most are mixed.

Update on themes identified in previous years

Poor performance on diversity

In Year Five, practice on diversity was again weaker than practice on the other domains, but has improved markedly. Diversity scores rose:

- Whereas last year, no foundation achieved A on diversity, this year three foundations did.
- Numerical scores on diversity rose: last year, the average diversity score was low C but near the border for D. In Year Five this score is still C but higher (see Figure 34).

- The number of foundations scoring zero in diversity fell: from 13 last year to five this year.

As mentioned, the criteria which saw the greatest rises in overall scores were mainly in diversity.

That said, diversity is the sole domain in which any foundations scored zero. It is unclear why diversity scores are consistently below those on other domains: given that every criterion has been met, obviously none is impossible.

To provide a sense of how average performance changes across foundations, the research team calculated the average numerical score across all 100 foundations on each domain for each year. Then they translated that into grades. The results are shown in Figure 34.

Figure 34: Grade by domain for the average foundation, in Years One to Five

	Diversity	Accountability	Transparency
Average grade Year One	D (near the border for C)	C	B
Average grade Year Two	D (near the border for C)	C	B
Average grade Year Three	C	B (on the borderline with C)	B (near the border for A)
Change in sampling frame			
Average grade Year Four	C (near the border for D)	C	B (near the border for A)
Average grade Year Five	C	C	B (near the border for A)

The number of foundations scoring zero in each domain is shown in Figure 35. None has ever scored zero on accountability; a few do on transparency; but in diversity, zeros are fairly common, though declined sharply this year.

Figure 35: Number of foundations scoring zero in each domain

	Diversity	Accountability	Transparency
Year One	16	0	4
Year Two	22	0	4
Year Three	11	0	0
Change in sampling frame			
Year Four	13	0	1
Year Five	5	0	0

Does size matter?

In all previous years, the FPR found that financial size did not correlate with foundations' ratings, but that size by trustees did. This year, there is a similar pattern. More statistical analysis on this is in Appendix E.

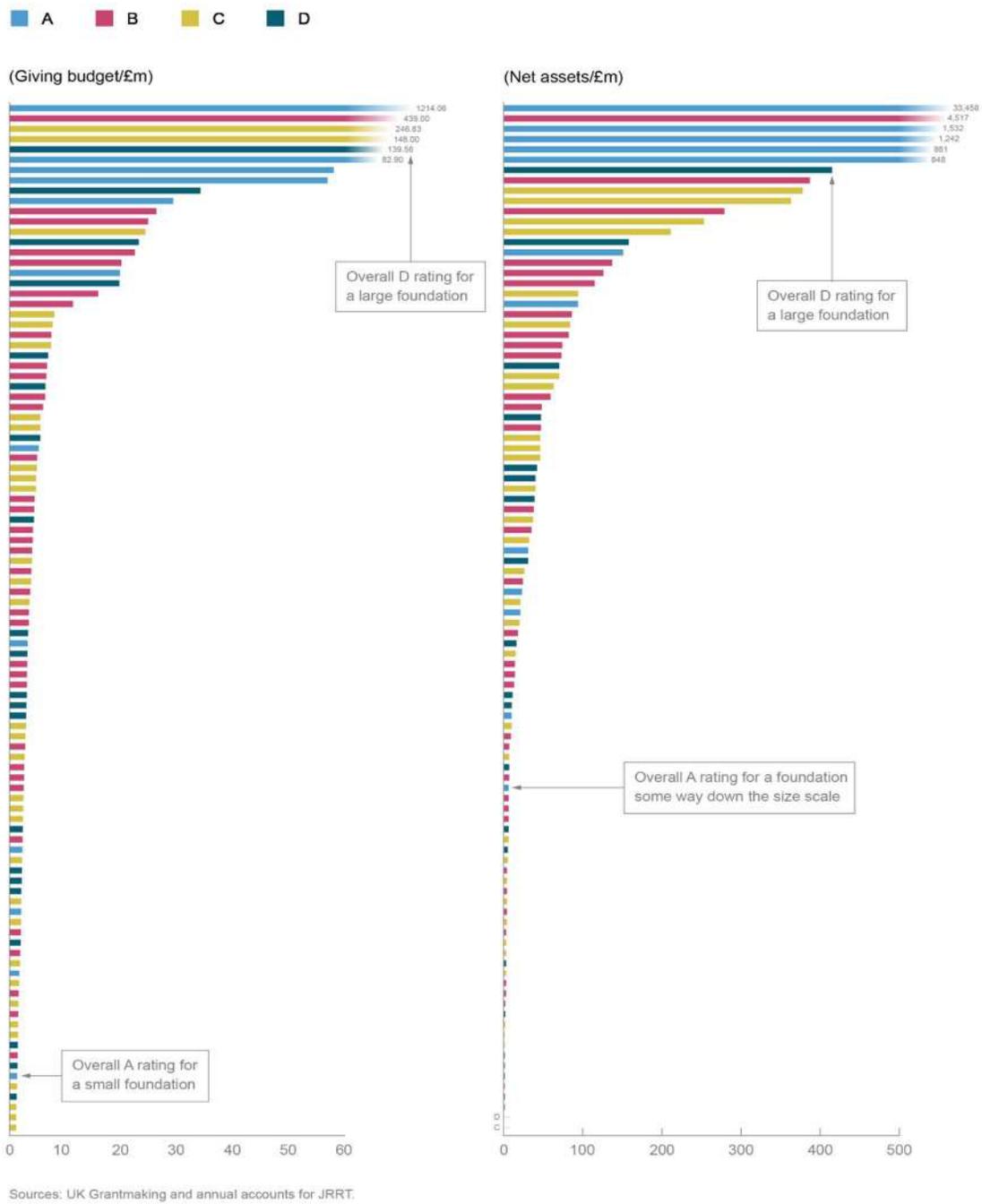
Scores by giving budget

As last year, the research team looked at the overall ratings for foundations divided into quintiles – first by giving budget and then by net assets.

As in previous years, **it is not the case that larger foundations (by giving budget or net assets) invariably outperform smaller ones: each quintile had a mix of overall scores.** In other words, **some foundations with pretty large giving budgets score badly, and some foundations with relatively small giving budgets score well.**

As in previous years, the graphs in Figure 36 show that some foundations which score A overall have relatively small giving budgets and net assets. There are Bs and Cs throughout the range of giving budgets; and foundations scoring D overall start to appear remarkably high up.

Figure 36: Overall scores of foundations ordered by financial size (Year Five)*



* The bars for the largest quintile are curtailed to prevent the smaller foundations' bars being illegibly small.

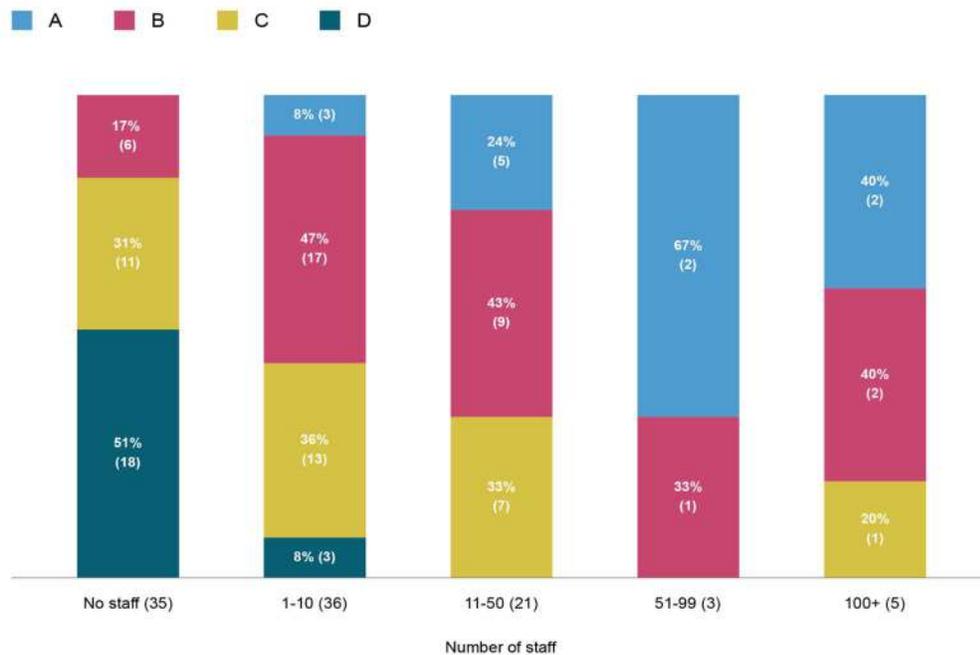
Results by size of team – staff and trustees

First, let’s look at staff. In every previous year, foundations with no staff tended to score lower than foundations with some staff; and to some degree foundations with few staff tended to score lower than foundations with more staff.

The same was found again this year: **the lowest rating of D was disproportionately concentrated in foundations with no staff, and no foundation with more than 11 staff members scored D.** However, this year the correlation between staff numbers and overall numerical score is weak and just shy of statistical significance.* This supports the hypothesis that good practices in these three important domains require work, and having no one at all or too few people prevents foundations from doing that work. Remember that the number of staff that a foundation has is a choice or a requirement (unlike the size of its financial assets): most foundations can choose to have more or fewer staff.

Figure 37 shows how overall scores vary by the number of staff in each foundation in Year Five.

Figure 37: Breakdown of overall scores by number of staff in each foundation (Year Five)



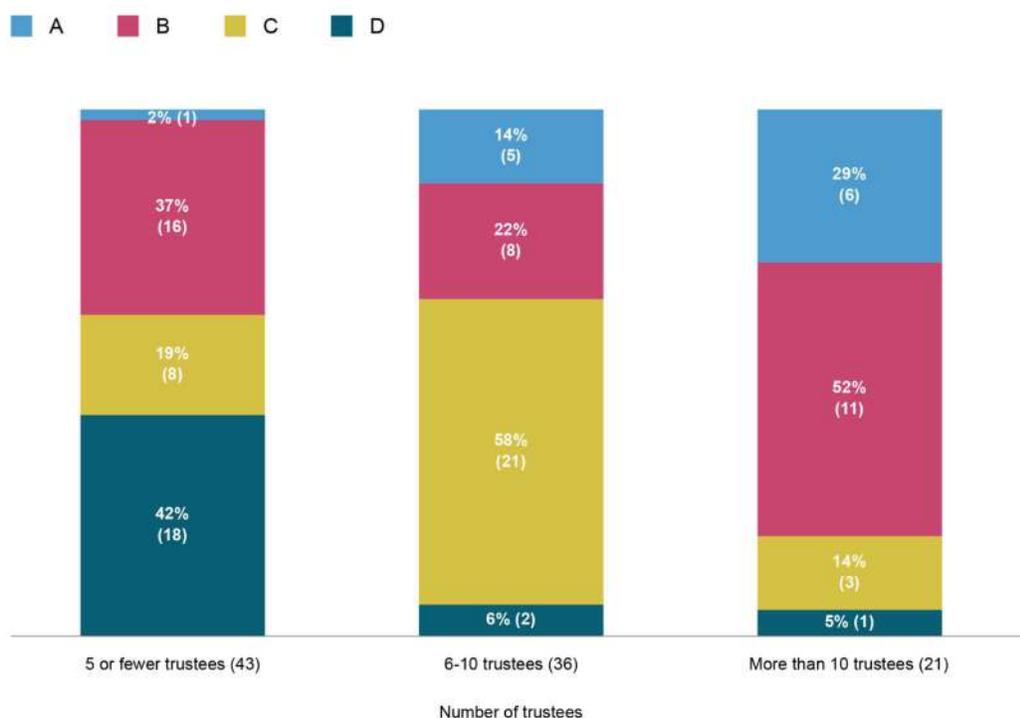
* Numbers in brackets denote number of foundations

* p=0.056. Correlation coefficient is 0.19.

Next, we turn to trustees. As in previous years, the **number of trustees** correlates to performance: foundations with five or fewer trustees tended to perform worse. The same was found in Year Five, as Figure 38 shows. Ds are most common amongst foundations with five or fewer trustees. The correlation between numerical scores (on each domain) and number of trustees is moderately strong and very highly statistically significant.*

Again, a foundation can choose the number of trustees that it has, and it can have too few to do the work required for good practices in these important domains.

Figure 38: Breakdown of overall scores by number of trustees at each foundation in Year Five



*Numbers in brackets denote number of foundations.

Why do foundations with few personnel score badly?

Though this result has been found in each year of the FPR, the cause is unclear. As a reminder, foundations with few staff and/or few trustees are exempt from many criteria (e.g. publishing pay gap data) so the FPR does not penalise foundations for deciding to have few staff and/or few trustees.

* p=0.00003132. Correlation coefficient is 0.40.

It may be because making the policies and disclosing the information which the FPR requires – which comes from other organisations' benchmarks and two consultations with the sector, i.e. seem to be what the sector wants – takes work, and having too few personnel means that foundations lack the labour to do that work. Clearly, funds spent on staff are funds not available for grants, but there could be false economies: perhaps foundations with few staff could improve their performance and impact by having more.

On which, remember that the FPR does not assess tiny foundations. In Years One, Two and Three the FPR's cohort was a subset of the largest 300 foundations in the country – plus community foundations and foundations which fund the FPR. In Year Four and Year Five, it is almost all foundations giving over £1 million, and yet the pattern persists.

Some corporate foundations appear to have few staff – few are employed by the foundation itself, though there may be several people involved who are employed by the company. They are presumably noise in these data.

Why foundations which dropped grades did so

To avoid errors which penalise foundations, before the data is finalised, the researchers identify every foundation which appears to have dropped a grade on any domain since they were last assessed, even if their most recent assessment was not last year. They then identify and re-check the data for every criterion on which the foundations have dropped points in every domain on which their grade looks to have dropped.

The researchers also look for foundations which are just below grade boundaries, and check all the data about them to see whether bumping them up a grade can be justified.

The main reasons that foundations dropped grades this year were these:

- Documents which counted previously are now too old and the researchers didn't find (and the foundation didn't alert them to) replacement newer ones.
- The links to a previously relevant document is now broken and no replacement document was found.
- Foundations being closed / paused now, e.g. Asda Foundation.
- Different exemptions:
 - Foundations having more staff or more trustees now, so fewer exemptions, e.g. one foundation seems to have had one staff member last time, but 21 now.
 - Foundations having been partly closed before, so being marked last time as not accepting unsolicited applications, which triggers some exemptions, which now no longer apply.
 - For one, last time, it was unclear how to apply, whereas now it is clear that it does not accept unsolicited proposals.

4. Other findings

Non-scoring questions

The FPR also gathered data – but did not score foundations – on several factors (question numbers are cited for ease of referencing).

First, whether they make a **public commitment to be a Living Wage Funder**, and do so on their website or in their annual report (Q 50a). Sixteen in the Year Five cohort did so, compared with 22 who stated a commitment to being a Living Wage Employer. Given the effect that funders (can) have on grantee practices, including salaries, it would be excellent if more foundations committed to funding Living Wages.

Second, **staff and trustee diversity targets for LGBTQIA+ and social class or lived experience** (Qs 48 and 55 – only gender, ethnicity and disability score here). Foundations with targets around staff diversity remain the exception rather than the rule, both for more established categories of gender, ethnicity and disability, and for newer categories. But there is improvement from last year. Wiltshire and Swindon Community Foundation, Mission44, Cheshire Community Foundation Limited and Cumbria Community Foundation were the only four foundations which had numerical targets to improve the diversity of their staff.

Targets around trustee diversity are even rarer, but also better than last year.

Three foundations (Wellcome, Wiltshire and Swindon Community Foundation, Cheshire Community Foundation) have numerical targets for diversity of trustees/board members. Some foundations have told the researchers that they have consciously decided against numerical targets: for small teams this is clearly reasonable.

Lastly, whether the foundation **comments on its payout rate** (Q 80). In applying this question, a judgement was made about whether a payout rate was relevant / meaningful: some foundations are not endowed, and receive money and disburse it quite quickly. Some are a mixture of the two. For this reason, payout rate was only sought out when more than half of a foundation's income was from investments.

In Year Five, 35 foundations met that test. Of those, 25 provided some comment which, the researchers believe, relates to (but may not concern explicitly) their payout rates.

The payout rates (some of which were calculated, rather than being stated by the foundation) ranged from 2.6% to 21%. To reiterate, foundations are not scored on this.

Foundations' reporting about lived experience, and social class

For Year Five, as for the last four years, data were collected on whether foundations reported about the 'lived experience' and/or 'social class' of their staff and trustees. This does not contribute to ratings (though it may in future). Rather, they were collected as a 'toe in the water', to see whether foundations report on these issues, and if so how and what definitions they use. Specifically, information was collected on whether either of these categories were included in staff and trustee biographies, in the staff and trustee diversity reporting, and/or as targets for staff and trustees in any diversity plans.

Both issues present definitional challenges, and clear independent definitions would help.

Lived experience

There is not yet a clear, agreed definition of 'lived experience'. This creates some difficulty in collecting data. For example, one foundation cites a trustee who has lived in the country where it conducts most of its activities. Does that count as lived experience? On the one hand it implies (but does not prove) an understanding of local communities, but on the other hand this person may not have dealt with any barriers themselves so may not have 'lived' them or understand them. Similarly for a staff member who has 'caring responsibilities'.

This year, three foundations provided information about the lived experience of their trustees: John Ellerman Foundation, Variety the Children's Charity and Barnwood Trust. Barnwood Trust was the only foundation that reported this about its staff. This was better than Year Four, when just one foundation reported lived experience information about trustees and none did for staff.

Social class

In Year Five, seven foundations reported information on the social class of trustees and/or staff, or had numeric targets on this in their diversity strategy, up from five foundations in Year Four.

Foundations used various definitions / interpretations here. The most common ways were to collect information about the education of the staff member / trustee. Questions related to the type of school they attended, highest level of education, if their parents or guardians completed a university degree or equivalent or not, income support received during school years, free school meals received during school years, profession of their parents, etc.

Foundations' reporting about the diversity of the organisations whom they fund

In Year Three, the FPR began recording whether foundations reported on the diversity of their grantees or applicants. This was a non-scoring question included in response to the consultation, to find out what foundations are reporting about diversity, and what tools or standards they were using.*

In the Year Five cohort, eight foundations published about this. This is few, though again there are some foundations which have consciously decided against reporting on this (even for sizable teams) in the interests of privacy or other concerns. The foundations which did publish on this were:

- Wellcome (reported on the proportion of lead applicants on grants awarded by gender, disability and ethnicity);¹¹
- Paul Hamlyn Foundation (conducted a racial justice audit analysis);
- Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (reported on communities experiencing racial inequality, disabled, educationally and economically disadvantaged, LGBT+, migrants, older/younger people, women/girls);
- John Ellerman Foundation (reported proportion of grants led by people experiencing racial inequity, grants led by people from a specific group or community like women/girls, educationally or economically disadvantaged people);
- Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust (on the number/percentage of grants designed to benefit black or ethnic minority communities and grants to organisations with a majority of board and senior staff from black, Asian or minority ethnic groups);
- Walcot Educational Foundation;
- Barnwood Trust (demographics of their grantees including gender, age, physical disability); and
- Hampton Fuel Allotment (show how their grants are distributed across categories such as disability and ethnic minorities).

For context, in Year Four, nine foundations reported about this, none of which were community foundations.

As with Year Four, this year the cohort varied in the characteristics of diversity that they reported, and in whether or not they stated the definitions that they used, e.g. the DEI Data Standard or the Race Equality Audit.

* As an aside, in the interests of transparency and fairness in the grant-making processes, some foundations use randomisation in their selection process. One such is the British Academy. The partial randomisation of its grants appears to have increased the proportion of people of colour in the applicant pool and amongst grantees:

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2025/04/16/how-randomisation-has-changed-the-british-academys-approach-to-research-funding/>

Overall, there is still very little published information on the diversity of grantees, which does not give a reliable picture of funding flows in the sector.

Foundation websites

In general, foundations with websites were good about publishing their funding priorities, eligibility information and information about who and what they have funded. Having a website is essential to performing well, both in the domains and overall: only one foundation without a website has ever scored above D overall: Rachel Charitable Trust did so this year.

As in previous years, many foundation websites could be much better:

- 21 foundations in the Year Five cohort had no website at all.
- When navigated using the keyboard, some websites did not highlight the position of the cursor, leaving one to read the small navigation text in the bottom left corner. This increases the navigation difficulty for some readers.
- Some websites are very 'busy', impeding finding information. This is a concern because the FPR researchers operate as if they were potential applicants, who might also be unable to find information that they need.
- Other websites shared only very limited information. Some of the foundations included this year had just a single webpage. Below is a section about poor website practices.

Evidence and analysis of foundations' own effectiveness

Many foundations require grantees and applicants to produce evidence of their effectiveness, yet few foundations publish such analysis of their own effectiveness. All these criteria have been scored somewhat generously. Despite that, in Year Five, only four of the 100 foundations in the main cohort were scored as providing analysis of their own effectiveness, and only 11 as gathering systematic feedback from their grantees / applicants.

Definitions and decision – rules

Clearly, grant-makers' effects are mainly vicarious through their grantees, so identifying their effects is complicated. But it is possible to gain a 'line of sight' through various types of analysis, all of which Giving Evidence has seen foundations produce and publish. Analysis was counted such as the following. FPR published a blog post which lays out what counts.¹²

Views of grantees and/or applicants, collected systematically, and the data reported. There is a criterion and point for this (Q 65). The researchers do not count ad-hoc quotes or case studies published without a statement that all grantees / applicants were surveyed, because there is no way of knowing whether the foundation has cherry-picked only the most flattering examples. To count, this feedback needs to cover all the foundation's work, not just a sub-set (e.g. some but not all of its programmes). This is to avoid bias if foundations only publish feedback about those programmes for which feedback was positive.

Other analysis. There is a separate criterion and point for this (Q 67). Analyses which might count here include:

- analysis of the proportion of grants which (at some level) succeeded vs those which did not; and
- analysis of the costs created by the foundation's funding processes and borne by grantees / applicants: ideally this would be expressed as a proportion of the amount given, i.e. the net grant. This matters because clearly if a foundation is a net drain on the sector it seeks to support, then it is not helping.

The researchers were open to counting other relevant analyses if they found them.

Points were not awarded for:

- simple breakdowns of the grant portfolio, e.g. by grant size, geography or sector, because these do not relate to effectiveness. Again, many of these were found, and they are useful for other analysis, but do not relate to effectiveness;
- statements of changes that are being made in response to feedback but without publishing what that feedback is. Though improving in response to feedback is clearly valuable, it is not visible to outsiders;
- claiming some benefit but without explaining the input data or calculation method (since such data could simply be fabricated). For instance, a foundation in a previous year claimed that its effects include '[e]conomic value of 117 jobs created or maintained' (which it gives as £3.2 million), but no source data or calculation is given;
- stories of grantees' effects. Grantees might have achieved that impact *despite* their funders! (This will certainly happen if the grant is net negative – costing more to deal with the funder than is granted, as happens sometimes);
- citing activities / outputs;
- describing or counting changes created by grantees. This is because it is unclear whether the funder(s) contributed to those changes: sometimes grantees achieve things despite meddling funders!

For both feedback from grantees / applicants (Q 65) and analysis of the foundation's effectiveness (Q 67), there are related criteria as to whether the foundation publishes any plans arising from the research. Sometimes foundations commission an agency to gather and analyse the feedback, and sometimes publish that report in full. That suffices for Q 65. Sometimes those reports contain recommendations to the foundation. But they

do not normally contain the foundation's commitments, which are needed for that ancillary point (Q 66).

As for other criteria, the material needed to have been published in the last three years. A handful of foundations published relevant material which was just too old to count. (This is unfortunate because some foundations do these exercises triennially – which is a reasonable period – so got caught by this.)

Findings

Feedback from grantees / applicants

Eleven foundations published feedback from grantees / applicants. One said that it has commissioned research which was underway at the time of the assessment.

Some research was undertaken by the foundation itself (e.g. Cheshire Community Foundation) whereas others were externally commissioned reports (e.g. John Ellerman Foundation). One (BBC Children in Need) states that it has commissioned a survey of grantees and applicants, but the researchers did not find it published (yet) so this did not count.

John Ellerman Foundation also publishes a statement about its response to the findings and its consequent plans.¹³ Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Shine do the same. Mission44 is also a good example here.

Interesting examples also include Asda Foundation, which cites a survey of 'the community' (not grantees), though that is not published. The foundation does cite that its strategy will focus on three groups which emerged from that community survey. The Robertson Trust runs pilots and looks at actions / learning arising, and solicits feedback.¹⁴

Also, Barnwood Trust has an annual public meeting: this is excellent and rare.¹⁵ (A decade ago, Giving Evidence looked at whether foundations and charities – all of which get tax subsidy – have any meetings in public, inspired by Global Giving UK which does. Of 82 investigated, only two did.¹⁶)

Analysis of effectiveness

Only four foundations scored points here – even marking generously. One published a good analysis of one programme that it runs: ideally there would be analysis across the whole foundation's work.

Shine publishes about what the grantees achieve (e.g. literacy speeds: this is not what this criterion is about) but there is some related analysis of how Shine's support relates to those achievements.

Hampton Fund asks grantees not only for their perceptions of the funder, but the extent to which the funding / funder has helped them achieve their various goals. It is clearly on a journey of increasing sophistication in thinking about its effectiveness and how best to engage with grantees (as are others!).

City Bridge Foundation publishes the average time to complete a grant application, which is useful for applicants: the data are from GrantAdvisor. (This did not suffice for a point.)

In sum, as in previous years, foundations could do much more to analyse and understand their own effects – as opposed to those achieved by their grantees – and to publish the methods and findings of those analyses. If a new funder were to read all the impact reports published by the cohort of 100 foundations, they might learn disappointingly little about how to give well.

It's very difficult to contact some foundations

Each year, the research team send to each assessed foundation the draft data about it, for it to check. They used the contact details that foundations provide. Every year's cohort has included some foundations which publish no email address, so the data is sent by post. This year, there were 11 such foundations. As a reminder, all included foundations give at least £1.17 million per year so are not small. Those 11 included one of the largest five funders in the UK.

For many of the foundations, the email address is a generic one – such as info@ or enquiries@ – and sometimes it is for a lawyer. Foundations quite often feed back that those emails are not received: presumably they go to spam and are not checked. That is, for many foundations, the contact details which a prospective applicant might use go to some place which is not checked.

All charitable foundations operate in the public interest and are subsidised by the taxpayer. It seems not unreasonable that outsiders should be able to contact them.

Examples of good practice

The research encountered some particularly strong practices. Some are cited here to inspire other foundations and to show what is possible.

Non-financial capacity building for grantees: **The Robertson Trust** provides comprehensive non-financial capacity-building support to its grantees through its Funder Plus programme. This support is designed to help grant holders become stronger, more resilient organisations better able to meet the needs of people in Scotland experiencing poverty and trauma. **Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation** also provides non-financial capacity building and networking opportunities for grantees.

Data about staff and trustee diversity: **Cumbria Community Foundation** has benchmarking data about staff and trustee diversity on various criteria. **John Ellerman Foundation** has clear diversity reporting in its Annual Report. It also has a full

recruitment policy which is a good example too. Paul Hamlyn Foundation has pay gap data based on gender and ethnicity.¹⁷

Foundation Scotland publishes pay gaps and gender ratios of its employees.

Accessibility: Enthuse Charitable Trust's website is accessible by navigating using speech recognition software and listening to content using a screen reader.

Access Support Bursary: Buckinghamshire Community Foundation supports people with up to £300 for support in making a grant application. The support involves Braille, interpreters, etc. **Paul Hamlyn Foundation** also has an Access Support Bursary to help applicants.

Information to help applicants decide whether to apply:

- Wiltshire and Swindon Community Foundation has grants overview including success rates.
- Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust provides clear information about its decision-making timeframe,¹⁸ and also about success rates.
- Mercer's Charitable Foundation (which opted in) presents very clearly its success rates and timeframe for all grant programmes.

Grantee survey and feedback: AB Charitable Trust has published grantee feedback in full, and good details of what it is doing differently by using this feedback (though it is now over three years old). **Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales** publishes its grantee perception survey in full.

In terms of **foundation practices**, Wellcome has a good paper reflecting on one of its grant programmes (around cholera) and how the processes for call-for-proposals and funding could have been better.¹⁹

Examples of poor websites

Clear, transparent information is genuinely helpful: unclear or confusing information is not. There were various issues with websites that create confusion. These are detailed as practices to avoid: these examples are anonymised because it is the practice which matters and not the foundation itself.

Foundations linked with corporates

For some foundations of large companies, the foundation information is one page / some pages on the company site, and it is unclear whether information, for instance a policy or a DEI strategy, applies to the foundation only or to the larger company. It would help if this were clearer, e.g. if the foundation has a separate website, or if it stated when / whether the company details / policies also apply to the foundation.

In one case, there is quite a lot on the website and it is unclear what refers to the work of the foundation and what refers to the company's services.

Web presence and information clarity

Similar to the corporate foundation mentioned above, some foundations did not have a standalone website, but instead had a single webpage or section on the website of a larger organisation. It can be unclear what refers to what. One foundation with just one webpage managed multiple funds, and the information provided – such as each fund's purpose, criteria and application details – was limited and not clearly presented. This lack of clarity makes it difficult for users to fully understand or access the funding available.

Several foundations had no website and gave very scarce information about its operations in its annual report. This too was found in previous years.

Some foundations' websites were confusing overall. One had an 'online recruitment portal' that was not listed on the regulator's website: it appeared to be for new and existing donors and charities (applicants perhaps: it was unclear) and the site could only be accessed after entering bank details.

Sometimes foundations did not list priority funding areas nor how to apply on their website, nor timeframes: sometimes those foundations' annual report stated that they consider all applications.

5. Reactions from foundations

The discussion of foundations' reactions has been split into: their technical reactions to the data about them, which they are each sent to check; and comments about the FPR more broadly.

Foundations' reactions to the data about them

Each included foundation was sent the information gathered about it, so that it could point out anything that had been missed, or provide relevant context or interpretation. They had at least three weeks to respond. The research team ran three public webinars during this period, open to anybody, and to which the included foundations were invited.

As a reminder, most (92) of the 100 included foundations had not asked to be included: only the foundations funding the FPR had done so.

Responses were received from 26 foundations in Year Five. That is an increase from Year Four, which saw 19 responses. Some of the foundations that responded had not been assessed before, whereas some were assessed in previous years as well.

A few of the responses simply confirmed that the data were accurate. Several included positive comments that the foundations were glad to have been assessed and find it useful.

The comments were all in one of the following categories:

- Updated information where it differed from that shown by the regulator, e.g. on number of staff. The FPR only uses publicly available data, therefore revisions were made only if the change was reflected in the regulator's or foundation's website.
- Some foundations noted that the exercise had highlighted some website functionality or content issues that had gone unnoticed, e.g. a broken link or a change in practice that was not yet reflected on the site. Where the foundation had made the correction, the scoring was revised.
- Some provided explanations for why certain information is not available, e.g. diversity data or a whistleblower policy is not made public.
- Some foundations provided links to data, e.g. multiple locations where grantee information is stored, or documents that the research team had missed.
- There were a few instances where the foundations sought clarification about closely related criteria, e.g. a complaints policy and a whistleblower policy, or feedback from grantees and analysis of effectiveness.

- Getting to know about something interesting, e.g. one foundation realised there was a separate accreditation for being a Living Wage Funder and a Living Wage Employer. They have been a Living Wage Employer for a few years, and are now applying to be a Living Wage Funder.

Feedback from foundations about the FPR

Many pieces of feedback were again provided this year. Some were recounted verbally; others in writing. Some were from foundations which have been assessed (either this year or previously), others were from foundations which have never (yet) been assessed.

Below are some examples: these were provided – unsolicited – when foundations wrote to the researchers in response to the data about them that they were sent to check.

“We wanted to let you know that we have made some updates to our website in response to some of the points in our FPR review, including making our enquiry form clearer and giving more info about what we look for and how long our processes take. We also recently ran our own feedback survey, and took some of the feedback from our partners onboard too in terms of other edits, as well as the IVAR peer review process.”

“We feel that it is an accurate reflection of the information available. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to feed back. Looking forward to seeing the report in due course.”

The FPR team has also heard many such views verbally.

These views are very heartening because the FPR was created and designed to influence behaviour, rather than simply a research exercise.

Clearly, this feedback is not definitive proof of systematic change across the board, but it is nonetheless encouraging because it indicates that the FPR is having its desired effect of encouraging foundations to improve their practices.

6. Next steps

Next year's research and analysis

The Foundation Practice Rating will run again in 2026–27 (which will be Year Six). The details have yet to be finalised but the following is envisaged.

The cohort of foundations will be defined in the same way: that is, it will comprise:

- the foundations funding the work;
- the five largest UK foundations by giving budget; and
- a fresh sample of other foundations drawn from an independently published list of UK grant-making foundations, and the most recent list of UK community foundations. It will, again, be a stratified random sample.

As with previous years, there is a good chance that some foundations in the cohort in Year Five or before will be included again, simply by weight of numbers.

It is likely that **the criteria** for Year Six will be largely the same. That is for reasons of continuity and direct comparison. That said, the questions may be refined in the light of experience and feedback. At some point the criteria may be completely overhauled, reviewing them 'from the ground up'.

The 'grade boundaries' are likely to remain the same in Year Six as for previous years, to avoid chopping and changing. An alternative is to raise the bar for the rating bands, on the basis that, by Year Six, foundations have had time to improve their practice and disclosure, and expectations should accordingly be higher.

Assessing the effects of the FPR

As set out before, accurately and comprehensively identifying the entire effect of this project is challenging.

This is because there is no counterfactual: the FPR 'operates on' the whole UK foundation sector – and does so quite deliberately – for instance by publishing the FPR criteria and stating publicly that the rating is being carried out, and that any foundation might be included in any year. There are therefore no foundations that are outside what researchers call the 'treatment group' (i.e. who are not affected by the project). This precludes any comparison of changes in performance of foundations who are 'treated'

(i.e. assessed) with changes in performance of foundations who are not – everybody is ‘treated’.

Furthermore, there is no ‘baseline’ data. The FPR Year One data in effect are the baseline, but they were gathered *after* the criteria and guidance on ‘how to do well’ were published: that is, after the intervention started. As a result, it is possible that some foundations may have changed practices and public documents in response to the criteria and guidance but before the formal data gathering. And that is great! The FPR team and funders are primarily interested in encouraging change, though understanding the FPR’s influence is important for learning and improvement.

Consequently, it is not possible to rigorously distinguish between the effects of this rating and the effects of (the many) other factors that affect foundations. Any observed changes could be due to factors that affect all foundations.

However, as mentioned, there are encouraging signals and examples from various foundations that they are changing their practices in response to the FPR (and probably other factors too). Many foundations have said that they find value in this process and the criteria. The FPR will continue to track these stories and it is hoped that the process continues to create value for the sector. The FPR may commission some systematic qualitative work to hear from foundations about whether they are aware of the FPR, their experiences of it and whether / where / how it has affected their practices. This might illuminate both the kinds of effects that the FPR is having, and how it could be amended to be more consequential.

How to provide feedback

Friends Provident Foundation welcomes feedback about this project. That can include your views about the process or the results; or if your foundation is now changing its practice as a result.

Please contact Friends Provident Foundation:

enquiries@friendsprovidentfoundation.org.uk

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