

Transcript – Minister Paschal Donohoe remarks April 2017 in launching Benefacts first Sector Analysis Report.

Well good morning everybody, Tom, Ombudsperson, Patricia.

I just want to recognise you all and thank you all for your immense work in getting to this point in this very important project. I'm really delighted to be back here today. As Tom has already said, the very first public event I ever did as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, was to launch this project and launch the website in relation to it.

An awful lot has happened since then and I have seen an awful lot of change. But one of the things that has been constant across this period is the admiration and supports that I and my Department have for the Benefacts project. If you want an example as to why I believe this is a very valuable project, as to why I believe the output is so crucial, a lot of that is actually contained in the final chapter in this report which I think is worth considering. It is entitled 'Scope and Approach', and it goes through the process that was followed to get to this point and the further work that needs to be done.

And the key thing in all of this is that all of this is possible only because Benefacts have done a huge amount of work to assemble all of the information that is needed in relation to what is happening in the not-for-profit sector: the sources of income, the scale of the sector, the outputs the sector generates. And the process that has got us to this point is incredibly important.

As someone who has spent so much of his time looking at outputs as opposed to input, the outputs that are now emerging from this are really helpful. Patricia has already touched on one of them, the clarity that is available for the first time for example on remuneration. This is very important, to have clarity with where we are now in relation to the level of disclosure within the sector is very important. For the first time we can all be clear on the scale of funding that is involved in this sector, what goes to whom and why. The analysis and the interrogation of all of this data is now possible in an objective way because of the work of Patricia and her team. And I think it is incredibly important.

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In Patricia's conclusion, she made reference to the importance of information, the importance of having data to be able to understand where we are and understand where we are going. And I guess this is something in the environment of fake news, of post truth politics or whatever, the value of these things is something now that we can't take for granted and maybe even the value is even higher than it was a short time a while ago.

And that is what the Benefacts project is looking to do, they are looking for a sector that is really important, that after all it receives from various funders well in excess of €10billion worth of support - from the Exchequer alone, support of over €5billion - which are gigantic amounts of money.

What Benefacts allows us to do is now bring a fact-based approach to understanding how that money is used, what's the totality of funding and what are the disclosure levels in organisation of all the recipients of all of that funding. And that is vital. It's vital in the era that we are in, but it's also vital for another reason. Again, as Patricia said, the not-for-profit sector is a sector that we as a country have decided to entrust with the delivery at times of public services or with the delivery of objectives that we believe are really important to our society. And given that importance and given the debate that is taking place around who does what in our society and what organisation should perform what services to who and under what conditions? It's more important than ever to have the deepest understanding of what is happening, to deal with misperceptions, to deal with things that are not true, but also to appreciate the scale of what goes on, so that when we want to acknowledge the fantastic work that does happen in that sector and let's be clear of fantastic work that takes place, the degree of professionalism, the efficiency that is there in that sector, is really there it's something that pulses through us.

But also, as we acknowledge what we want to do differently, how we want to improve, how we want to change. The starting point for any kind of discussion like this has to be facts, there has to be evidence. And a huge challenge that we have had in the past is trying to integrate all of that into a single place and then when we integrate it trying to do that integration in a way that's accessible to all.

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It's to the huge credit of Benefacts that they have been able to do it, I want to acknowledge the other sponsors and funders that they have had, Atlantic Philanthropies, we see the reference to the Ireland funds here who have been huge supporter of the project. My own Department has prioritised this project for a nearly 2 million euro worth of funding in its first three-year period. And we did this because we think this is really important work. We are now engaging with Patricia and Tom in relation to the business plan for this organisation and the future.

But to end where I began, I and my Department believe this is really important work and it's more important now than ever. Facts give us an ability to understand what is happening, they give us the ability to explain to the public where the money is going. This is incredibly important now.

So, it's for those reasons I'm delighted to be here and to be associated with the launch of this report. I want to thank Tom and Patricia and all of their staff and their team for the great work they have done in the set up of this organisation, the set up of the site and the early publication of an incredible valuable and useful report. Thank you.

Ends.