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The impact of ICTs on the communication of parliamentary information in the UK:
results of a pilot project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council

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Timeliness of ESRC project

- **Formative period of new devolved bodies**

  Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales, Northern Ireland Assembly

- **Freedom of information; openness and transparency agendas**

- **e-government agendas; e-Envoy website design guidelines**

- **Growing political apathy among UK public**

- **Built on previous research conducted by Project Team**

  UK public's need for European Union information and citizenship information

ESRC Project 2001

Stage 1

- **Face to face interviews with representatives of:-**
    House of Commons and House of Lords Information Offices
    Scottish Parliament Public Information Service
    National Assembly for Wales Public Information and Education Service

- **Telephone interview with representative of:-**
    Northern Ireland Assembly Public Information Office

Stage 2

- 15 roadshow events conducted in England, Scotland and Wales
- Roadshows held in public libraries, community centres, universities, sheltered accommodation, etc.
- Interactive, electronically-assisted interviews
- 79 interviews conducted overall (17% response rate)

Parliamentary public information services: some common approaches (1)

- ## Interparliamentary Forum

- ## Enquiry services
  - Most enquiries about elected members and parliamentary business

  - Enquiries increase when high-profile topics are debated
  - Enquiries from general public, the media, business and education communities

  - Mostly by telephone, but e-mail enquiries increasing rapidly
  - Public confusion over structure, roles and responsibilities of the UK Parliament and the devolved bodies

Parliamentary public information services: some common approaches (2)

- ## Publications programmes

  e.g. House of Commons Factsheets, Scottish Parliament Factfiles

  Increasingly available in various languages and formats

- ## Websites

  - Similar content: Hansard (and equivalents), minutes, annual reports, consultation papers, press releases, etc.
  - Scottish Parliament site in English and Gaelic; Welsh Assembly site in English and Welsh
  - All provide webcasting facilities

Parliamentary websites: some findings from roadshow events

Of the 79 participants:-

68 believed the website served a useful purpose;

71 found it easy to use;

61 thought the information retrieved was interesting;

69 found the information easy to understand;

43 felt such information was relevant to their own lives;

61 might visit the website again in the future.

In general, highest ratings were for Scottish Parliament site, lowest were for UK Parliament site

Parliamentary public information services: some common approaches (3)

■ **Education services**

- Visits programmes
- Other events, e.g. pupil parliaments, 'Question Time' sessions, teacher training days
- Educational resources, e.g. wallcharts, revision notes, CD-ROMs
- Separate websites/pages

■ **Public library networks**

- Scottish Parliament: Partner Libraries
- Welsh Assembly: Information Link

Parliamentary public information services: some common approaches (4)

- **Visitor centres**

  - Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly

- **Distribution of tickets for public galleries**

- **Outreach work**

  - Talks to external groups are limited
  - Scottish Parliament: presence at committee meetings held outside Edinburgh
  - Welsh Assembly: presence at major agricultural shows and cultural events

Conclusions

- No consensus on best practice in public information services, but each service shares a similar overall vision

- All services experiencing rapid growth in e-mail enquiries; this has significant management implications

- Public confusion over roles and responsibilities of UK legislative and executive bodies; likely to increase with further devolution

- No great consistency in website structure or design

- Apparent public disinterest in using parliamentary websites (see also HEDRA research), and lack of appreciation of their relevance

- Not enough to simply ensure that parliamentary information is publicly accessible in electronic form: other motivators and forms of support are required