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## 6.5 Citizenship information

### A national survey of the citizenship information needs of the general public

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A relatively rare example of research originating from the LIS sector which ranges more widely than libraries. The survey examines the kinds of information that a sample of citizens have sought - and might in future seek - from public institutions. There are questions on citizens' satisfaction with information provided, information which is difficult to obtain, reasons for seeking information, and preferred media/formats for using information. Readers should go to the original report for many additional data which have had to be omitted from the summary - notably, some of the demographic data on the respondents.

This is an interim report, 1997. The final report will be available in April 1999.

### Introduction and methodology

This report focuses on the results of the first stage of the Citizenship Information research project - a questionnaire-based survey of members of the UK public, designed to elicit preliminary data on their use of and need for citizenship information. Prior to its dissemination, the questionnaire was tested on 100 users of Aberdeen City Libraries.

For the dissemination of the questionnaire, the project team enlisted the help of various public library authorities, Citizens Advice Bureaux and other generalist information and advice agencies throughout the country. In each of the 13 Government Office Regions of the UK one public library authority, plus either one CAB or other advice agency, were asked to distribute questionnaires to their users/clients. In addition, the public library authorities were asked to distribute half of their allocated questionnaires from a central reference library, and the other half from one of their busier branch libraries. In total, some 2830 questionnaires were disseminated from 42 service points in 28 organisations.

The public libraries were asked if systematic sampling might be used, whereby every 10th user approaching the issue/enquiry desk in each distribution point would be given a questionnaire. Given that the number of enquiries received annually by CABx throughout the UK is far fewer than that received by public libraries (in 1995-96, 6,956,459 enquiries in CABx, compared with 57,327,000 enquiries in public libraries) the CABx and the other advice agencies were asked if they could hand out questionnaires to every second user. Such a systematic approach may not always have been possible in practice. Distribution of the

questionnaires began on 9th June 1997 and finished on 31st October 1997.

### Response

Overall, 1294 of the questionnaires were completed and returned - a very pleasing response rate of 45.7%. The data from the completed forms were analysed using the statistical software package *SPSS for Windows*.

#### Response by type of organisation

There was a sizeable response from all regions of the UK. [Table 6.5.1](#) indicates the response by the type of organisation in which the questionnaires were distributed.

#### 6.5.1 Response by type of organisation

Type of organisation	Number	% of total response	Response rate (%)
Public library authorities	975	75.3	69.4
Citizens Advice Bureaux	253	19.6	49.6
Other advice agencies	66	5.1	8.3
Total	1294	100	

There was an overwhelmingly better response from the public libraries as a distribution mechanism. While just under half (49.6%) of the original questionnaires were distributed by public libraries, over 75% of the completed survey forms were returned by public libraries; and the public library response rate of 69.4% compares favourably with

### 6.5.2 Social class of employed respondents

Social Class	Male	Female	Totals	% (of 409)
I Professional etc. occupations	29	10	39	9.5
II Managerial and technical occupations	80	79	159	38.9
III(N) Skilled occupations non-manual	31	83	114	27.9
III(M) Skilled occupations manual	24	17	41	10.0
IV Partly skilled occupations	24	18	42	10.3
V Unskilled occupations	7	7	14	3.4
Totals	195 (47.7%)	214 (52.3%)	409	100

that of the CABx (49.6%) and the particularly poor response rate of 8.3% in the other advice and information agencies.

#### Demographic details of respondents

Of the 1,294 completed questionnaires:

- 14% were returned from rural areas
- 48.7% were male; 50.5% female; 0.9% unspecified
- 90.7% white; 9.3% from ethnic minorities
- 41.8% working; 13.7% seeking work; 20.8% retired; 6.6% running a home; 14.1% students.

#### Social class of respondents

The 541 respondents who were either in paid employment or were self employed were asked to specify their occupation. Those who did specify an

occupation (409 respondents) were then allocated a social class using the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys Standard Occupational Classification. These are detailed in [Table 6.5.2](#).

#### Citizenship information need

##### Examples of past need

There was an open question which asked respondents to give an example of an occasion in which they had been required to look for information to help them make a decision, solve a problem, or understand something a little better. In total, 769 (59.4%) of the respondents gave such an example. While the number of examples given by respondents in the CABx and other advice agencies was high (60.1% and 57.6% of respondents, respectively) it was surprising it was not greater, for it might be safe to assume that the main reason for their visit to such an organisation would have been to help with a problem of some kind. The nature of this information need is summarised in [Table 6.5.3](#).

### 6.5.3 Nature of past information need

Nature of information need	Number	% (of 769 respondents)
Education		
- to assist with coursework, projects, etc. (139)		
- to choose schools, universities, courses, etc. (58)	197	25.6
Leisure and recreation		
- hobbies and pastimes (92)		
- travel and tourism (38)	130	16.9
Health care	89	11.6
Welfare benefits	82	10.7
Legal information	75	9.8
Employment / job opportunities	64	8.3
Financial matters	40	5.2
Consumer and credit	33	4.3
Housing	33	4.3
Business information	30	3.9
Family / Personal matters	25	3.3
Taxation	11	1.4
Politics / UK Government	9	1.2
Local government	7	0.9
Local planning information	7	0.9
Charitable / Voluntary work	6	0.8
Health and safety at work	6	0.8
Technology and communications	5	0.7
Other	15	1.9

### Satisfaction with information

In a further question, the 769 respondents who indicated they had looked for information in the past were then asked how satisfied they were with the information they obtained, and asked to respond for each of the prompted questions. This is summarised in Table 6.5.4.

What is immediately of interest about these responses is the fact that the accuracy, currency, comprehensiveness and format of information are difficult qualities for users to judge, and higher proportions of respondents held no view on these. Generally they were happy with the comprehensibility and the relevance of the information found.

### Problems in obtaining information

In another question, the 769 respondents who indicated a specific example of looking for information in the past were asked if there were any kinds of information which might have helped them, but which they had found difficult to obtain. In all, 196 (25.5%) of these respondents had encountered difficulties in the past in obtaining information. When asked to provide some details, the majority indicated the types of information that had proved difficult to acquire, and these are summarised in Table 6.5.5.

#### 6.5.4 Satisfaction with information obtained

Was the information:	YES		NO		No response	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Easy to understand?	618	80.4	72	9.4	79	10.3
Relevant?	618	80.4	30	3.9	121	15.7
Accurate?	547	71.1	51	6.6	171	22.2
Up to date?	470	61.1	114	14.8	185	24.1
Comprehensive?	479	62.3	103	13.4	187	24.3
In a physical form that was easy to use?	470	61.1	85	11.1	214	27.8

Note: %'s within each description

#### 6.5.5 Types of information that were difficult to obtain

Types of information	Number	%
Technology and communications	3	(of 5) 60.0
Health and safety at work	3	(of 6) 50.0
Local planning information	3	(of 7) 42.9
Business information	11	(of 30) 36.7
Taxation	4	(of 11) 36.4
Disability	1	(of 3) 33.3
Legal information	22	(of 75) 29.3
Local government	2	(of 7) 28.6
Politics/UK government	2	(of 9) 22.2
Health care	15	(of 89) 16.9
Education		
- to assist with coursework, projects, etc. (23; 16.5%)		
- to choose schools, universities, courses, etc. (8; 13.8%)	31	(of 197) 15.7
Housing	5	(of 33) 15.2
Employment/job opportunities	9	(of 64) 14.1
Leisure and recreation		
- hobbies and pastimes (12; 13.0%)		
- travel and tourism (6; 15.8%)	18	(of 130) 13.8
Financial matters	5	(of 40) 12.5
Welfare benefits	10	(of 82) 12.2
Family/personal matters	2	(of 25) 8.0
Consumer and credit	1	(of 33) 3.0

The percentages in each case are of those respondents who indicated they had looked for that type of information in the question relating to Table 6.5.3.

### Types of information sought in the past

While 769 respondents gave an example of an occasion on which they had sought information in answer to the open, unprompted question (Table 6.5.4, page 233), a larger number of answers were given when respondents were prompted with a list of 23 subjects which, the authors believed, were the prime components of citizenship information. Respondents were asked to indicate which they had 'ever wanted to find out more about in the past'. Overall, 1,100 (85%) had wanted to find out more about at least one of the subjects listed. A summary of the overall response, arranged in descending numerical order, is provided at Table 6.5.6.

### 6.5.6 Types of information sought in the past

Subject	Number	%
1. Leisure and recreation	502	38.8
2. Education	478	36.9
3. Employment / job opportunities	433	33.5
4. Transport and travel	409	31.6
5. Legal information	326	25.2
6. Health care	305	23.6
7. Social security benefits	284	21.9
8. Information about your local council	280	21.6
9. Financial matters	273	21.1
10. Environmental information	263	20.3
11. Information about politics/ UK govt.	260	20.1
12. Taxation	254	19.6
13. Housing	252	19.5
14. Family / personal matters	231	17.9
15. Technology and communications	223	17.2
16. Health and safety at work	218	16.8
17. Citizens' rights	202	15.6
18. Information about the European Union	176	13.6
19. Equal rights and discrimination	154	11.9
20. Business opportunities	151	11.7
21. Crime and security	144	11.1
22. Consumer and credit	139	10.7
23. Immigration and nationality	89	6.9

The top six answers to the unprompted question (where respondents had sought information on education, leisure, health care, welfare benefits, legal issues and employment) also occupy six of the top seven places in the table here. The one 'newcomer' is transport and travel information, cited here by 31.6% of the respondents.

### Past reasons for seeking information

Respondents were asked to indicate (from a list of 13 reasons) why they had wanted citizenship information in the past, and these are summarised in descending numerical order in Table 6.5.7.

### 6.5.7 Past reasons for wanting information

Reasons	Number	%
1. Educational / study reasons	632	48.8
2. Work-related reasons	455	35.2
3. A general interest	431	33.3
4. Family / personal reasons	426	32.9
5. Recreational reasons	365	28.2
6. Job-seeking reasons	359	27.7
7. Health reasons	303	23.4
8. Financial reasons	288	22.2
9. Legal reasons	251	19.4
10. Business / commercial reasons	157	12.1
11. For work with a representative / interest group	141	10.9
12. For political decision-making	100	7.7
13. Religious reasons	85	6.6

### Future information need

Using the same list of 23 subjects described earlier, respondents were also asked if they felt they might want to find out more about any of these topics in the future. Overall, 1,014 (78.4%) of the respondents predicted a future need for information on at least one of the subjects listed. The total response in descending numerical order can be seen at Table 6.5.8.

### 6.5.8 Predicted future information needs

Subject	Number	%
1. Leisure and recreation	462	35.7
2. Employment / job opportunities	418	32.3
3. Legal information	385	29.8
4. Transport and travel	375	29.0
5. Education	364	28.1
6. Health care	334	25.8
7. Information about your local council	308	23.8
8. Taxation	306	23.6
9. Financial matters	304	23.5
10. Information about the European Union	284	21.9
11. Environmental information	280	21.6
12. Information about politics/ UK govt.	272	21.0
13. Citizens' rights	266	20.6
14. Social security benefits	260	20.1
15. Technology and communications	254	19.6
16. Family / personal matters	252	19.5
17. Housing	249	19.2
18. Business opportunities	228	17.6
19. Health and safety at work	217	16.8
20. Crime and security	189	14.6
21. Equal rights and discrimination	179	13.8
22. Consumer and credit	172	13.3
23. Immigration and nationality	112	8.7

### 6.5.9 Difference between past and predicted future needs

Subject	Past need		Future need		Net difference	
	%	Pos.	%	Pos.	+pts	+Pos.
European Union	13.6	18	21.9	10	+8.3	+8
Business opps.	11.7	20	17.6	18	+5.9	+2
Citizens' rights	15.6	17	20.6	13	+5.0	+4
Legal	25.2	5	29.8	3	+4.6	+2
Crime/security	11.1	21	14.6	20	+3.5	+1
Taxation	19.6	12	23.6	8	+4.0	+4
Consumer/credit	10.7	22	13.3	22	+2.6	same
Technology / communications	17.2	15	19.6	15	+2.4	same
Financial	21.1	9	23.5	9	+2.4	same
Local council	21.6	8	23.8	7	+2.2	+1
Health care	23.6	6	25.8	6	+2.2	same
Equal rights	11.9	19	13.8	21	+1.9	-2
Immigration	6.9	23	8.7	23	+1.8	same
Family / personal	17.9	14	19.5	16	+1.6	+2
Environmental	20.3	10	21.6	11	+1.3	-1
Politics/govt.	20.1	11	21.0	12	+0.9	-1
Health & safety	16.8	16	16.8	19	0	-3
Housing	19.5	13	19.2	17	-0.3	-4
Employment	33.5	3	32.3	2	-1.2	+1
Welfare benefits	21.9	7	20.1	14	-1.8	-7
Transport / travel	31.6	4	29.0	4	-2.6	same
Leisure	38.8	1	35.7	1	-3.1	same
Education	36.9	2	28.1	5	-8.8	-3

The 'Pos.' columns in Table 6.5.9 indicate the 'league position' each subject held in the respective tables - e.g. leisure and recreation information was top of both past and future needs lists.

In the net difference column, the difference is shown as  $\pm$  percentage points, where '+' is predicted to be more popular in the future, and '-' is predicted to be less popular in the future.)

Table 6.5.9 summarises the differences between the respondents' past citizenship information needs, from Table 6.5.6, and their predicted future needs, from Table 6.5.8, indicating those categories where greatest change in future needs is predicted.

### Preferred sources of information

Respondents were given a list of organisations and people and asked to indicate whether they would approach them for information frequently or occasionally. In total, 1,209 (93.4%) of the respondents indicated they would approach at least one of the sources to obtain information. The overall response is outlined in Table 6.5.10.

### 6.5.10 Organisations and people that would be approached for information

Organisations / People	Frequently		Occasionally		Never	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Public libraries	655	50.6	346	26.7	293	22.6
Family and friends	551	42.6	247	19.1	496	38.3
Post offices	300	23.2	387	29.9	607	46.9
Academic libraries	287	22.2	222	17.2	785	60.7
Professional people (e.g. doctors and social workers)	219	16.9	415	32.1	660	51.0
Citizens Advice Bureaux	139	10.7	513	39.6	642	49.6
Offices of govt. depts. and agencies (e.g. Inland Revenue, Benefits agency)	136	10.5	561	43.4	597	46.1
Local council offices	135	10.4	416	32.1	743	57.4
Other information and advice centres	87	6.7	319	24.7	888	68.6
Professional / trade associations	69	5.3	224	17.3	1001	77.4
MPs	39	3.0	292	22.6	963	74.4
Chambers of Commerce	19	1.5	102	7.9	1173	90.6

Note: percentages run horizontally (i.e. percentage of each organisation/people).

### Preferred methods of obtaining information

In addition to examining sources of information (Table 6.5.10), the survey also asked respondents about their preferred method of obtaining the information from a given list. Respondents were asked to indicate their favourite three methods in order of preference. The responses to this question are outlined in Table 6.5.11. A small number of other methods were indicated by respondents: reading trade journals (1 respondent), watching/reading Teletext (1), and C.B. radio (1).

These responses were also given weighted scores (i.e. 3 points for a 1st choice, 2 points for a 2nd choice, and 1 point for a 3rd choice) and ranked accordingly.

### Access to information using computers

Respondents were asked how often they would use computers to look for information, if public access to computers was made more widely available. From a short list of public places (cited as likely locations for public access computers in the Government's *government.direct* Green Paper (Government), they were asked to indicate where they would go to use these computers. In all, 969 (74.9%) of the respondents indicated they would use computers on at least an occasional basis in at least one of the places listed. A summary is provided in Table 6.5.12.

#### 6.5.11 Preferred methods of obtaining information – 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> choices and ranked by weighted scores

Method	Points	1st choice (No.)	2nd choice (No.)	3rd choice (No.)
1. Talking face to face with someone	1023	215	125	128
2. Reading a book	848	168	130	84
3. Looking through a collection without help from the staff	827	173	99	110
4. Reading a newspaper	679	115	117	100
5. Talking by telephone to someone	518	62	120	92
6. Listening to the radio	426	85	53	65
7. Watching television	411	46	90	93
8. Reading a leaflet / pamphlet	312	29	75	75
9. Using a computer	275	30	59	67
10. Reading a magazine	232	21	56	57
11. Writing a letter	171	19	26	62

#### 6.5.12 Predicted frequency of use of computers

Location	Frequently		Occasionally		Never	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Public libraries	527	40.7	413	31.9	354	27.4
Post offices	169	13.1	319	24.7	806	62.3
Shopping centres	160	12.4	294	22.7	840	64.9
Town halls	128	9.9	250	19.3	916	70.8

Note: percentages run horizontally

### Reference

*Government direct : a prospectus for the electronic delivery of Government services.* London: HMSO, 1996 (Cm 3438).