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**CITIZENSHIP INFORMATION**

Rita Marcella and Graeme Baxter

**Abstract.-** Citizenship information is information produced by or about national and local government, government departments and public sector organisations which may be of value to the citizen either as part of everyday life or in the participation by the citizen in government and policy formulation. This report describes a research project, funded by the British Library Research and Innovation Centre, which investigated the extent to which members of the UK public have expressed or unexpressed needs for citizenship information, their preferred routes to the acquisition of such information, and the suitability and approachability of the public library, among other agencies, for the user seeking citizenship information. The key elements of the project were: a national survey of almost 1,300 users of public libraries, Citizens Advice Bureaux and other information and advice agencies; another national survey, this time by personal doorstep interview, of almost 900 members of the UK public; a series of 9 focus group discussions with representatives of various sectors or interest groups, such as disabled people, elderly people, ethnic minority groups and jobseekers; and a series of 27 case study visits to libraries, CABx and other information and advice agencies.

The report discusses the background to the research, as well as the project methodology and major findings. The project found clear evidence that the public encounter situations in which information is required to help solve problems, and that they feel that access to information and freedom of information are very important to them in exercising their rights as citizens. The great majority of respondents saw public libraries as their preferred option in seeking citizenship information, although there were still areas of concern in that there was evidence to show that certain groups, such as disabled people and jobseekers, are less willing to use libraries. There was also a clear emphasis on public libraries as an appropriate location for computerised access to citizenship information, although other public places such as post offices and shopping centres would also attract a significant proportion of the public. The data suggested that no single mechanism for enabling access to information should be seen as the ultimate solution to the information needs of the citizen. Rather a complementary range of solutions must be offered to the citizen.

**Rita Marcella** is Reader/Depute Head of School at the School of Information and Media, the Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. She has been the Course Leader for the MSc in Information Analysis since its inception. Research interests include: citizenship information, European information, business information and the management of help desks. She has also published textbooks on classification and biography for children.

**Graeme Baxter** is a Research Assistant at the School of Information and Media, the Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. A former student of the School, his research interests include citizenship information and European information.

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## **DEFINITION OF CITIZENSHIP INFORMATION**

The following definition of citizenship information has been formulated by the authors during the course of this research project:

*Citizenship information is information produced by or about national and local government, government departments and public sector organisations which may be of value to the citizen either as part of everyday life or in the participation by the citizen in government and policy formulation.*

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Methodology**

- The citizenship information needs of the UK public were investigated using 2 national surveys, a series of 9 focus group discussions, and 27 case study visits to public libraries, Citizens Advice Bureaux and other information agencies.

### **Information need**

- The majority of survey respondents had sought information in order to solve a problem in the past, primarily related to education, recreation, health, welfare benefits, the law, employment, and transport and travel. Almost a half of respondents had sought information for educational reasons, while others had done so for work related and family/personal reasons. Similar patterns of future information need were predicted.
- Over a quarter of respondents had encountered difficulties in accessing information. Dissatisfaction was expressed with the quality of legal and welfare benefits information, and with information received from government departments and agencies. Users were frequently bewildered about where to go to obtain information.
- Northern Ireland dominated respondents' perception of the most significant current issue. Otherwise a wide range of issues emerged, dominated by education, health, Europe and the economy. Many of the topics were deemed by respondents to have a significant impact on their lives. There was evidence of very high levels of passive consumption of information from the media on subjects that respondents felt highly significant. In a more detailed investigation of three current issues, the majority of respondents felt they were well informed about BSE; however, more information was needed on the Single European Currency and on local government cutbacks.
- Over a quarter of respondents cited an example of an occasion when not being able to obtain information had proven a disadvantage. Interestingly, better educated respondents and those from higher social classes were more likely to cite an example of disadvantage: contrarily this might suggest that these groups are more aware of disadvantage and its causes rather than they suffer greater disadvantage.
- The majority of respondents felt well informed about areas relating to citizenship. However, more than a quarter were poorly informed in legal rights, welfare benefits and local politics. Respondents felt best informed about national politics.

### **Information seeking behaviour**

- Over three quarters of respondents said they would use public libraries to obtain information on at least an occasional basis, while between 50% and 75% of respondents would approach CABx, post offices, government departments and agencies, or their family and friends. For most respondents it was the accessibility of the public library and the fact that they visited it regularly that made libraries their preference. Public libraries were also seen as reputable and having an appropriate atmosphere. Barriers to library use were identified as inconvenient opening hours, the image of libraries and staff shortages.



- 72.5% of respondents were members of public libraries. The majority of respondents felt that public libraries were suitable places for finding information on their local council, consumer issues, welfare benefits, jobs and careers, and housing, although there was little evidence that many had approached public libraries for such information in the past. Very significant numbers of respondents were unaware that public libraries held official government publications, European Union information, health information, legal rights and educational opportunities.
- Face to face communications were preferred by the largest number of respondents. Other preferred options included reading a book, browsing in a collection and by telephone. Only a small proportion expressed a preference for using a computer to seek information; however, when respondents were asked whether they would use computers if these were more widely available in public places, ICTs proved more popular.
- There was a clear emphasis on public libraries as an appropriate location for computerised access to information for a significant majority (72.6%) of the general public. However, other public places, such as post offices, shopping centres and town halls would attract a significant body and proportion of the general public.
- These data suggest that no single mechanism for enabling access to information should be seen as the ultimate solution to the information needs of the citizen. Rather a complementary range of solutions must be offered to the citizen.

### **Perceived importance of information to citizens and participation**

- A highly significant majority (79.2%) of the respondents in the first survey believed that access to accurate and unbiased information is very important for exercising their rights as citizens. This figure was supported by the second survey where the vast majority of respondents felt that freedom of information (91.7%) and access to accurate and unbiased information (91.7%) were important in exercising their rights. Significantly, those aged 19 or under felt less certain of the importance of information.
- Respondents tended to overestimate their voting patterns, with national elections predominating over local and European elections. Very small numbers in all instances participated in other forms of political activity, such as canvassing or attendance at political meetings. Most respondents preferred to make their feelings known on an issue by writing to someone.
- Access to computers, the Internet and satellite/cable television in the home is presently limited. The majority felt that they would be prepared to use computers to vote, to convey opinions to government and to obtain government information: a lower proportion would use them to participate in political debate. Around a half of those who would use a computer to vote, provide feedback or debate were concerned about confidentiality.

### **Citizenship information service provision**

- Public libraries concentrate on the facilitation of access to factual information, while CABx and other agencies provide information and advice as well as representation for clients at tribunals and court appearances. CABx and other agencies utilise a mix of paid full-time and part-time and unpaid volunteer staff, but public library services tend not to dedicate staff to community/citizenship information service. The provision of staff with minority and sign language skills tends to be reactive to demand from, and perceived need in, their respective user communities.
- All CABx staff and volunteers complete a basic training programme and have available a supplementary and more specialist set of training programmes, while the other agencies adopt a range of approaches built upon in-house training. Public library staff receive some induction and training, but usually only as part of more generic training.
- Users tended to approach all services primarily by a personal visit, followed in frequency by a telephone call. Staff felt that users preferred face-to-face contact, but that a telephone approach was useful where privacy/confidentiality was desirable. Staff also felt that users received a better and more tailored response when a personal visit was made.
- While there was poor availability of statistical information in public library services, the CABx, and to a lesser extent the other information agencies, have a systematic approach to analysing enquiries and studying user satisfaction. All CABx also analyse evidence forms to identify significant issues and problems amongst clients.
- The mainstay of the CABx network is the NACAB Information System. Collections in the other information agencies were variable in scope and size. Public libraries were split between those that had collated their community/citizenship collections into a discrete section and those whose materials were dispersed throughout their classified sequence.
- The majority of CABx do not presently access or enable public access to information electronically. Similarly, in the other information agencies, apart from isolated projects, there is little evidence of the application of ICTs. Public libraries tend to have produced local community/citizenship information databases, although certain authorities had more highly developed projects underway.

### **Lessons to be learned**

- The results of the survey have significance in two broad areas: in government information strategy; and in the future development and role of public libraries (see Section 4.3).

## **1. RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH**

### **1.1 Background**

The Citizenship Information project investigates an area of growing significance and concern to public libraries in information service provision. Citizenship information and the role of information in helping the public to participate in the democratic process, in particular via electronic democracy, are at present highly significant issues, both for the information profession and for those involved in political life. Although there has been much comment on these and related concepts, there has been no attempt to gather evidence (positive or negative) as to the general public's interest in and need for citizenship information. Indeed, part of the project involved the attempt to achieve a better definition of citizenship information both in terms of the subject categories which it subsumes and of the respondents' perceptions of the kinds of information that might be connoted by the term. The researchers did not want to impose a definition on respondents but rather to develop and formalise one that would emerge from the data collected. This project seeks to investigate the extent to which members of the public in the UK have expressed or unexpressed needs for citizenship information, and to explore their preferred routes to the acquisition of such information. The project constitutes a piece of basic research, which would have implications for a range of information service providers.

The Citizenship Information project has been ongoing at a time of great change in terms of information policy formulation and development. Until relatively recently UK government policy paid little attention to the concept of citizenship information. *The Local Government (Access to Information) Act* (1985) gave the public the right to attend council meetings and to gain access to relevant documents. The *Citizen's Charter* initiative (1991) led the government to introduce, in 1994, a non-statutory *Code of Practice on Access to Government Information*. In support of the initiative the government's Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA) established a UK Government Information Web Server. The *Freedom of Information White Paper* was published in December 1997, with a view to establishing a general statutory right of access to official records and information, although it is feared that a Bill may not now become law until 2001 at the earliest, and that it will be a somewhat watered-down version of that pledged in the Labour Government's pre-election manifesto. The *Crown Copyright Green Paper* (1998), mooted the possibility of its abolishment and the placing of all material originated by government in the public domain.

Professional and representative bodies and other interested organisations have indicated the importance of public libraries providing citizenship information. The Library Association's pre-election *Library Manifesto* in 1997 declared that 'if citizens are to exercise their democratic rights and make informed choices they must have access to political, social, scientific and economic information'; UNESCO's *Public Library Manifesto* (1994) highlighted the role of libraries in enabling "well-informed citizens to exercise their democratic rights and to play an active part in society"; and the *Public Library Review* (Library and Information Commission, 1995) stressed that "access to fuller information is an aid to democracy, and should increase a citizen's ability to exercise his or her franchise and to influence policy". The Coalition for Public Information (CoPI) was established in 1996 with the aim of ensuring that information and communications infrastructures in the UK enable individuals and organisations to participate in 'social, economic and democratic activity'. It was within this context that the researchers sought a better understanding of what they termed citizenship information.

In the aftermath of the *Public Library Review*, a Library and Information Commission working party was set up to develop a public library networking plan which resulted in the publication of a report, *New Library: the people's network* (1997). In April 1998, the government's response to the LIC report recognised that 'the proposed public libraries network will play a central role in delivering its [the government's] wider objectives for the role of technology in society ... to allow Britain to increase its prosperity and quality of life' (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1998). Despite the rejection of the *Information for All* bid for Millennium Commission funds, the *New Opportunities Fund* will disburse five million pounds for the digitisation of educational materials together with twenty million pounds to train **all** library staff in information and communications technology by the year 2001 (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1997). The proposed People's Network will link with the *National Grid for Learning* (Department for Education and Employment, 1997) as part of an integrated network of online learning and teaching materials.

Increasingly over recent years government information in electronic form has become accessible via the Internet. The Government Information Service attempts to provide a coordinated single point for information produced by departments and agencies of government. The Parliamentary Channel Online, the web site for the Houses of Parliament, provides a range of information about the activities of Parliament. All UK political parties now have a web presence, and the majority of local government authorities have established sites. UK Citizens Online Democracy (UKCOD) was established in 1996 by Irving Rappaport, backed by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, to develop opportunities for wider participation in the democratic process and to promote public participation in government.

In November 1996, the Green Paper *government.direct*, was issued as a prospectus for delivery of government services to citizens and the business community using electronic communications technologies. As part of this proposal it was suggested that public access terminals could be provided 'in places such as post offices, libraries and shopping centres' and eventually via cable and digital television. In the aftermath of the 1997 General Election, the incoming government instituted a reappraisal of the *government.direct* initiative (Central Information Technology Unit, 1997). The White Paper on *Freedom of Information* published in December 1997 suggested the likely need for the practical emphasis to be upon Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) in enabling public access to sought information. The *Electronic government* report (Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, 1998) discussed the benefits and issues arising for government of these and other UK initiatives. It identified three areas of concern, where it was felt that electronic government would have a significant impact: in the use of ICTs to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the executive functions of government, including delivery of public services; in the potential support of greater transparency in government by enabling public access to a greater range of information generated and collected by government; and in the consequent effecting of significant changes resulting from ICTs in the relationship between the citizen and the state.

There have been high hopes expressed for the increased involvement in government by a wider representation of the population - whether that be as a consumer of government services or as a participant in the democratic and decision making process - as a result of the emergence of the Information Society and the wider availability of information and communications technologies to the population as a whole. The authors sought via this project to explore further the reality underlying these hopes and claims.

## **1.2 Existing research into citizenship information needs**

The Citizenship Information project has built upon a significant body of existing research, such as that of Usherwood's (1989) work on public libraries and the Comedia report (1993) investigating welfare rights and citizens' advice. Swash and Marsland (1994) suggested that there has been a rise in public expectation as a result of the Citizens' Charter initiative. Watson *et al* (1980) surveyed the community information services of seven public library authorities; while Toop and Forejt (1993) surveyed the provision of community information in five UK public libraries. Bunch (1988) discussed the information/advice debate in relation to public libraries' provision of community information; and Moore and Steele (1991) observed that this debate led to a general consensus that public libraries should concentrate on the provision of factual information and on referral. Black and Muddiman (1997) identified three conceptions of community librarianship 'the welfarist, based on paternalist and statist philosophies associated with the mid-century welfare state; the radical, associated with ideas about decentralisation, community autonomy and freedom of access to information; and the consumerist, based on a commitment to customer satisfaction and market research'. Milner (1997) argued for the move away from a need for 'computer literacy in people' and towards 'people literacy in computers', claiming the need for extensive research into the real potential for achieving improvements for citizens via technology, before huge sums are expended on systems that may fail. The Policy Studies Institute (1995) pointed out that direct evidence of citizenship information need can be found in the records of the number of enquiries made to information agencies and other service providers, while *indirect* evidence of citizenship information need can be drawn from various demographic, social and economic markers.

There is also a significant body of research-based work on information needs, much of which has focused on particular localities or on particular marginalised groups. For example, Bruce *et al* (1991) carried out an interview-based social survey of visually-impaired adults for the Royal National Institute for the Blind; while Tinker *et al* (1994) carried out an exploratory study of the information needs of elderly people. The most influential studies, however, have been the survey of 1,300 Baltimore households conducted by Warner *et al* in 1973, and the 1977 survey of over 200 Sheffield residents carried out by the Centre for Research on User Studies at the University of Sheffield (Beal, 1979).

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Aims and Objectives**

The aims of the Citizenship Information project were to measure demand for citizenship information and establish the nature of information need exhibited by users.

The objectives of the project were to:

1. define and describe citizenship information
2. investigate the nature and extent of problems or situations in which users may exhibit a need for information which would fall within the definition established above
3. investigate the connections or relationship between information and citizenship or democracy from the users' perspective
4. explore the impact of demographic factors (i.e. age, social grade, ethnicity, etc.) on need and patterns of use
5. investigate users' preferred methods of accessing information and preferred methods of information delivery, including electronic methods of delivery
6. explore the attitudes of users (both public library members and non-members) to the public library service and its role in disseminating citizenship information
7. identify ways in which public libraries might extend membership by increasing awareness of their role in providing citizenship information
8. explore the impact upon public libraries of the need for citizenship information, in the light of the data gathered above

### **2.2 Survey by Questionnaire**

The first stage of the project comprised 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, and these pilot results were fully analysed in order to reveal design deficiencies. A copy of the final version can be found at Appendix 1.

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. All, of course, are organisations used extensively by the general public. In order that true nation-wide coverage could be achieved, dissemination took place in each of the 13 official UK regions - that is the 10 Government Office Regions in England, plus Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. In selecting the precise areas within these regions where the dissemination would take place, the project team was mindful of the second stage of the research, which proposed that librarianship and information studies students from throughout the UK would gather more qualitative data on citizenship information needs through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with members of the public. With this in mind, dissemination largely took place in towns and cities hosting a library school.

In each of the 13 regions 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 the 27 organisations listed below. (The number of questionnaires each organisation distributed is shown in brackets).

**Scotland**

Aberdeenshire Library and Information Service (100 questionnaires)  
Aberdeen Citizens Advice Bureau (100)  
Gordon Rural Action and Information Network (100)

**Wales**

Ceredigion Libraries (200; 100 in English, 100 in Welsh)  
Aberystwyth and District Citizens Advice Bureau (125; 75 in English, 50 in Welsh)

**Northern Ireland**

Belfast Education and Library Board (100)  
Belfast Group of Citizens Advice Bureaux (100)

**North East**

Newcastle upon Tyne Libraries & Information Service (100)  
Byker Advice & Information Project, Newcastle (100)

**North West**

Manchester City Libraries (100)  
Manchester Citizens Advice Bureaux Service (100)

**Merseyside**

Liverpool Libraries & Information Services (100)  
Orrell Park Advice Centre, Liverpool (100)

**Yorkshire and the Humber**

Sheffield Libraries and Information Services (105)  
Langsett Advice and Area Resource Centre, Sheffield (100)

**West Midlands**

Birmingham Libraries (100)  
St. James Community Support & Advice Centre, Aston, Birmingham (100)

**East Midlands**

Leicestershire Libraries and Information Service (100)  
Charnwood Community Council, Loughborough (100)

**Eastern**

Cambridgeshire Libraries & Information Service (100)  
Peterborough and District Citizens Advice Bureau (100)

**South West**

Somerset Library Service (100)  
West Somerset Advice Bureau, Minehead (100)

**South East**

Brighton and Hove Libraries (100)  
Brighton Citizens Advice Bureau (100)

## **London**

Camden Libraries & Information (100)

Turnpike Lane Advice Bureau, Haringey (100)

It was suggested by some information professionals in Wales that a better response might be obtained from the Welsh public if the questionnaire was in the Welsh language. With this in mind, the project team arranged for a translation to be made, and both English and Welsh versions were made available in Ceredigion Libraries and Aberystwyth CAB. It should also be noted that in the one region (Scotland) where, prior to distribution commencing, information professionals expressed real concerns about a potentially low response rate, one additional organisation took part in the exercise so as to counteract any possible shortfall in completed questionnaire numbers from that particular area.

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 (National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, 1996; Citizens Advice Scotland, 1996), compared with 57,327,000 enquiries in public libraries (Library and Information Statistics Unit, 1997) - the CABx and the other advice agencies were asked if they could hand out questionnaires to every *second* user. It is appreciated, however, that the staff involved in all of the organisations will have had many other pressures on their time and that such a systematic approach may not always have been possible.

In order to obtain as high a response rate as possible, all organisations were also asked if they could request that the users complete and return the questionnaires at the time of their distribution. Distribution of the questionnaires took place over a five-month period between June and October 1997. 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*; significant statistical relationships between variables (at the 95% confidence level) were identified using the chi-square test.



### *Response by Government Office Region*

Table 1 indicates the response rate in each Government Office Region, with Northern Ireland having the most impressive return of 75%. In the other regions the response rates were relatively even, apart from Wales which had a poor response of only 14.7%. The suggestion that providing questionnaires in Welsh would benefit the response proved, unfortunately, to be incorrect. Indeed, only 9 of the 150 Welsh language survey forms were completed and returned.

<b>Region</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of total response</b>	<b>Response rate (%)</b>
Scotland	143	11.1	47.7
Wales	44	3.4	14.7
Northern Ireland	150	11.6	75.0
North East	109	8.4	54.5
North West	85	6.6	42.5
Merseyside	88	6.8	44.0
Yorkshire and the Humber	109	8.4	53.2
West Midlands	71	5.5	35.5
East Midlands	98	7.6	49.0
Eastern	103	8.0	51.5
South West	98	7.6	49.0
South East	106	8.2	53.0
London	90	7.0	45.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1294</b>	<b>100</b>	

### *Response by type of organisation*

Table 2, meanwhile, indicates the response by the type of organisation in which the questionnaires were distributed.

<b>Type of Organisation</b>	<b>Number distributed</b>	<b>Number returned</b>	<b>Response rate (%)</b>	<b>% of total response</b>
Public library authorities	1405	975	69.4	75.3
Citizens Advice Bureaux	625	253	40.5	19.6
Other advice agencies	800	66	8.3	5.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2830</b>	<b>1294</b>		<b>100</b>

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 that of the CABx (40.5%) and the particularly poor response rate of 8.3% in the other advice and information agencies. The staff in the CABx and other advice agencies suggested three major factors responsible for the lower responses in these organisations:

- Some clients, because of the nature of their individual problems and enquiries, were too angry or upset to want to fill up a questionnaire.

- The literacy level of some clients was such that completing the questionnaire was difficult, if not impossible.
- A number of the CABx and advice agencies had no reception/enquiry point from which questionnaires could be readily distributed. As a result, the survey forms often had to be simply left lying in these organisations' public waiting rooms, albeit with posters and signs to attract the public's attention. It would appear that this situation was generally not conducive to encouraging the users to complete the questionnaires, and that it certainly compares unfavourably with physically handing the survey forms to users.

With over 75% of the completed questionnaires having been distributed in public libraries, it might initially appear that the survey results would be somewhat biased towards the opinions of public library users and not really representative of the UK population as a whole. It should perhaps be remembered, though, that the Library and Information Commission's report *New Library: The People's Network* (LIC, 1997) pointed out that libraries are used by 58% of the UK public, so it might be argued that library users *are* fairly representative of the overall population. In any case, although the survey was not designed to reach a precise, stratified sample of the population as a whole, the respondents' demographic details, obtained from the first part of the survey, revealed that the characteristics of the sample were sufficiently close to national trends for generalisations to be drawn; the one exception being that the sample respondents came to a greater extent proportionally from the professional and managerial classes than for the UK as a whole. With regard to exclusion, however, the survey response did not indicate any groups excluded or poorly represented in the sample.

### **2.3 Survey by Interview**

Stage 2 of the research project was another national survey of the citizenship information needs of the general public, this time by personal doorstep interview. Prior to the survey taking place, the project team tested the interview schedule on members of the Aberdeen public; the final version can be found at Appendix 2.

These interviews were designed to elicit more qualitative, extended and individual responses, and to form a more in-depth and less pre-determined set of data. In conducting the interviews at people's homes, away from the 'institutional' setting of the initial survey, it was anticipated that this would overcome any deficiencies in the first survey in reaching the less literate respondent, a higher proportion of the unemployed, and those from lower social grades.

To conduct these interviews, the project team employed undergraduate and postgraduate librarianship and information studies students from library schools throughout the country. Interviews took place in 12 of the 13 UK regions, the one exception being Merseyside, where, unfortunately, health problems prevented the appointed interviewer carrying out the survey within the prescribed timescale. As Merseyside, in official terms, is a relatively new region, having been part of the old North West Standard Planning Region until 1994, it is believed that its absence does not severely affect the overall geographical coverage of the survey sample. The interviews largely took place in the same towns and cities in which the Stage 1 questionnaires were disseminated. Indeed, the only exception was in the South West region, and more specifically in Somerset, where the interviews took place in Weston-super-Mare, whereas the Stage 1 questionnaires had been distributed in Bridgwater and Minehead.

Each interviewer was provided with socio-economic and population data for their allocated town or city taken from the 1991 UK Census Small Area Statistics (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, 1992), and was asked to identify five local government electoral wards in which the survey would take place. In an attempt to reach a broad cross-section of the public, each interviewer was effectively asked to conduct interviews in the ward containing the highest percentage of residents belonging to Social Classes IV and V (partly skilled and unskilled occupations), the ward with the lowest percentage of Classes IV and V, and three other wards spread across the cumulative population figures for the town/city. Precise details of the method with which these wards were identified can be found in the *Guidelines for Interviewers*, which appears as Appendix 3. The full list of wards in which the interviews took place is shown in Table 3 (where ward number 1 is the one containing the highest percentage of Classes IV and V, and ward number 5 is the one containing the lowest percentage of Classes IV and V).

<b>Table 3: Electoral wards in which interviews took place</b>					
	<b>Ward Numbers</b>				
<b>Town/City</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Aberdeen	Tillydrone	Quarryhill	Victoria	Duthie	Harlaw
Aberystwyth	Aberystwyth West	Aberystwyth South	Llanbadarn Fawr	Faenor	Aberystwyth East
Belfast	Duncairn	Woodstock	Water Works	Knock	Stranmillis
Birmingham	Nechells	Weoley	Oscott	Perry Barr	Sutton Vesey
Brighton	Moulsecoomb	Tenantry	Regency	St. Peter's	Westdene
Cambridge	Abbey	Arbury	Market	Petersfield	Trumpington
London (Camden)	Somers Town	Grafton	St. John's	Fortune Green	Chalk Farm
Loughborough /Charnwood	Woodthorpe	Birstall Stonehill	Shepshed West	East Goscote	Birstall Netherhall
Manchester	Benchill	Moss Side	Burnage	Rusholme	Didsbury
Newcastle	Sth. Gosforth	Wingrove	Fenham	Walkergate	Walker
Sheffield	Park	Brightside	Sharrow	Stocksbridge	Ecclesall
Weston-super-Mare	W-super-Mare South	W-super-Mare Ellenborough	W-super-Mare Ashcombe	W-super-Mare North	Hutton

Each interviewer was asked to complete 15 interview schedules in each of the five wards - a total of 75 interviews in each town/city. All were successful with the exception of the Birmingham interviewer who fell two schedules short of the desired quota, therefore 898 interviews were successfully completed. The interviews took place between May and November 1998.

The interviewers were instructed to use the random walk sample method, commonly used in market research, whereby they randomly selected a starting point within each ward, and proceeded to attempt an interview at every 7th household within that ward until the required quota had been reached. Detailed instructions were provided on how to deal with vacant households, blocks of flats, offices and commercial premises etc., and again these can be found in the *Guidelines for Interviewers* at Appendix 3. Indeed, as well as receiving a copy of these guidelines, each interviewer was personally briefed by a member of the project team prior to commencement of the survey. The response rate of the random walk sample method in individual wards ranged from 31.9% (i.e. one successful interview obtained at approximately every third household visited) to 4.9% (one interview in every twenty homes visited). While the survey respondents were guaranteed anonymity, each one was asked if they could provide a daytime telephone number at which they could be contacted. A member

of the project team then rang a random sample of these numbers in each town/city to confirm that the interviews had been carried out satisfactorily.

Again, the data from the completed forms were analysed using *SPSS for Windows*, and significant statistical relationships between variables (at the 95% confidence level) were identified using the chi-square test.

## **2.4 Focus Group Discussions**

The third stage consisted of a series of discussion groups comprising representatives, from Aberdeen and the North East of Scotland, of the following sector or interest groups:

- information providers
- local, national and European government
- women
- disabled people
- ethnic minority groups
- the business community
- the education sector
- elderly people
- jobseekers

At these events, which took place in September and October 1998, participants were presented with some of the major findings from the first survey (see Appendix 4) and were given the opportunity to respond to and provide feedback on these results.

An additional group was planned, for representatives of rural communities, but had to be cancelled due to a lack of interest. In fact, although around a dozen individuals and organisations were invited to take part in each of the other groups, attendances were generally low, the participants (in addition to the project team) numbering between one and five at each focus group meeting.

The information providers group consisted of two public librarians, the coordinator of a welfare rights unit, and the information officer from an organisation which provides a local community and health information service. The business community group comprised a business information executive from a business shop, a project executive from a local authority economic development department, and a public librarian responsible for a business information service.

The government discussion group contained an MP, an MP's research assistant (and local councillor), a local councillor (and convenor of a women's and equal opportunities committee), the principal development officer of a local authority community development department, and a public librarian responsible for the provision of government information. The group from the education sector consisted of a deputy head teacher, a school librarian and the principal officer of a local authority curriculum resources and information service.

The group representing women comprised the principal development officer (responsible for women and equal opportunities) of a local authority community development department, the coordinator of a women's aid group, and the programme action officer of a Soroptomist society. The group representing elderly people unfortunately had just one participant, the chairman of a senior citizens' self-help group.

The group representing disabled people consisted of a development officer from a local authority community development department, and two researchers from the Robert Gordon University, both with a particular interest in the information needs of disabled people. The jobseekers group had the training manager and deputy training manager of a college's

training services unit, and the assistant business manager of a Jobcentre. Finally, the group representing ethnic minority communities comprised an officer from a local authority interpretation and translation service and a development/anti-racist worker from a local community project.

As a result of these low attendances, the participants' responses and contributions could certainly not be regarded as being truly representative of their particular sectors or interest groups; nevertheless many interesting comments and points were made, and these are discussed fully in Section 3.3 of this report.

## **2.5 Case Studies**

Stage 4 consisted of a series of face-to-face interviews with representatives of those 27 organisations who had assisted with the dissemination of the Stage 1 questionnaires. These interviews were designed to gather information on, for example, existing levels of provision of citizenship information, and the types of citizenship information enquiries most frequently made by users/clients.

As citizenship information, in the terms of this project, has a close affinity with many commentators' definitions of community information, the public library interviews were conducted with members of staff closely involved in community information matters. In the CABx and other advice agencies, meanwhile, interviews were conducted with either the manager or deputy manager. The vast majority of the interviews took place between August and October 1997, the remainder being conducted in October and November 1998. All interviews were recorded on audio tape.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1 USER STUDY 1: SURVEY BY QUESTIONNAIRE

##### 3.1.1 Demographic details of respondents

###### **Respondents in rural areas**

Of the 2830 questionnaires originally disseminated, 675 (23.8%) were distributed in rural areas (i.e. areas designated as rural by the Office for National Statistics and the General Register Office for Scotland). Of the 1294 completed questionnaires, 190 (14.7%) were returned from rural areas. In 1995, the number of people living in rural areas in Great Britain was 10.4 million, 18.2% of the total population of 57.0 million (Office for National Statistics, 1997a). The proportion of rural residents in this survey, then, is relatively close to the national figure.

###### **Gender and age group of respondents**

Table 4 indicates the gender and age group of the respondents. In 1995, 49% of the U.K. population were males, 51% were females (Office for National Statistics, 1997b). The male/female ratio in this survey is, therefore, almost identical to that nationally. Interestingly, in the public libraries, the percentage of male respondents was 48.9% compared to 50.3% female; this suggests a far smaller difference in library use by gender than that traditionally expected.

The age group variables are those used in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy standard for Public Library User Surveys (Fuegi, 1994). However, these age groups differ from those appearing in Office for National Statistics publications, such as *Regional Trends* and *Social Trends* (which also differ from each other), so a direct comparison with national percentages is not possible. It is noticeable that in the younger age groups there is a greater proportion of female respondents, while in the older age groups male respondents are predominant.

<i>Table 4: Gender and age of respondents</i>				
<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Gender</b>			<b>Totals</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Not specified</b>	
Under 15	10	21	-	31 (2.4%)
15-19	37	61	1	99 (7.7%)
20-29	126	120	1	247 (19.1%)
30-44	177	190	1	368 (28.4%)
45-54	90	111	-	201 (15.5%)
55-64	82	76	1	159 (12.3%)
65-74	71	54	3	128 (9.9%)
75 or over	33	16	3	52 (4.0%)
Age not specified	4	4	1	9 (0.7%)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>630 (48.7%)</b>	<b>653 (50.5%)</b>	<b>11 (0.9%)</b>	<b>1294 (100%)</b>

## Ethnic group of respondents

Table 5 shows the ethnic group of the respondents. In total, 100 (7.7%) of the respondents belonged to an ethnic minority group. This is fairly representative of the U.K. population as a whole, for, in Spring 1996, the Office for National Statistics Labour Force Survey estimated that just under 6% of the population in Great Britain belonged to an ethnic minority group (Office for National Statistics, 1997a).

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Sex not specified</b>	<b>Totals</b>
White	566	600	8	<b>1174 (90.7%)</b>
Black Caribbean	7	6	-	<b>13 (1.0%)</b>
Black African	8	7	1	<b>16 (1.2%)</b>
Black Other	4	3	-	<b>7 (0.5%)</b>
Indian	8	6	-	<b>14 (1.1%)</b>
Pakistani	14	9	-	<b>23 (1.8%)</b>
Bangladeshi	1	2	-	<b>3 (0.2%)</b>
Chinese	3	1	1	<b>5 (0.4%)</b>
Other*	9	10	-	<b>19 (1.5%)</b>
Ethnic group not specified	10	9	1	<b>20 (1.5%)</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>653</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1294 (100%)</b>

\* The 'other' ethnic groups were Arabic (3 respondents), Japanese (3), Indonesian (1), Korean (1), Malaysian (1), Mexican (1), indigenous New Zealander (1), Vietnamese (1), plus 7 respondents of mixed race.

## Status of respondents

Table 6, meanwhile, indicates the status of the respondents. 55.5% of the respondents were economically active (i.e. working or looking for work), and this compares with the national figure, in Spring 1996, of 48.9% (Office for National Statistics, 1997c). With regard to the economically inactive respondents in the survey, 14.1% were students (i.e. FE/HE students *and* schoolchildren), compared with the national figure, in 1994/95, of 23.1%, i.e. 6.7% FE/HE students, 16.4% schoolchildren (Office for National Statistics, 1997c).

<b>Status</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Sex not specified</b>	<b>Totals</b>
In paid employment	204	242	-	<b>446 (34.5%)</b>
Self employed	55	37	3	<b>95 (7.3%)</b>
Seeking work	117	60	-	<b>177 (13.7%)</b>
Retired	160	103	6	<b>269 (20.8%)</b>
Running a home	9	77	-	<b>86 (6.6%)</b>
Student	66	115	1	<b>182 (14.1%)</b>
Status not specified	19	19	1	<b>39 (3.0%)</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>630</b>	<b>653</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1294 (100%)</b>

Some interesting points emerge in terms of gender breakdown, in particular the higher figures for women in employment, running a home and studying; and the lower figures for women seeking work or retired. There were also some notable differences, regarding status, between the respondents in the three types of organisation involved in the survey. For example, the proportion of jobseekers in the CABx (22.5%) and the other advice agencies (21.2%) was effectively twice that in the public libraries (10.9%), which perhaps reflects the concerns this group would have over obtaining information and advice on, say, the Jobseeker's Allowance and other benefits; while the public library student percentage (16.0%) was virtually double those in the CABx (8.7%) and the other agencies (6.1%), indicating the use made of public libraries for study purposes.

### 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 Standard Occupational Classification (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, 1990 & 1991). These are detailed in Table 7. In terms of gender, the greatest difference is in the skilled non-manual categories, where women are predominant.

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

In Spring 1996, the Office for National Statistics Labour Force Survey (Office for National Statistics, 1997c) estimated the breakdown by social class of the UK's economically active population to be as follows:

<b>Social Class</b>	<b>%</b>
I Professional, etc. occupations	6.0
II Managerial and Technical occupations	29.6
III(N) Skilled occupations non-manual	22.4
III(M) Skilled occupations manual	20.6
IV Partly skilled occupations	15.7
V Unskilled occupations	5.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>



Respondents to the survey, therefore, come to a greater extent proportionally from the professional and managerial categories than for the UK as a whole.

### **Disabled respondents**

Respondents were asked if they would describe themselves as disabled, and in all 123 (9.5%) indicated they were disabled in some way. Although it has been established that 15% of UK *households* are currently in receipt of incapacity or disablement benefits (Office for National Statistics, 1997c), and that, in 1995, over 2.4 million individuals (4.1% of the population) were claiming such benefits (Office for National Statistics, 1997b), a current estimate of disabled people in the UK, including those not actually registered as disabled, could not be found. The most recent estimate was made in an 1988 report by the Office of Population Censuses and Survey which indicated that there were 6.5 million disabled persons in Britain, around 11% of the population at the time (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, 1988). Again, this figure is relatively close to that in the survey here.

The proportion of disabled respondents in the CABx (15.0%) and the other advice agencies (27.2%) was significantly greater than in the public libraries (6.9%). While respondents were not asked directly why they were visiting the organisation on the day they received the questionnaire, these figures perhaps reflect a preference for visiting CABx and other advice centres for matters relating to disability.

### **3.1.2 Citizenship information need**

#### **Examples of past need**

Question 2 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.

While 35 (4.6%) of these 769 respondents felt that past examples of information need were too many to specify, the rest indicated a wide range of situations in which a need had arisen. The nature of this information need is summarised in Table 9. As can be seen, information for educational purposes was cited most frequently, by over a quarter of the respondents. This educational information could be divided into two distinct groups: information to assist with the completion of school, college and university project work; and information to assist with the choice of course or educational establishment. Leisure and recreation information was the second most popular response (16.9%) and, again, two distinct types emerged: information required for the pursuit of hobbies and pastimes (ranging from antique collecting to car maintenance); and information on travel and tourism.

Health care information (from identifying and registering with a doctor or dentist, to finding out about the side-effects of particular drugs), information on welfare benefits eligibility, and legal information were also prominent.

**Table 9: Nature of past information need**

<b>Nature of information need</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% (of 769 respondents)</b>
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
Citizens' rights	3	0.4
Disability	3	0.4
Animal welfare	2	0.3
Immigration and Nationality	2	0.3
Environmental information	1	0.1
Equal rights and Discrimination	1	0.1
Neighbourhood problems	1	0.1
Religion	1	0.1
Transport policy	1	0.1

## Sources of information

The respondents who indicated they had looked for information in the past were asked, in Question 3, where they had gone to obtain the information. The organisations and people visited are listed in Table 10.

<b>Organisations / People</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% (of 769 respondents)</b>
Public libraries	513	66.7
Citizens Advice Bureaux	136	17.7
Academic libraries	59	7.7
Other advice centres	32	4.2
Offices of Government departments and agencies	30	3.9
Professional people (e.g. doctors, solicitors)	27	3.5
Local council offices	16	2.1
Voluntary groups and agencies	14	1.8
Internet	13	1.7
The press	8	1.0
Careers services	7	0.9
Family and friends	7	0.9
National Libraries	5	0.7
Records / Archives offices	4	0.5
Bookshops / Own reference materials	3	0.4
Community centres	3	0.4
Professional / Trade Associations	3	0.4
MPs	2	0.3
Post Offices	2	0.3
Tourist Information Centres	2	0.3
Training and Enterprise Councils	1	0.1

For the great majority (66.7%) the public library had been their resource, with CABx forming the only other significant source (17.7%). On examining the data more closely, however, a clear relationship emerged between the organisations cited and the type of organisation in which the questionnaires had been distributed. 88% of the respondents in public libraries cited public libraries as their source of information; 72.8% of CABx respondents cited Bureaux as their resource; while 84.3% of the users in the other advice agencies indicated that these agencies had been their preferred option.

Some interesting trends also emerged when examining where the respondents had gone to obtain particular types of information. For example, of the top five topics indicated in the responses to Question 2 (Table 9), public libraries were by far the most popular source for educational information (84.4%) leisure and recreation information (95.5%) and information on health care (82.3%). However, for legal information, only 37.5% had gone to a public library while 50% had gone to a CAB or another advice agency; and for information on welfare benefits a mere 5% had gone to public libraries compared with 75% having gone to CABx and other agencies.

## Satisfaction with information

In Question 4, the 769 respondents who indicated they had looked for information in the past were asked how satisfied they were with the information they obtained. This is summarised at Table 11.

	Yes		No		No response	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Was the information:</b>						
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

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. These measures of satisfaction, however, were investigated more fully and were cross-tabulated firstly with details of the types of information the respondents had looked for, with a view to establishing whether the public was more or less satisfied/dissatisfied with information on particular topics.<sup>1</sup>

## Satisfaction with particular types of information

Comprehensibility rated highly across the board, with each type of information being regarded as easily understood by at least 69% of those respondents who had obtained it. Perhaps surprisingly, financial information received the highest rating of all, being described as comprehensible by 92.3% of the respondents who had obtained such information. The least comprehensible types of information were legal information (described as not easily understood by 15.9% of respondents who had obtained it), information to assist with educational coursework (15.8%) and welfare benefits information (11.4%).

Relevance also rated well overall, and apart from welfare benefits information (at 59.1%) all information was described as relevant by at least 70% of the respondents obtaining it. Business information (92.6%) and information concerning consumer and credit matters (89.3%) received the highest ratings. The highest level of dissatisfaction belonged to legal information, with 11.4% describing it as irrelevant.

With regard to accuracy, most types of information fared less well, although were still rated as accurate by between 63% and 79% of the relevant respondents. The one exception was business information, which was described as accurate by 92.6% of its users. Again, legal

<sup>1</sup> For practical reasons this analysis was restricted to those types of information that were coded to SPSS 20 or more times. Because, in Question 2, 96 respondents gave two or more examples of past information need, which then, therefore, could not be coded to SPSS, the most popular categories of information analysed here do not correspond exactly with those in Table 9.

information was the subject of the most dissatisfaction, being cited as inaccurate by 13.6 % of those who had used it.

The levels of satisfaction with the currency of information ranged from 56.6% for information to help with hobbies and pastimes, to 77.8% for business information. The types of information regarded as least current were travel and tourism information (described as out of date by 25% of users), information to assist educational project work (24.2%) and information on hobbies and pastimes (18.4%).

With comprehensiveness, meanwhile, business information was again regarded most favourably, with 88.9% of its users responding positively. The satisfaction levels for the other types of information ranged from 55.9% for health care, to 70% for information to help with school and university coursework. Over 20% of the users of legal information indicated that the information they had obtained was not comprehensive.

The physical format of financial information (76.9%) and travel and tourism information (75%) received the most positive response, but respondents again appeared dissatisfied with information concerning legal matters: only 43.2% of its users felt that legal information was in an easy to use format, while 25% indicated the format was difficult to use. Interestingly, 50% of the users of welfare benefits information appeared to find the merits of its format difficult to judge and therefore failed to answer this question.

### **Satisfaction with information from particular providers**

The levels of satisfaction were also cross-tabulated with details of the major sources of the information (i.e. public libraries, CABx, academic libraries, other advice agencies, and Government departments and agencies) in order to investigate whether the public was more or less satisfied/dissatisfied with information from particular providers.<sup>1</sup>

With regard to comprehensibility, the organisations generally rated highly. The main exceptions were Government departments: although 52.9% of users felt their information was comprehensible, 41.2% felt it was not. Relevance also scored relatively well, ranging from 60.7% for advice agencies to 88.2% for academic libraries, although a large proportion of users of advice agencies (35.7%), Government departments (29.4%) and CABx (23.6%) preferred to reserve judgement on this question.

Accuracy ratings ranged from 58.8% for Government departments to 76.5% for academic libraries; although 17.6% of the users of both academic libraries and Government departments had found their information to be inaccurate. With currency, meanwhile, ratings were lower, ranging from 52.9% for Government departments to 67.9% for advice agencies. 29.4% of academic library users, 17.9% of public library users, and 17.6% of Government department users had found their information to be out of date.

Information from Government departments fared badly in terms of comprehensiveness, with just 41.1% of users indicating it was comprehensive, and 29.4% stating it was not.

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<sup>1</sup> This analysis was restricted to those organisations that were coded to SPSS 15 or more times. Because, in Question 3, 117 respondents cited two or more organisations or people they had approached to obtain information, which then, therefore, could not be coded to SPSS, the list of organisations analysed here does not correspond exactly to those organisations and people cited 15 or more times in Table 10.

Comprehensiveness ratings for the other organisations ranged from 56.6% for CABx to 70.6% for academic libraries. With regard to the physical format of the information, academic libraries (82.4%) and public libraries (69.5%) received the highest ratings, but again Government departments fared less well: only 35.3% of their users felt their information was in an easy to use format, while 23.5% stated the format was difficult to use.

### **Types of information sought in the past**

In Question 6, the entire survey sample was presented 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 wanted to find out more about in the past. Overall, 1100 (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 12.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
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

It can be seen that the top 6 responses to Question 2 (Table 9) - i.e. information on education, leisure, health care, welfare benefits, legal issues and employment - also occupy 6 of the top 7 places in the table here. The one 'newcomer' is transport and travel information, cited here by 31.6% of the respondents, although there are obvious similarities between this category and the travel and tourism element of the leisure and recreation information outlined at Table 9.

The questionnaire gave respondents the opportunity of indicating any other subjects on which they had sought information in the past, and the responses are outlined at Table 13. It would appear that, really, many of these topics could quite readily be allocated to one of the 23

subject categories above. For example, gardening and philately could certainly be classed as leisure and recreation information.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Number</b>
History (including local and family history)	28
The Arts	19
Religion	7
Science	5
Animal welfare	4
Languages	3
Literature	3
Geography	2
Local planning	2
The media	2
Gambling	1
Gardening	1
Global current affairs	1
Local community affairs	1
Natural history	1
Non-Departmental Public Bodies	1
Northern Ireland politics	1
Philately	1
Philosophy	1
Psychology	1
Social policy	1

### **Demographic variances in past information need**

The data from Table 12 were cross-tabulated with the demographic data described in Section 3.1.1 of this report in order to establish whether there were any significant demographic variances in past information need. Some of the more notable differences will be outlined here. *(Please note that differences between the percentages in responses to particular variables will be described in terms of points).*

With regard to gender, there were some significant differences between the sexes. For example, 42.1% of the female respondents had indicated a past need for educational information, compared with 31.7% of male respondents - a difference of 10.4 points. There had also been a significant female preference for family/personal information (+9.5 points) and health care information (+8.9). Male respondents, meanwhile, had had more interest in technology and communications (+7.0) and political information (+6.2).

There were also significant differences between the past information needs of the various age groups, the most obvious being that with several topics (e.g. local government, health care, taxation, financial matters, legal issues) the percentages for those aged 19 or under were decidedly lower than the other age groups, presumably because most were not yet at a stage in life when such information had been required.

Examining the status of the respondents also revealed some significant differences, a number of which would not be unexpected. For example, welfare benefits information had been needed in the past by 36.7% of those respondents currently seeking work and by 29.1% of

those who were running a home, but only by 17.5% of the retired and 16.5% of the students. And employment information was cited by 51.4% of jobseekers and 41.4% of the employed, compared with 7.8% of the retired respondents. This last figure does appear rather low, for it might be safe to assume that many more of the retired respondents would have required employment information at some stage in their lives, and although no time period was attached to this question it was perhaps the case that a number of respondents had focused on information obtained in more recent times.

On studying the responses from the employed respondents in more detail, it was found that there were also some significant variations in the responses from the various social classes. For instance, 41% of those in professional occupations indicated they had required political information in the past, compared with 12.2% of skilled manual workers and 7.1% of unskilled workers; similar differences were to be found in the past need for local government information and information about technology and communications.

Geographic variations were also prevalent. For example, only 9.2% of East Midlands respondents cited a past need for housing information, compared with 31.1% of those in the South East; and just 9.1% of the Merseyside respondents had wanted tax information, compared with 38.6% in Wales. The data was also examined for differences between rural respondents and those living in other areas, and it was found that information on local government (+11.1 points), the environment (+9.8) and technology and communications (+6.3) had been more popular in rural areas, but that employment information (-7.8) had been less popular.

Amongst those respondents belonging to ethnic minority groups, two topics, perhaps unsurprisingly, had proved more popular than with the rest of the sample population: 25% of the ethnic minority respondents had required immigration and nationality information, compared with just 5.4% of the rest of the survey population; while the percentage requiring information on equal rights and discrimination (23%) was more than double that of the white respondents (11%). There were also significant differences between the past needs of disabled respondents and those without a disability, the most notable being for information on welfare benefits: 43.1% of disabled respondents had required such information, compared with 21.6% of those without a disability. Health care information (+9.5 points) had also been more frequently required by disabled respondents, but information on education (-14.7), politics (-10.6), and technology and communications (-9.9) had been less popular.

Finally, there appeared to be a significant relationship between past need for information on certain topics, and the type of organisation in which the questionnaires were distributed. For instance, 40.8% of the respondents in the CABx and other advice agencies had required information on welfare benefits, compared with 15.8% of the public library users; and 33.9% had required housing information, compared with 14.8% of library users. Conversely, just 8.8% of CABx and advice agency users had needed political information, compared with 23.8% of library users; while 22.3% of Bureaux and agency users indicated a past need for leisure and recreation information, compared with 44.2% of public library respondents.

### **Past reasons for seeking information**

In Question 7, respondents were asked to indicate (from a list of 13 reasons) the reasons why they had wanted citizenship information in the past, and these are summarised in descending numerical order in Table 14.



<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
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

Almost half of the survey sample (48.8%) identified educational and study reasons, and significant numbers also cited work-related reasons, family and personal reasons, and a simple general interest. There was a fairly low incidence of information seeking for political decision making and for religious reasons. Only a very small number of respondents gave additional reasons: for writing and speaking on particular subjects (2 respondents); for participation in a public enquiry (1); and to establish rights and responsibilities as a citizen (1).

### **Demographic variances in past reasons for seeking information**

These data were also cross-tabulated with demographic details in order to identify significant variations in reasons for information seeking.

With regard to gender, three notable differences arose: there was a female preference for seeking information for family and personal reasons (+9.0) and for health reasons (+6.4), but a male preference for business and commercial reasons (+7.2). With age groups, meanwhile, there were several variations. For example, educational reasons were cited by 61.5% of those respondents aged 29 or under, but by just 28.9% of those aged 55 or over; and work-related reasons were identified by 46% of those aged 30-54, but only 17.1% of those aged 55 and over. Again, given no particular time period was given for this information need, these figures for the older respondents are perhaps rather low, suggesting that many have focused very much on recent life experiences.

There were many differences identified when examining the status of respondents. Indeed, the status of the respondents was only an insignificant factor when the information was required for work with a representative or interest group, or for satisfying a general interest. Given the findings already outlined above, some of these differences were not unexpected. For example, educational reasons were cited by 72.2% of the students, but by only 26.8% of the retired respondents; and job-seeking reasons were identified by 46.3% of those currently seeking employment, and by 36.8% of those currently in employment, but by only 4.1% of the retired respondents. There were fewer variations amongst the social classes, where significant differences were found only amongst those respondents citing educational, work-

related, business and recreational reasons. In general, these reasons were identified more frequently by those in Social Classes I to III, than by those in Classes IV and V.

Regional differences were many, and inexplicable. There are no apparent reasons why percentages for educational reasons ranged from 38.5% in Scotland to 63.6% in Merseyside; why health reasons ranged from 15.6% in London to 50% in Wales; and why satisfying a general interest ranged from 27.1% in the North West to 46.9% in the South West. With regard to rural areas, a number of reasons were cited more frequently by rural respondents than by those in other areas: a general interest (+10.3 points), health reasons (+9.6), family reasons (+7.7), financial reasons (+7.2), for work with an interest group (+6.3), and business reasons (+5.5).

With ethnicity, only one significant difference was identified: 15% of the ethnic minority respondents identified religious reasons, compared to 5.9% of the white respondents. Disabled respondents, meanwhile, cited health reasons more frequently (+21.8) than those without a disability, although educational reasons (-20.7), recreational reasons (-12.3) work-related reasons (-11.9) and a general interest (-11.6) were less popular.

When cross-tabulating the reasons given with information on the type of organisation in which the survey form was distributed, a few significant variations emerged - differences which perhaps reflect the reasons why the respondents visit these organisations in the first instance. For example, educational reasons were cited by 55.7% of public library users, but only by 27.9% of CABx and advice agency users; recreational reasons were identified by 39% of library users and 15.4% of Bureaux and agency users; and conversely, legal reasons were cited by 16.5% of library users, but by 28.2% of CAB and agency users.

## Future information need

Using the same list of 23 subjects described above, Question 6 also asked respondents if they felt they might want to find out more about any of these topics in the future. Overall, 1014 (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 15.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
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

Table 16, meanwhile, summarises the differences between the respondents' past citizenship information needs, from Table 12, and their predicted future needs, from Table 15, indicating those categories where greatest change in future needs is predicted. *(Please note that the 'Pos.' columns in Table 16 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.)*

<b>Table 16: Difference between past and predicted future needs</b>						
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Past need</b>		<b>Future need</b>		<b>Net difference</b>	
	<b>%</b>	<b>Pos.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Pos.</b>	<b><math>\pm</math> pts</b>	<b><math>\pm</math>Pos.</b>
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
Tech. & comms.	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

As can be seen, the top six subjects required in the past (leisure and recreation, education, employment, transport and travel, legal issues, and health care) are still regarded as the six types of information most likely to be required in the future, although in a slightly different order of preference. While there has been a slight increase in the predicted need for legal information (+4.6 points) and health care information (+2.2), less interest is anticipated in information on employment (-1.2), transport (-2.6), leisure (-3.1), and most significantly education (-8.8). Information on consumer and credit issues, and on immigration and nationality, although showing a slight predicted increase in use, remain the two least favoured subjects. There is an interestingly significant increased perception of information need about the European Union in the future (+8.3).

As with the question on past information need, the survey gave respondents the opportunity of indicating any other topics on which they might want to find out more in the future. These

are listed in Table 17, and are quite similar to those in Table 13. The only 'new' topics indicated are grant opportunities and environmental health.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Number</b>
History (including local and family history)	23
The Arts	14
Religion	7
Science	4
Geography	2
Grant/Funding bodies and opportunities	2
Languages	2
Local planning	2
Agriculture	1
Animal welfare	1
Environmental health	1
Gardening	1
Global current affairs	1
Literature	1
Local community affairs	1
The media	1
Northern Ireland politics	1
Philately	1
Philosophy	1
Psychology	1

### **Demographic variances in predicted future information need**

Gender variations, in terms of subject, were similar to those for past need, although the numerical differences were not so pronounced. Females again had less interest in technology (-7.8 points) and politics (-5.9), but a greater interest in family/personal information (+6.5), health care (+6.4) and education (+5.0). There was also a significant female preference for employment information (+5.7).

With regard to the age groups, however, there were only 4 topics with which there were *no* significant differences - local government, health care, taxation, and transport and travel. For those respondents aged 19 and under, there was an increase in predicted future use, compared to past use, for all topics except education and environmental information. Indeed, in general, for those aged 44 and under, predicted need was greater than past need for most subjects on the list; while for those aged 45 and over, predicted future use of the majority of subjects was less than past use. This was most noticeable with the 65 and over age group, where there was a drop in interest in all topics, except politics (where interest remained the same) and EU information (+4.5 points). Indeed, of the 23 topics, EU information was the only one for which predicted future need was greater than past need for *all* age groups.

Status, too, was a significant factor in future information need, except in the cases of local government and transport information. Students, jobseekers, and those respondents running a home displayed an increased interest, compared to past need, in the vast majority of the topics; while predicted interest from retired respondents was lower in the vast majority of subjects. Employed respondents, meanwhile, showed an increased interest in 13 topics (including health care, taxation and financial information), but a decreased need for the other

10 topics (including employment, education and housing). Within the group of employed respondents, significant differences were only evident with two topics: future interest in EU information was greater in Classes I to III than in Classes IV and V; while leisure information proved more popular with Classes I, II, III(N) and IV, than with Classes III(M) and V.

There were also a number of geographic variances, the causes of which were again not immediately obvious. For example, future interest in equal rights ranged from 6.1% in the East Midlands to 24.7% in the North West; while interest in EU information ranged from 13.8% in Yorkshire and the Humber to 32.2% in London. It is interesting to note that for 18 of the 23 subjects listed, the percentage of interested respondents in Wales was higher than for all other regions of the UK, although it should be re-emphasised that there were only 44 Welsh respondents to the questionnaire, therefore the statistical significance of their response might be questioned. Compared with their urban counterparts, respondents in rural areas displayed a significant future preference for local government information (+9.1 points) and information on transport and travel (+8.0), but less of an interest in employment (-7.6).

Respondents from ethnic minority groups, when compared with white respondents, again displayed a preference for information on immigration (+21.0) and equal rights (+13.2), but also indicated significant preferences for information on housing (+16.0), business opportunities (+14.4) and consumer and credit issues (+7.3). Disabled respondents, meanwhile, when compared with those without a disability, showed a greater interest in welfare benefits (+16.5) and equal rights (+7.8), but less of an interest in employment (-14.5) and politics (-10.0). Their need for future health care information, although greater (+4.2), was surprisingly not significantly different from that of the respondents without a disability.

The type of organisation in which the survey form was distributed again appeared to be a factor in the predicted need for particular kinds of information, although not to the same degree as with past information need. For example, users in CABx and advice agencies, when compared with users of public libraries, had a greater interest in welfare benefits (+12.5), but less of an interest in leisure and recreation (-19.1). And users of advice agencies had a significantly lower predicted need for information on finance, legal issues and politics than the users in public libraries and CABx.

### **Predicted reasons for wanting information**

In Question 7, respondents were also asked to predict the reasons why they might want citizenship information in the future, and the response can be found at Table 18. Additional reasons predicted were identical to those in the past: for writing and speaking on particular subjects (2 respondents); for participation in a public enquiry (1); and to establish rights and responsibilities as a citizen (1).

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
1. Educational / study reasons	471	36.4
2. A general interest	423	32.7
3. Work-related reasons	422	32.6
4. Family / personal reasons	373	28.8
5. Job-seeking reasons	348	26.9
6. Recreational reasons	329	25.4
7. Financial reasons	323	25.0
8. Health reasons	282	21.8
9. Legal reasons	259	20.0
10. Business / commercial reasons	170	13.1
11. For work with an interest group	143	11.1
12. For political decision-making	113	8.7
13. Religious reasons	82	6.3

Table 19, meanwhile, summarises the differences between the respondents' past reasons for seeking information, from Table 14, and their predicted future reasons for requiring information. (Please note that the 'Pos.' columns in Table 19 indicate the 'league position' each reason held in the respective tables - e.g. educational/study reasons was top of both past and future 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.)

Reasons	Past reasons		Future reasons		Net Difference	
	%	Pos.	%	Pos.	$\pm$ %	$\pm$ Pos.
Financial	22.2	8	25.0	7	+2.8	+1
Political decision-making	7.7	12	8.7	12	+1.0	same
Business / commercial	12.1	10	13.1	10	+1.0	same
Legal	19.4	9	20.0	9	+0.6	same
Rep. / Interest group	10.9	11	11.1	11	+0.2	same
Religious	6.6	13	6.3	13	-0.3	same
General interest	33.3	3	32.7	2	-0.6	+1
Job-seeking	27.7	6	26.9	5	-0.8	+1
Health	23.4	7	21.8	8	-1.6	-1
Work-related	35.2	2	32.6	3	-2.6	-1
Recreational	28.2	5	25.4	6	-2.8	-1
Family / personal	32.9	4	28.8	4	-4.1	same
Educational / study	48.8	1	36.4	1	-12.4	same

The 4 most popular past reasons for seeking information (educational, work-related, family, and satisfying a general interest) are also regarded as the most likely reasons for requiring information in the future. There was, however, a significant reduction in predicted educational reasons; it might be hypothesised that this relates to difficulties in predicting future areas of educational deficiency. Political decision making and religious reasons were again regarded as the least likely motives for information seeking. Interestingly much fewer increases were predicted (than for categories of future information need) and a greater proportion of respondents indicated a drop in information need in relation to specific uses.

### **Demographic variances in predicted reasons for wanting information**

Female respondents again predicted a greater need than male respondents for information for family and personal reasons (+6.4 points), but less of a need for business reasons (-9.5), financial reasons (-8.4), and work-related reasons (-6.4). With regard to age group differences, there was a perhaps predictable trend for educational, work-related, jobseeking, and business reasons to be cited less by older respondents; legal and political decision-making reasons also followed a similar pattern. Family and personal reasons were cited more frequently by those aged 30-54.

The status of respondents was only an insignificant factor when it was predicted that information would be required for health reasons or for satisfying a general interest; for all other reasons there were significant differences in terms of status. For instance, percentages for educational reasons ranged from 54.4% of students to 19.7% of the retired; those for



family reasons ranged from 40.7% of those respondents running a home to 19.7% of the retired; and those for financial reasons ranged from 32.8% of jobseekers to 12.8% of those running a home. For each reason the lowest response came from either the retired or those running a home. As was the case with the past reasons for seeking information, the only variations in terms of social class were found amongst those respondents citing educational, work-related, business and recreational reasons; all were cited more frequently by those in Classes I and II than by those respondents in the other classes.

Regional differences were again numerous and followed no clear pattern, although for 7 of the 13 reasons listed the percentage response in Wales was higher than for the other UK regions. Again, certain reasons were cited more frequently by rural respondents than by those living in other areas: a general interest (+8.0 points), family reasons (+7.6), health reasons (+6.6) and work with an interest group (+5.6).

Two significant differences were identified in terms of ethnicity: 15% of ethnic minority respondents predicted religious reasons, compared with just 5.6% of white respondents; while 14% cited political decision-making, compared with 8.3% of white respondents. Disabled respondents again predicted health reasons more frequently (+19.0 points) than those without a disability, but educational reasons (-15.0), work-related reasons (-13.6), a general interest (-11.8), job-seeking (-10.8) and recreational reasons (-9.2) were less popular.

Finally, there were again noticeable differences in terms of the type of organisation in which the survey form was distributed. When compared with public library users, respondents in CABx and advice agencies predicted a less frequent need for information to satisfy a general interest (-21.3); for educational (-17.9), recreational (-15.8) and business (-7.5) reasons; and for working with an interest group (-5.5). Interestingly, CABx users predicted a greater need for financial and legal reasons than the users of public libraries and other advice agencies.

### 3.1.3 Barriers to information access

#### **Problems in obtaining information**

In Question 5, the 769 respondents who indicated they had looked 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 20. *(It should be noted that the percentages in each case are of those respondents who indicated they had looked for that type of information in Question 2)*

<b>Table 20: Types of information that were difficult to obtain</b>		
<b>Types of information</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
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

A number of respondents to this question, however, preferred to give the reasons why the information had been difficult to obtain, and these are detailed in Table 21. As can be seen, the most common reason was that relevant resources were inadequate or were unavailable; a number of respondents added that this was often due to underfunding of the public library service. Some respondents had encountered difficulties with using various elements of information systems, such as catalogues, classification schemes, and electronic databases. Two respondents indicated that official secrecy and restricted access to information sources was the prime barrier; one felt that (legal) information sources were often full of jargon and difficult to interpret; while another respondent indicated that a lack of personal time and information skills had prevented him obtaining the required information.

<b>Table 21: Reasons for information being difficult to obtain</b>		
<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% (of 196 respondents)</b>
Resources were inadequate or unavailable	21	10.7
Difficulties with using information systems	9	4.6
Official secrecy / restricted access to information	2	1.0
Information difficult to interpret / full of jargon	1	0.5
Lack of personal time or knowledge of where to go for information	1	0.5

### **Inability to access information**

A similar question to Question 5 was also asked of the survey sample as a whole (i.e. the 1294 respondents). This question, Question 13, was actually included at the end of the survey form in the hope that reading and answering the previous questions might jog some memories or spark some thoughts in the minds of the respondents, but because of its similarity to Question 5 it is discussed here.

The question asked if respondents had ever been unable to access information which they needed in order to make a decision, solve a problem, or understand something a little better. In all, 308 respondents (23.8% of the survey sample) had been in the past unable to access information they needed. These respondents were then asked to briefly describe the circumstances.

Of these 308 respondents, 91 (29.5%) did not specify the circumstances, but the majority of the rest indicated the types of information they had been unable to access. These are summarised in Table 22. As can be seen, there was a wide range of responses, with information on legal issues, education, welfare benefits, health care and employment being the most prominent.

<b>Table 22: Types of information unable to access</b>		
<b>Types of information</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% (of 308 respondents)</b>
Legal information	22	7.1
Education - to assist with coursework, projects, etc. (12) - to choose schools, universities, courses, etc. (7)	19	6.2
Welfare Benefits	18	5.8
Health Care	16	5.2
Employment / Job opportunities	14	4.5
Financial matters	10	3.2
Housing	9	2.9
Business information	8	2.6
Family / Personal matters	7	2.3
Leisure and Recreation - hobbies and pastimes (5) - travel and tourism (2)	7	2.3
Local Government	7	2.3
Politics / UK Government	5	1.6
Taxation	5	1.6
Disability	4	1.3
Information about the European Union	4	1.3
Environmental information	3	1.0
Local planning information	3	1.0
Transport	3	1.0
Immigration and Nationality	2	0.6
Technology and Communications	2	0.6
Charitable / Voluntary work	1	0.3
Consumer and Credit	1	0.3
Crime and Security	1	0.3
Health and Safety at work	1	0.3
Religion	1	0.3

As in Question 5, a substantial number of Question 13 respondents preferred to indicate the reasons why they had been unable to access information, and these appear in Table 23.

<b>Table 23: Reasons for being unable to access information</b>		
<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% (of 308 respondents)</b>
Official secrecy / restricted access to information	19	6.2
Resources were inadequate or unavailable	19	6.2
Difficulties with using information systems	11	3.6
Information difficult to interpret / full of jargon	6	1.9
Information professionals' lack of knowledge	3	1.0
Lack of personal time or knowledge of where to go for information	2	0.6

Again, inadequate or unavailable resources, particularly in public libraries, was a prominent reason, but official secrecy and restricted access, particularly to national and local government information, was also a major factor. Interestingly, three respondents felt that the knowledge of information professionals was somewhat lacking: “they send you all over the place” was one comment received.

### **3.1.4 Information seeking behaviour**

#### **Preferred sources of information**

In Question 8, 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, 1209 (93.4%) of the respondents indicated they would approach at least one of the sources to obtain information. The overall response is outlined at Table 24.

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

In descending numerical order, the number of respondents who would use these organisations or people on at least an occasional basis is detailed in Table 25.

<b>Organisations / People</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
1. Public libraries	1001	77.3
2. Family and friends	798	61.7
3. Offices of Govt. depts. and agencies (e.g. Inland Revenue, Benefits Agency)	697	53.9
4. Post Offices	687	53.1
5. Citizens Advice Bureaux	652	50.3
6. Professional people (e.g. doctors and social workers)	634	49.0
7. Local council offices	551	42.5
8. Academic libraries	509	39.4
9. Other information and advice centres	406	31.4
10. MPs	331	25.6
11. Professional / Trade Associations	293	22.6
12. Chambers of Commerce	121	9.4

This is felt to be a significant area in terms of overall consideration of sources of access to information used by the public. Over three quarters of respondents would use public libraries. Between half and three quarters of the respondents would approach Citizens Advice Bureaux, post offices, Government departments and agencies, or their family and friends.

Question 8 also gave respondents the opportunity to identify additional preferred sources of information, and these are listed in Table 26.

<b>Organisations / People, etc.</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Occasionall y</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Internet	1	2	3
Leisure centres	2	1	3
Local councillors	-	2	2
Animal welfare and environmental groups	1	-	1
Banks	1	-	1
Community centres	1	-	1
Islamic community centres	1	-	1
Overseas trade and funding agencies	-	1	1
Parent-Teacher Associations	-	1	1
Religious organisations	-	1	1
Schools	-	1	1
Telephone help lines	-	1	1
Tourist information centres	1	-	1
Voluntary agencies	-	1	1

## **Demographic variances in preferred sources of information**

When compared with the male respondents, females displayed a significantly greater preference for using five sources of information: family and friends (+11.0 points), professional people (+10.4), advice agencies (+7.3), post offices (+7.3) and CABx (+4.9). There were also several significant variations in terms of age group. For post offices, public libraries, academic libraries, advice agencies, Chambers of Commerce, professional people, and family and friends, the general trend was for interest in using these sources to gradually wane as respondents grew older. For example, potential use of post offices ranged from 62.3% of those aged 19 and under, to 44.4% of those aged 65 and over; use of professional people ranged from 55.4% to 33.3% in the same age groups; and use of family and friends ranged from 75.4% to 37.8%. Use of Government departments, meanwhile, was identified most frequently by those aged between 20 and 64, and less frequently by those in the earliest and latter stages of their lifespan.

Status was only an insignificant factor amongst those who indicated they would approach local council offices for information. As regards the rest of the information sources, with the exception of professional and trade associations, the lowest responses came from retired respondents, again indicating an apparent decline in information seeking interest in later years. Professional associations, incidentally, would be used least frequently by those respondents who run a home. The responses indicate that public libraries, family and friends, academic libraries, post offices, advice agencies and Chambers of Commerce would be approached most frequently by students; CABx, Government departments and MPs would be visited most frequently by jobseekers; employed people would be the most likely users of professional associations; while the most frequent visitors to professional people would be those respondents running a home. Amongst the group of employed respondents, social class was only a significant factor in the potential use of 3 information resources: use of public libraries ranged from 57.1% of Class V respondents to 97.4% of those in Class I; academic library use ranged from 14.3% of Class V to 66.7% of Class I; and potential contact with professional and trade associations ranged from 7.1% of Class V to 71.1% of Class III(N).

There were no significant regional differences in the potential level of use of MPs, post offices, advice agencies, trade associations, professional people, and family and friends. Significant variations existed for the other information sources, but again they follow no clear trend. Use of Government departments, for example, ranged from 63.2% in the South East to 40.4% in Yorkshire and the Humber; while use of Chambers of Commerce ranged from 18.8% in the North West to 4.9% in Scotland. What was apparent, however, was that in all regions public libraries were the most frequently cited resource, from 68.8% of respondents in Yorkshire and the Humber to 93.2% in Wales. Respondents in rural areas, compared with those in other areas, displayed a significantly greater interest in obtaining information from local council offices (+17.4 points), professional people (+11.0), post offices (+10.0) and public libraries (+8.0).

The ethnic minority groups in the sample, when compared with the white respondents, displayed a significant preference for visiting advice agencies (+14.8), academic libraries (+11.6), post offices (+6.4) and Chambers of Commerce (+6.1); although public libraries (77% of ethnic minority respondents), and family and friends (65%) remained the two most favoured sources. The resource most frequently cited by disabled respondents was CABx (58.5%), and when compared with those without a disability, a significant preference was also shown for contact with MPs (+8.5 points). Disabled respondents felt less inclined to obtain information from public libraries (-22.6), academic libraries (-18.3), family and friends (-15.1) and post offices (-9.3).

Significant differences in preferred sources of information were also identified when examining the type of organisation in which the questionnaires were disseminated. For the users of CABx and advice agencies, CABx were their preferred source (78.7% and 56.1% of respondents, respectively), followed by family and friends. While public libraries were then 3rd on the list of CABx users' preferences, they were actually 6th on the advice agency users' list, also being behind post offices, Government departments and professional people. Users of CABx and advice agencies, when compared to library users, also indicated they would be less frequent users of academic libraries (-18.1 points), professional associations (-12.1) and Chambers of Commerce (-5.0).

### Preferred language of information

In Question 9, the survey sample was asked in which language they prefer to obtain information. The results are summarised in Table 27. Excluding the Welsh and Irish languages, only 1.4% indicated a preferred minority language, compared with 7.7% of respondents that came from an ethnic minority.

<b>Language</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
English	1216	94.0
Welsh	8	0.6
Scottish Gaelic	-	-
Irish	5	0.4
Bengali	3	0.2
Gujarati	3	0.2
Hindi	1	0.1
Punjabi	-	-
Urdu	3	0.2
Chinese	2	0.2
Vietnamese	-	-
Greek	-	-
Turkish	-	-
Arabic	-	-
Other*	6	0.5
No response	47	3.6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1294</b>	<b>100</b>

\* The 'other' languages were German (2 respondents), Italian (1), Norwegian (1), Swedish (1) and British Sign Language (1).



### Preferred methods of obtaining information

From a list of methods of obtaining information, respondents were then asked to indicate their favourite three methods in order of preference. The responses to this question, Question 10, are outlined in Table 28. A small number of other methods were indicated by respondents: reading trade journals (1 respondent), watching/reading Teletext (1), and C.B. radio (1).

<b>Method</b>	<b>1st choice (No.)</b>	<b>2nd choice (No.)</b>	<b>3rd choice (No.)</b>
Listening to the radio	85	53	65
Looking through a collection without help from the staff	173	99	110
Reading a book	168	130	84
Reading a leaflet / pamphlet	29	75	75
Reading a magazine	21	56	57
Reading a newspaper	115	117	100
Talking by telephone to someone	62	120	92
Talking face to face with someone	215	125	128
Using a computer	30	59	67
Watching television	46	90	93
Writing a letter	19	26	62

These responses were then 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. This is shown in Table 29.

<b>Method</b>	<b>Points</b>
1. Talking face to face with someone	1023
2. Reading a book	848
3. Looking through a collection without help from the staff	827
4. Reading a newspaper	679
5. Talking by telephone to someone	518
6. Listening to the radio	426
7. Watching television	411
8. Reading a leaflet / pamphlet	312
9. Using a computer	275
10. Reading a magazine	232
11. Writing a letter	171

Several respondents (173) completed this question incorrectly, however, and simply indicated their favourite methods without ranking them 1, 2 or 3. With this in mind, an alternative 'league table' of preferred methods was constructed, based on the number of times each method had been cited, but with no weighted scoring attached. This method resulted in only one minor change to the above positions, with watching television changing places with listening to the radio.

Preference for face to face communications is high. Again interestingly the traditional book retains a high degree of favour with a significant number of respondents - with a (perhaps unexpected) lower preference for the leaflet. Many respondents, however, are happy to browse unassisted in a collection or to make an enquiry by telephone.

Significance of the media is attested. Interestingly there is a continuing preference for newspapers. However, only a small proportion prefer using a computer or writing a letter. It would seem from the above that these tend to be the least preferred methods at present.

These data suggest that no single mechanism for enabling access to information should be seen as the ultimate solution to the information needs of the citizen. Rather a complementary range of solutions must be offered to the citizen.

### **Demographic variances in preferred methods of obtaining information**

The data from Question 10 was also cross-tabulated with demographic details in order to identify significant variances. It should be emphasised that the figures outlined here relate simply to the number of times each method was cited: weighted scores were not taken into account.

With regard to gender, only in the case of talking by telephone was there a significant difference, cited by 33.8% of female respondents compared with 23.2% of males. There were a number of differences between age groups, however, the most notable being using a computer, which perhaps unsurprisingly was cited as a preferred method by 40.6% of those aged 19 and under, and by 22.1% of those aged 20-29, but by just 10.6% of those aged 30 or over. Telephone, television and magazines were also cited by a significantly greater proportion of those aged 19 or under than by those in the other age groups; and there was a slight but noticeable preference amongst more mature respondents for radio, newspapers and looking through a collection.

A small number of differences were apparent in terms of status. Again, the most notable concerned the use of computers, cited by 33% of students, but just 9.7% of those running a home and 3.4% of retired respondents. Conversely, listening to the radio and looking through a collection were cited by decidedly less students than by those of other status. Significant differences, in terms of social class, were also present, but no clear patterns emerged. For example, preferences for looking through a collection ranged from 30.6% of Class I to 54.5% of Class V; while face-to-face communication ranged from 18.2% of Class V to 71% of Class III(M).

Regional variations were prevalent, but once again no clear trends were evident. Acquiring information through face-to-face communication, for example, was preferred by 60.2% of Scottish respondents, but only 30.6% of those in London; while preferences for watching television ranged from 14.8% in the Eastern Region to 35.0% in Northern Ireland. In comparison with respondents in other areas, rural respondents had a significant preference for obtaining information by reading a book (+12.0 points), but were less inclined to read a newspaper (-7.2) or use a computer (-7.0).

Ethnic minority respondents, compared with their white counterparts, indicated a preference for obtaining information by using a computer (+6.5) and watching television (+6.0), but listening to the radio (-11.6), talking by telephone (-10.1) and reading a book (-6.3) were less popular. Disabled respondents, meanwhile, displayed a greater preference for listening to the

radio (+9.3) and face to face communication (+6.2) than those without a disability, but were less disposed to obtain information through reading a book (-13.6) or using a computer (-8.3).

Significant variances were also found when comparing preferred methods with the type of organisation from which the respondent obtained the survey form. For example, reading a book was preferred by 48.4% of public library users compared to 12.1% of the users of CABx and advice agencies, while reading a magazine was cited by 16% of library users compared with just 7.4% of Bureau and agency users. Face to face communication, on the other hand, was preferred by 68.8% of Bureau and agency users compared with 42.2% of library users; while telephone contact was cited by 40.3% of CABx and agency users, but only 24.7% of library users.

### **3.1.5 Use of computers**

#### **Access to information using computers**

In Question 11, the 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 (Central Information Technology Unit, 1996), 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 at Table 30.

<b>Table 30: Predicted frequency of use of computers</b>						
<b>Location</b>	<b>Frequently</b>		<b>Occasionally</b>		<b>Never</b>	
	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Computers in public libraries	527	40.7	413	31.9	354	27.4
Computers in post offices	169	13.1	319	24.7	806	62.3
Computers in shopping centres	160	12.4	294	22.7	840	64.9
Computers in town halls	128	9.9	250	19.3	916	70.8

Table 31, meanwhile, indicates in descending numerical order, the numbers of respondents who would use the computers in the locations listed on at least an occasional basis.

<b>Table 31: Use of public access computers on at least an occasional basis</b>		
<b>Location</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Computers in public libraries	940	72.6
Computers in post offices	488	37.8
Computers in shopping centres	454	35.1
Computers in town halls	378	29.2

There was a clear emphasis on public libraries as an appropriate location for computerised access to information for a significant majority of the general public. The other options listed, though, would also attract a significant body and proportion of the general public.

A small proportion (64) of the respondents specified one or more other locations at which they would use public access computers, and these appear in Table 32.

**Table 32: Other locations for public access computers**

Location	Frequently	Occasionally	Total
Health centres / Doctors' surgeries	5	4	9
Schools	6	2	8
Bus / rail stations	4	3	7
Colleges / Universities	4	3	7
Citizens Advice Bureaux	2	3	5
Public houses	4	-	4
Tourist information centres	3	1	4
Banks	1	2	3
Community Centres	2	1	3
County records and archives offices	2	1	3
Leisure centres	-	3	3
Internet cafés	1	1	2
'One-stop' information centres	1	1	2
Street kiosks	2	-	2
Unemployment drop-in / day centres	1	1	2
Airport terminals	-	1	1
Independent advice centres	1	-	1
Job Centres	-	1	1
Village halls	-	1	1

### Demographic variances in the potential use of public access computers

In terms of gender, only one significant difference in potential use of computers arose: female respondents, in comparison to males, displayed a preference for using computers in shopping centres (+8.1 points). Given the findings discussed above, it is unsurprising that the main variations, in terms of the respondents' age groups, reflect a substantially higher interest in using computers among younger respondents than among the more elderly. It should be emphasised, however, that a highly significant 67.3% of those aged 55-64, and 40.6% of those aged 65 and over, indicated a willingness to use computers in public libraries; and a substantial proportion of the 55-64 age group displayed a desire to use computers in post offices (25.8%), shopping centres (18.9%) and town halls (18.9%).

Significant differences were also evident when examining status, and again these tended to revolve around age differences. In each of the four potential locations for computers, students were the most probable users, while retired respondents were the least likely users. Of the employed respondents, those in Social Class IV (partly skilled occupations) were less likely to use public access computers than were the other occupational classes.

Each location for computers was the subject of significant regional differences, which once again followed no obvious pattern, although the potential level of use in the 4 locations was lowest in the North East and the South West, and Wales and the West Midlands shared the highest responses for the 4 locations. Use of public libraries ranged from 65.1% in the North East to 87.3% in the West Midlands; use of post offices from 20.4% in the South West to 52.3% in Wales; use of shopping centres from 14.3% in the South West to 52.1% in the West Midlands; and use of town halls from 16.5% in the North East to 43.2% in Wales. Although

the potential level of use of computers in public libraries by rural residents and by those in other areas was identical (72.6%), there was significantly less interest among rural respondents in using computers in shopping centres (-12.8 points) and post offices (-7.2).

Compared with white respondents, those in ethnic minority groups displayed a greater willingness to use computers in all of the locations: shopping centres (+17.2), post offices (+12.2), town halls (+9.5) and public libraries (+5.8). Disabled respondents, meanwhile, were less ready to use computers in libraries (-24.0), shopping centres (-18.3), post offices (-12.2) and town halls (-6.5) than those without a disability.

With regard to the type of organisation in which the survey forms were distributed, only one notable variation arose: although using computers in public libraries was the most favoured option of the users of all 3 types of organisation, interest was proportionally higher among library users (76.7%) than among users of CABx (62.1%) and advice agencies (53.0%).

### **3.1.6 The value of information as part of citizenship**

#### **Perceived importance of information to citizens**

In the final question to be discussed here, Question 12, respondents were asked if they believed that access to accurate and unbiased information is important for exercising their rights as a citizen. Their responses are summarised at Table 33. As can be seen, a highly significant majority (79.2%) believe that access to high quality information is very important for exercising their rights as citizens.

	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Very important	1025	79.2
Quite important	196	15.1
Not important	10	0.8
Don't know	19	1.5
No response	44	3.4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1294</b>	<b>100</b>

#### **Demographic variances in perceived importance of information**

When considering the importance of information, there were no significant variations in terms of gender. As regards age group, however, the most notable feature was that those aged 19 or under felt less certain of the importance of information than the other age groups: while 59.2% believed it was very important, 28.5% felt it was quite important (almost double the proportion of the entire survey sample), and 8.5% did not know (a significantly greater figure than that for the survey population as a whole).

The one significant variation in terms of status again reflected the slightly conflicting view of the younger respondents: 69.2% of the students felt that information access was very important, compared with 84.9% of those running a home, 81.9% of the employed, 81.4% of the jobseekers, and 78.8% of the retired. Among the employed respondents, there were no significant differences in terms of social class.

Again there were inexplicable regional differences. Belief that information was very important ranged from 90.6% in the South East and 88.6% in Wales, to 68.5% in Scotland

and 67% in Yorkshire and the Humber. No significant differences arose between the opinions of rural respondents and those in other areas.

Respondents from ethnic minority groups felt slightly less assured that information access was very important (72%) compared to white respondents (79.8%). However, there were no significant differences between the views of disabled respondents and those without a disability.

Finally, no variations were evident on comparing the views of the users of the various types of organisations that were used as distribution mechanisms for the questionnaire.

## **3.2 USER STUDY 2: SURVEY BY INTERVIEW**

### **3.2.1 Demographic details of respondents**

#### **Respondents in rural areas**

Of the 898 respondents, 150 (16.7%) lived in rural areas. This is a slightly larger proportion than in the first survey (14.7%), and closer to the 1995 national figure of 18.2% (Office for National Statistics, 1997a).

#### **Gender and age group of respondents**

Table 34 indicates the gender and age group of the respondents. As can be seen, 61.1% of the respondents were female, while 38.6% were male - a significantly greater female-male ratio than the national percentages of 51% and 49% (Office for National Statistics, 1997b). It is noticeable that amongst those respondents aged 30-54 the female-male ratio was 2:1.

Compared with the first survey, there is a greater proportion of older respondents - i.e. 40.0% aged 55 or over, compared with 26.2% in the initial survey. This is substantially greater than the national percentage, in 1996, of 26% (Office for National Statistics, 1997a). Again, because of the survey's use of CIPFA age group variables, and inconsistencies in Office for National Statistics publications, direct comparisons with national figures for the other age groups can not be made.

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Gender</b>			<b>Totals</b>	
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Not specified</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
16-19	18	24	-	<b>42</b>	<b>4.7</b>
20-29	72	72	-	<b>144</b>	<b>16.0</b>
30-44	75	149	-	<b>224</b>	<b>24.9</b>
45-54	40	82	1	<b>123</b>	<b>13.7</b>
55-64	54	77	1	<b>132</b>	<b>14.7</b>
65-74	52	75	-	<b>127</b>	<b>14.1</b>
75 or over	35	66	-	<b>101</b>	<b>11.2</b>
Age not specified	1	4	-	<b>5</b>	<b>0.6</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>347</b> <b>(38.6%)</b>	<b>549</b> <b>(61.1%)</b>	<b>2</b> <b>(0.2%)</b>	<b>898</b>	<b>100</b>

#### **Status of respondents**

Table 35, meanwhile, indicates the status of the respondents. Compared with the first survey, the proportions of employed respondents and students were lower, whilst the proportions of retired people and those running a home were higher. Indeed, almost half of the respondents (47.5%) were retired or running a home. Particularly noticeable is the number of females running a home (12.1% of the total sample). Given that many of the interviews will have been carried out during the day, these figures were perhaps inevitable. Surprisingly, though, the proportion of jobseekers was also down, to 7.2% from 13.7% in the first survey.

The percentage of economically inactive respondents (i.e. student, retired, running a home, or permanently unable to work) was 57.2%, slightly greater than the national figure of 51.1% (Office for National Statistics, 1997c). However, as the national figure also includes all people under 16, who were excluded from this second survey, then it becomes clear that the respondents come to a greater extent proportionally from the economically inactive groups than for the UK as a whole.

These data would suggest that the doorstep interview methodology has reached a greater proportion of those not in active employment - women, the elderly, the retired, the unemployed and those running a home. However, given these are groups deemed in danger of exclusion, then the results are highly relevant and significant. They also complement those of the first survey where a more dynamic and potentially 'informed' group of respondents was achieved.

<b>Status</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Sex not specified</b>	<b>Totals</b>	
				<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
In paid employment	113	146	-	<b>259</b>	<b>28.8</b>
Self employed	28	33	-	<b>61</b>	<b>6.8</b>
Seeking work	40	25	-	<b>65</b>	<b>7.2</b>
Retired	116	189	2	<b>307</b>	<b>34.2</b>
Running a home	10	109	-	<b>119</b>	<b>13.3</b>
Student	35	43	-	<b>78</b>	<b>8.7</b>
Status not specified	5	4	-	<b>9</b>	<b>1.0</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>549</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>898</b>	<b>100</b>

It is noticeable amongst the retired respondents that there is a significantly greater proportion of females (61.6%) compared with males (37.8%). However, this is remarkably close to the national percentages for women (64.9%) and men (35.1%) over state retirement age (Office for National Statistics, 1997b). There is also a greater proportion of females amongst the employed respondents (55.9% compared with 44.1% males), although interestingly this is in contrast to 1996 national figures for the UK workforce, where just 44.3% of those in employment were female while 55.7% were male (Office for National Statistics, 1997a). The gender breakdown of the jobseeking respondents (61.5% male, 38.5% female) is slightly closer to the national pattern, in January 1997, of 76.7% male and 23.3% female unemployed claimants (Office for National Statistics, 1997c).



Table 36, meanwhile cross-tabulates the respondents' status with the 'category' of the electoral ward they lived in, where category 1 comprises those wards with the highest proportion of social classes IV and V (i.e. using the Standard Occupational Classification) in the 1991 census, and category 5 consists of the wards with the lowest proportion of social classes IV and V.

Few clear patterns emerge, although the percentage of jobseekers in categories 1 and 2 is effectively double that in categories 4 and 5.

Status	Ward category				
	1	2	3	4	5
In paid employment	25.6	26.4	32.2	32.2	30.3
Self employed	2.2	6.3	12.3	9.0	5.1
Seeking work	10.6	9.2	7.0	4.5	4.6
Retired	37.2	35.6	27.5	30.5	39.4
Running a home	17.2	12.1	9.4	15.8	13.1
Student	7.2	10.3	11.7	7.9	7.4

### Social class of respondents

The 320 respondents who were either in paid employment or were self employed were asked to specify their occupation. Those who did specify an occupation (288) were then allocated a social class using the Standard Occupational Classification. These are detailed in Table 37.

Social Class	Male	Female	Totals	% (of 288)
I Professional, etc. occupations	33	16	49	<b>17.0</b>
II Managerial and Technical occupations	41	61	102	<b>35.4</b>
III(N) Skilled occupations non-manual	18	37	55	<b>19.1</b>
III(M) Skilled occupations manual	13	4	17	<b>5.9</b>
IV Partly skilled occupations	16	32	48	<b>16.7</b>
V Unskilled occupations	2	15	17	<b>5.9</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>123</b> (42.7%)	<b>165</b> (57.2%)	<b>288</b>	<b>100</b>

Compared with the first survey (see Section 3.1.1, Table 7), there were greater proportions of respondents with professional, partly-skilled, and unskilled occupations, but smaller proportions of respondents with managerial and technical, skilled non-manual, and skilled manual occupations. Compared with 1996 national figures (see Section 3.1.1, Table 8) the sample contained greater proportions of professional and managerial occupations, smaller proportions of skilled occupations, but almost identical proportions of partly-skilled and unskilled occupations.

Table 38, meanwhile cross-tabulates the respondents' social class with the category of their electoral ward. As was anticipated, given the methodology used, there were generally higher proportions of professional and managerial occupations in ward categories 4 and 5, and higher proportions of partly-skilled and unskilled occupations in categories 1 and 2.

Interestingly, though, the highest percentage of those with managerial occupations lived in category 2 wards.

**Table 38: Social class - percentage of respondents by ward category (of 288 respondents)**  
(where 1 is the ward in each town/city with the highest proportion of social classes IV and V, and 5 is the ward with the lowest proportion of classes IV and V, according to the 1991 census)

Social class	Ward category				
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>I</b> Professional etc	7.0	5.9	15.7	25.0	26.8
<b>II</b> Managerial etc	20.9	45.1	37.1	35.3	35.7
<b>III(N)</b> Skilled non-manual	16.3	19.6	18.6	17.6	23.2
<b>III(M)</b> Skilled manual	9.3	5.9	7.1	2.9	5.4
<b>IV</b> Partly skilled	30.2	17.6	17.1	13.2	8.9
<b>V</b> Unskilled	16.2	5.9	4.3	5.9	-

### Ethnic group of respondents

In total, 56 (6.2%) of the respondents belonged to an ethnic minority group: a smaller proportion than that in the first survey (7.7%), but closer to the 1996 national percentage of just under 6% (Office for National Statistics, 1997a).

**Table 39: Ethnic group of respondents**

Ethnic Group	Male	Female	Sex not specified	Totals	
				No.	%
White	318	522	2	<b>842</b>	<b>93.8</b>
Black Caribbean	5	5	-	<b>10</b>	<b>1.1</b>
Black African	-	6	-	<b>6</b>	<b>0.7</b>
Black Other	1	-	-	<b>1</b>	<b>0.1</b>
Indian	3	3	-	<b>6</b>	<b>0.7</b>
Pakistani	12	9	-	<b>21</b>	<b>2.3</b>
Bangladeshi	1	1	-	<b>2</b>	<b>0.2</b>
Chinese	2	3	-	<b>5</b>	<b>0.6</b>
Other*	5	-	-	<b>5</b>	<b>0.6</b>
Totals	347	549	2	<b>898</b>	<b>100</b>

\*The 'other' ethnic groups were Kashmiri (1), Malaysian (1) and 3 respondents of mixed race

## Educational attainment of respondents

Respondents were asked about the highest level of education they had completed (see Table 40). Just over a quarter had completed an undergraduate or higher degree, while almost 23% had completed a further education course. Just over half had received no education beyond school.

Level of education	Male	Female	Sex not specified	Totals	
				No.	%
School	165	295	1	461	51.3
FE college	73	129	1	203	22.6
University undergrad.	64	71	-	135	15.0
University postgrad.	43	47	-	90	10.0
Doctorate	1	2	-	3	0.3
Not specified	1	5	-	6	0.7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>549</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>898</b>	<b>100</b>

Tables 41 and 42, meanwhile, crosstabulate the educational attainment of the respondents with their status and social class.

Status	Educational attainment				
	School (458 resps.)	FE College (200 resps.)	University undergrad. (133 resps.)	University postgrad. (89 resps.)	Doctorate (3 resps.)
In paid employment	21.2	33.5	33.8	52.8	66.7
Self employed	3.1	7.0	13.5	16.9	-
Seeking work	7.9	6.0	9.0	4.5	33.3
Retired	46.9	24.5	21.1	13.5	-
Running a home	13.5	18.0	11.3	5.6	-
Student	7.4	11.0	11.3	6.7	-
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Social class	Educational attainment				
	School (95 resps.)	FE College (77 resps.)	University undergrad. (59 resps.)	University postgrad. (54 resps.)	Doctorate (2 resps.)
I Professional	2.1	1.3	27.1	53.7	50.0
II Managerial and technical	23.2	36.4	55.9	33.3	50.0
III(N) Skilled non-manual	20.0	31.2	13.6	7.4	-
III(M) Skilled manual	8.4	7.8	-	3.7	-
IV Partly skilled	30.5	20.8	3.4	1.9	-
V Unskilled	15.8	2.6	-	-	-
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

## Disabled respondents

Respondents were asked if they would describe themselves as disabled, and in all 118 (13.1%) indicated they were disabled in some way. This is a larger proportion than that questioned in the first survey (9.5%), but still relatively close to the most recent national estimate of 11% (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, 1988).

## Political situation in wards and towns/cities

Table 43 represents the political situation in the wards surveyed, with regard to the political party of the local MP and the local councillor(s), as well as the party holding overall control of the local council. It should be emphasised that the respondents were not asked for their individual voting preferences - the table simply represents the overall political preferences in these areas at the time of the survey. As can be seen, the majority of respondents resided in areas where Labour was the most prominent party, at both central and local government levels. It should be noted that some electoral wards were represented by two or more local councillors, sometimes from different parties; this explains the 'Mixed' category in the table.

<i>Table 43: Political situation in wards and towns/cities in which the respondents lived</i>						
Political party	Local councillor(s) for ward		Overall control of council		Local MP	
	No. resps	%	No. resps	%	No. resps	%
Labour	450	50.1	598	66.6	583	64.9
Lib Dems	180	20.0	75	8.4	90	10.0
Conservative	75	8.4	-	-	75	8.4
Plaid Cymru	15	1.7	-	-	75	8.4
Ulster Unionist	-	-	-	-	60	6.7
Democratic Unionist	-	-	-	-	15	1.7
Mixed	163	18.2	225	25.1	-	-
Independent	15	1.7	-	-	-	-
<b>Totals</b>	<b>898</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>898</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>898</b>	<b>100</b>

### **3.2.2 Current Affairs**

Respondents were asked to identify what they believed to be the single most important issue in UK current affairs at the time of the survey. 126 (14.0%) of the respondents could not identify an issue, 7 of them saying they simply were not interested in current affairs, 6 of them saying there were too many important issues to choose just one; and although specifically asked for a UK current affairs issue, a small number cited issues of global relevance. The majority, however, cited a wide range of issues, and the top twenty responses are illustrated in Table 44.

<i>Table 44: Most important current affairs issue (top 20 responses)</i>		
<b>Current affairs issue</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
1. The Northern Ireland situation	155	17.3
2= State of the education system	94	10.5
2= Health issues and the state of the NHS	94	10.5
4. The EU, and UK participation in EMU	76	8.5
5. State of the UK economy	43	4.8
6. Unemployment	38	4.2
7. Law and order issues	33	3.7
8. Football World Cup / English hooligans	24	2.7
9. Environmental issues	23	2.6
10. State of the Labour Government	16	1.8
11. State of the welfare system	15	1.7
12. UK politics in general	14	1.6
13. OAP poverty / low state pensions	13	1.4
14. Poverty and social inequality in general	11	1.2
15= Levels of drug use	9	1.0
15= The minimum wage	9	1.0
17= Devolution	8	0.9
17= Student tuition fees	8	0.9
19. Central government spending	7	0.8
20. The nation's morals	6	0.7

Other responses included: homelessness (5 respondents); UK foreign policy (5); UK transport policy (5); gay rights/age of consent for homosexuals (4); US bombing of Afghanistan (4); worldwide famines (4); wars throughout the world (4); the Louise Woodward trial (3); the 'Arms to Africa' affair (2); proposed reform of the electoral system (2); childcare issues (2); unoccupied youths (2); proposed reforms of legal system (2); religious issues (2); animal welfare (2); proposed reform of the House of Lords (2); council corruption (2); the Russian economy (2); the Far East economy (2); and nuclear testing in India (2).

The following issues were each identified by a single respondent: local government spending; the state of the UK agriculture industry; UK immigration policy; child abuse; racism; trade union rights; Millennium plans; the Stephen Lawrence trial; the deaths of children operated on by Bristol surgeons; the 'leaking of information by lobbyists' affair; the release of the two nurses in Saudi Arabia; genetic engineering in food; death of Diana conspiracy theories; reprocessing Dounreay nuclear waste; international terrorism; President Clinton's visit to China; the worldwide population explosion; and finally, the Spice Girls!

Unsurprisingly, interest in the top issue, Northern Ireland, was greatest within Northern Ireland itself, where it was cited by 40% of the respondents, well ahead of the 23.1% in the Eastern Region and in Scotland.

There were some interesting differences between the sexes. For example, when compared with female respondents, males placed greater importance on European Union issues (+6.0 percentage points) and in unemployment (+4.3), but less importance on the NHS (-8.6) and Education (-5.4). With regard to age group, the younger respondents appeared to have less interest in the NHS and (perhaps surprisingly) Europe, but more interest in the state of the education system.

There were also some significant differences in terms of status. The proportions of retired respondents and those running a home who cited the NHS as the most important issue were basically double that of the other status groups. Education was cited least by retired respondents and most by students and those running a home; while, unsurprisingly, unemployment was cited least by those in paid employment, but most by jobseekers. There were also some interesting variances in terms of the educational attainment of the respondents: amongst the better-educated respondents there was more interest in economic and environmental issues, but less interest in the state of the NHS.

### Sources of current affairs information

Respondents were then asked where they obtain most of their information on the current affairs issue from. Table 45 represents the sources of information for the top ten current affairs issues (*Note: some respondents cited two or more sources of information, so the percentages against each issue do not always add up to 100%*).

Issue	Source of information (%)							
	Mass Media	TV	The Press	Radio	Family/Friends	Personal exper.	Work in area	Other
N. Ireland (155 respondents)	55.5	31.6	8.4	2.6	5.2	-	-	3.2
Education (94)	40.4	16.0	17.0	4.3	7.4	4.3	6.4	24.5
Health/NHS (94)	57.4	25.5	4.3	-	5.3	-	6.4	12.8
EU/EMU (76)	57.9	18.4	19.7	3.9	1.3	-	-	7.9
Economy (43)	55.8	20.9	18.6	-	2.3	-	2.3	9.3
Unemployment (38)	50.0	18.4	18.4	-	2.6	2.6	2.6	10.5
Law and Order (33)	66.7	9.1	12.1	3.0	6.1	3.0	-	9.1
World Cup (24)	54.2	37.5	8.3	-	-	-	-	-
Environment (23)	52.2	26.1	4.3	4.3	-	8.7	-	30.4
Labour Govt. (16)	56.3	12.5	18.8	6.3	-	-	-	18.8

The 'other' sources include: the Internet; Teletext and Ceefax; public libraries; doctors; schools and colleges; community centres; specialist journals; job centres; the police; specialist groups and organisations; and the respondents' own books.

The more notable ‘other’ sources of information on particular issues were: schools and colleges (9.6%) and public libraries (6.4%) for information on educational issues; doctors and other health professionals (9.6%) for information on health issues and the NHS; and specialist/representative groups (13.0%) and specialist journals (13.0%) for environmental information.

There was a small number of significant demographic variations. In terms of age group, use of the mass media in general was greater among the older age groups; while television, specifically, was cited more by the younger age groups, ranging from 12.9% of those aged 75 or over to 34.7% of those aged 20-29. In terms of social class, use of television as the information source was greater among the manual and unskilled workers, while use of newspapers was greater amongst the professional and managerial occupations.

### Respondents’ knowledge of current affairs issues

The respondents were asked to indicate how well informed they felt they were about their chosen current affairs issue, and the response for the top ten issues appears in Table 46. A small number of respondents felt it necessary to add an additional category - ‘Adequately informed’.

**Table 46: How well informed about current affairs issue (top ten issues)**

Issue	Very well informed	Well informed	Adequately informed	Poorly informed	Don’t know
N. Ireland	11.0	60.0	2.6	23.9	2.6
Education	12.8	69.1	2.1	13.8	2.1
Health/NHS	8.5	62.8	2.1	22.3	4.3
EU/EMU	9.2	56.6	5.3	27.6	1.3
Economy	16.3	65.1	4.7	11.6	2.3
Unemployment	18.4	73.7	-	7.9	-
Law and Order	6.1	69.7	3.0	18.2	3.0
World Cup	29.2	54.2	4.2	8.3	4.2
Environment	21.7	60.9	-	17.4	-
Labour Govt.	6.3	68.8	12.5	12.5	-

Significantly, male respondents felt better-informed about their particular current affairs issue than female respondents. Some 17.3% of males felt very well informed, compared with 7.8% of females; while 20.6% of females felt poorly informed, compared with 11.2% of males. Those who had received a better education felt better informed than the other respondents. Some 21.1% of those who had obtained a postgraduate degree felt very well informed, compared with just 8.9% of those whose education was completed at school; while the proportions who were poorly informed ranged from 8.9% of those who had completed an undergraduate course to 19.5% of those who had simply left school. Respondents in Northern Ireland felt better informed about the Northern Ireland issue than those living in the rest of the UK, with 86.7% feeling very well or well informed.

## Need for further information on current affairs issues

The survey then asked if respondents would like to find out more about their particular issue. Table 47 shows the response for the top ten issues.

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Yes (%)</b>	<b>No (%)</b>
Northern Ireland (155 respondents)	34.2	65.8
Education (94)	52.1	47.9
Health issues/NHS (94)	43.6	56.4
EU and EMU (76)	51.3	48.7
Economy (43)	34.9	65.1
Unemployment (38)	42.1	57.9
Law and order (33)	33.3	66.7
World Cup (24)	12.5	87.5
Environment (23)	65.2	34.8
Labour Government (16)	6.3	93.4

Amongst the Belfast respondents, the need for further information on the Northern Ireland issue was only slightly higher (36.7%) than that nationally. In terms of status, interest in obtaining further information ranged from 27.7% of retired respondents to 51.3% of those who were students. Interest was also greater amongst the better educated, ranging from 31.7% of the 'school-leavers' to 51.1% of those with a postgraduate degree.

Those who indicated they would like to find out more about their chosen issue were then asked where they would most likely go to obtain this information (see Table 48). It is notable that at this point, when actively seeking information, respondents would turn to public libraries.

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Source of information (%)</b>								
	<b>Mass media</b>	<b>TV</b>	<b>The press</b>	<b>Radio</b>	<b>Internet</b>	<b>Family/Friends</b>	<b>Public library</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
N. Ireland (53 respondents)	11.3	13.2	18.9	1.9	3.8	1.9	24.5	11.3	18.9
Education (49)	12.2	-	12.2	-	2.0	6.1	38.8	30.6	6.1
Health/NHS (41)	2.4	12.2	4.9	-	2.4	7.3	29.3	36.6	7.3
EU/EMU (39)	20.5	7.7	20.5	-	10.2	-	28.2	23.1	7.7
Economy (15)	26.7	-	13.3	-	26.7	-	13.3	26.7	13.3
Unemployment (16)	12.5	12.5	12.5	6.3	-	-	31.3	37.5	-
Law and Order (11)	27.3	-	18.2	-	-	9.1	27.3	45.4	9.1
World Cup (3)	-	-	-	-	-	33.3	33.3	-	33.3
Environment (15)	20.0	-	-	-	26.7	-	46.7	33.3	-
Labour Govt. (1)	-	-	-	-	100.0	-	-	-	-



Again, the ‘other’ sources comprise a wide variety of organisations and individuals. Among the more notable potential sources of further information on particular issues were: doctors and other health professionals (24.4%) for information on health issues and the NHS; specialist/representative groups (20.0%) for environmental information; Jobcentres (18.8%) for employment information; the police (18.2%) for law and order information; and schools, colleges and local education authorities (16.3%) for information on education issues.

The most popular source for each topic, therefore, would be:

Northern Ireland. - public library  
 Education - public library  
 Health - public library  
 EU/EMU - public library  
 Economy - mass media / Internet  
 Unemployment - public library  
 Law and order - mass media / public library  
 Environment - public library

There were some interesting demographic variations in the proposed use of the public library as a source. With regard to region, proportions ranged from 5.6% in Wales to 66.7% in Scotland; while proposed use in urban areas (49.6%) was far greater than in rural areas (18.5%). In terms of educational attainment, the public library was cited more frequently by the ‘school-leavers’ and those who had completed a course at a FE college.

Proposed use of television as an information source was also higher among the less well-educated; while use of newspapers and the mass media in general was cited more frequently by the better-educated.

### Effects of current affairs issues on respondents’ lives

The respondents were then asked if the chosen issue significantly affected their own lives (see Table 49).

<i>Table 49: Does this issue significantly affect your own life? (top 10 issues)</i>			
<b>Issue</b>	<b>Yes (%)</b>	<b>No (%)</b>	<b>Don’t know (%)</b>
Northern Ireland (155 respondents)	29.0	69.7	1.3
Education (94)	67.0	33.0	-
Health issues/NHS (94)	74.5	25.5	-
EU and EMU (76)	60.5	38.2	1.3
Economy (43)	76.7	23.3	-
Unemployment (38)	57.9	42.1	-
Law and order (33)	54.5	45.5	-
World Cup (24)	25.0	70.8	4.2
Environment (23)	69.6	30.4	-
Labour Government (16)	50.0	50.0	-

Of the Belfast respondents, 66.7% felt the Northern Ireland situation significantly affected their own lives. Outside the top ten issues, 12 of the 13 respondents (92.3%) who cited low state pensions and OAP poverty, and all 8 respondents who mentioned student tuition fees, felt they were significantly affected.

## **Current issues: national and local**

The next part of the survey focused on three current issues which, the project team believed, would affect or be of interest to the majority of UK citizens. The first of these, the possibility of the UK joining the Single European Currency, has been a prominent issue for some time, and is one on which the public may yet have a direct say by means of a referendum. The second issue, the BSE crisis, is also of continuing national importance, but is one on which citizens are unlikely to have a direct influence via the ballot box. The third and final issue, local government financial cutbacks, whilst increasingly commonplace throughout the UK, is perhaps one of more personal and local significance to the respondents.

### ***Single European Currency***

With regard to the possibility of the UK joining the Single European Currency, the respondents were firstly asked if they would like to find out more about monetary union prior to a referendum taking place. Some 669 (74.5%) indicated they would like to find out more, while 221 (24.6%) felt they would not. Three respondents were unsure, 4 said they were simply not interested in the topic, while a single respondent felt it was unlikely that such a vote would ever happen.

Interestingly, when compared with males, female respondents displayed a greater interest in finding out more (+10.2 points); while respondents belonging to ethnic minority groups also showed more interest than their white counterparts (+10.0).

Those respondents who said they would like to find out more about the Single Currency were then asked where they would go to try to obtain this information. Some 115 (17.2%) of the respondents did not know where they would get such information; another 6 said that while they would like to find out more they would not actively seek out information; while 3 felt obtaining information about EMU was impossible. The rest, meanwhile, indicated a wide range of potential sources (see Table 50).

**Table 50: Likely source(s) of information on Single European Currency (of the 669 respondents who would like to find out more)**

Source	No.	%
Public library	145	21.7
Mass media in general	135	20.2
The press	74	11.1
Special provision prior to vote	58	8.7
Television	47	7.0
Internet	29	4.3
Local MP	29	4.3
Local council offices	18	2.7
Family and friends	17	2.5
Citizens Advice Bureau	16	2.4
Government departments and agencies	7	1.0
Academic library	6	0.9
Work or work colleagues	5	0.7
Bank or building society	4	0.6
Local branch of a political party	4	0.6
European Commission offices	3	0.4
Attend a public meeting on the subject	3	0.4
Radio	3	0.4

In addition, the following sources were each identified by two respondents: community centre; local councillor; magazines; and post office. Meanwhile, single respondents cited the following: local MEP; specialist journals; government publications; polling station; other advice centres; and respondent's own books.

There were again some significant demographic variances in the proposed use of public libraries. Respondents in rural areas again appeared to be less willing to use libraries compared with those in urban areas (-24.5 points); while, in terms of status, proposed use of libraries ranged from 18.5% of those in paid employment to 33.3% of jobseekers. Unsurprisingly, proposed use was far greater amongst current library members (29.7%) than non-members (14.4%).

The survey then asked all respondents if they felt that the Government was doing enough to inform the general public about the Single Currency. The vast majority of 722 (80.4%) felt the Government was not doing enough to inform the public, while just 144 (16.0%) felt it was. Of the remainder, 29 (4.3%) were unsure, and 3 were simply not interested.

Demographic factors had little impact on the response to this question.

### ***BSE crisis***

Respondents were asked if they felt they were sufficiently well informed about BSE. In total, 532 (59.2%) felt sufficiently informed, but 355 (39.5%) felt they were not. Of the other respondents, 6 were unsure; 3 felt there was now *too much* information on BSE being generated; and 2 were not interested in the subject at all.

Again, demographic characteristics had little effect on the response to this question.

The 355 respondents who felt they were not sufficiently informed about BSE were asked where they might try to obtain further information. Eighty-three (23.4%) could not offer any suggestions; while 27 (7.6%) were not interested in actively seeking information. Eight felt it was impossible to obtain such information; and 2 felt it was now too late. The others, meanwhile, cited a range of sources, as illustrated in Table 51.

**Table 51: Likely source(s) of information on BSE (of the 355 respondents who did not feel well informed)**

Source	No.	%
Public library	69	19.4
Mass media in general	46	13.0
The press	30	8.5
Doctor or other health professional	28	7.9
Television	18	5.1
Family and friends	10	2.8
Internet	8	2.3
Department of Health	7	2.0
Butchers	6	1.7
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	6	1.7
Local MP	6	1.7
Scientific journals	6	1.7
Citizens Advice Bureau	5	1.4
Local council environmental health dept.	4	1.1
NFU and other representative bodies	4	1.1
Academic library	3	0.8
Farmers	3	0.8
Pressure/interest groups	3	0.8
Local councillor	2	0.6
Teletext and Ceefax	2	0.6
Vets	2	0.6
DSS	1	0.3
At school	1	0.3

There were two interesting variations in terms of gender: males were more likely to use newspapers as their source (+9.5 points), but females would prefer to consult a doctor or other health professional (+18.0). Educational attainment was also a significant factor: the better-educated were more likely to use newspapers as their source, while the less well-educated felt more inclined to visit their library or consult their doctor.

All respondents were then asked if they felt the Government was doing enough to inform people about BSE. While 382 (42.5%) felt the Government was doing enough, 496 (55.2%) were unconvinced. A further 18 (2.0%) could not comment, while 2 (0.2%) were not interested.

Respondents were also asked how they would make their own feelings known to the Government about the BSE crisis. A large proportion (320, 35.6%) of the respondents were not interested in making their own feelings known; while a further 41 (4.6%) did not know how they would go about it. Three respondents indicated they had tried to do so in the past, but that it had proved pointless; while a single respondent felt the public “shouldn’t have to” make their feelings known on the issue. The others indicated a range of methods (see Table 52).

<b>Table 52: How respondents would make their own feelings on BSE known to the Government</b>		
<b>Method</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Contact local MP	347	38.6
Contact a Government Minister or Dept. (i.e. Dept. of Health or M.A.F.F.)	90	10.0
Contact local councillor	24	2.7
Contact Prime Minister	21	2.3
Write to a newspaper	17	1.9
Take part in a protest march /demonstration	14	1.6
Contact local council offices	13	1.4
Raise or sign a petition	13	1.4
Contact or join a pressure/interest group	7	0.8
Stop eating beef	6	0.7
Vote against them at next opportunity	4	0.4
Contact NFU or other representative group	3	0.3
Through a political party	2	0.2
Through local Citizens Advice Bureau	1	0.1
Through local MEP	1	0.1
Take part in a radio phone-in	1	0.1

When compared to white respondents, those respondents in ethnic minority groups were less keen to contact their local MP (-34.7 points), but more inclined to contact the Prime Minister directly (+19.0), a government minister or department (+8.9), or their local councillor (+6.7). Disabled respondents, compared to their more able-bodied counterparts, preferred to contact their local MP (+16.4) or a government minister or department (+12.9).

### ***Local Government Cutbacks***

The questionnaire then asked respondents if they felt they were sufficiently well informed about local government cutbacks. Although 314 (35.0%) felt they were sufficiently informed, the majority (569, 63.4%) believed they were badly informed. Eleven respondents (1.2%) were unsure; 2 were not interested; while a further 2 believed the issue was not relevant in their particular locality (one was in Belfast, the other in Loughborough).

The only demographic characteristic that impacted upon the response to this question was that of age group, where older respondents generally felt better-informed than the younger ones. Indeed, the proportions ranged from 20.1% of those aged 20-29 to 46.5% of those aged 75 and over.

The 569 respondents who did not feel sufficiently informed were asked where they would go to obtain further information on cutbacks. Of these, 118 (20.7%) were unsure of who they might approach; 16 (2.8%) were uninterested; 8 (1.4%) believed it was impossible to obtain such information; while 7 (1.2%) felt this information should come to them, rather than them having to actively seek it out. Again, as can be seen in Table 53, a wide variety of sources were cited by the remaining respondents.

**Table 53: Likely source(s) of information on local government cutbacks (of the 569 respondents who did not feel well-informed)**

Source	No.	%
Local council offices	177	31.1
Local newspapers	66	11.6
Public library	59	10.4
Local MP	48	8.4
Local councillor	33	5.8
Local media in general	19	3.3
Local television	15	2.6
Citizens Advice Bureau	13	2.3
Family and friends	8	1.4
Attend local council meetings	5	0.9
DSS	5	0.9
Other government departments/agencies	5	0.9
Internet	5	0.9
Academic library	2	0.4
Other advice centres	2	0.4
Trade union	2	0.4
Work colleagues	2	0.4
Community centre	1	0.2
Doctor	1	0.2
Local education authority	1	0.2
Local pressure/interest groups	1	0.2
Local radio	1	0.2

The survey then asked all respondents whether their local councils were doing enough to inform them about financial cutbacks. Some 643 (71.6%) respondents felt their particular council *was not* doing enough to inform them; while just 221 (24.6%) appeared to be content with the extent of information provision. Of the remainder, 32 (3.6%) were unsure; while the 2 respondents described above (in Belfast and Loughborough) believed the question did not apply to their local authority.

Again, the older respondents were more positive in their response: the proportions who felt their council *was* doing enough ranged from 12.5% of those aged 20-29 to 37.6% of those aged 75 and over. In terms of educational attainment, the proportion of those with a postgraduate qualification who were happy with their local council's efforts was far greater than those in the other groups.

Respondents were then asked how they would make their own feelings about council cutbacks known to the Government or to their local authority. Over a quarter (235, 26.2%) indicated they were not interested in making their own feelings known; while 27 (3.0%) did not know how they might go about this task. A further 10 believed it was impossible to inform the powers that be of their feelings; while 3 respondents indicated that they had attempted to do so in the past, but with little success. One of the respondents pointed out that he was actually an elected member of his local council. Table 54 indicates the methods cited by the other respondents.

<b>Table 54: How respondents would make their own feelings on local government cutbacks known to the Government and local council</b>		
<b>Method</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Contact local councillor	182	20.3
Contact local MP	171	19.0
Contact local council offices	157	17.5
Contact both parties (i.e. 'The Government' and local council)	80	8.9
Attend council meetings	23	2.6
Write to local newspaper	18	2.0
Contact an unspecified Government minister	10	1.1
Join a demonstration/protest march	10	1.1
Through a local community/pressure group	7	0.8
Contact Prime Minister	6	0.7
Sign or raise a petition	5	0.6
Vote against them at next opportunity	3	0.3
Contact Chancellor of Exchequer	2	0.2
Through local CAB management committee	2	0.2
Through local branch of a political party	1	0.1
Through social worker	1	0.1
Through trade union	1	0.1

When compared with their rural counterparts, those respondents living in urban areas were more likely to make their feelings known to their local councillor (+19.6 points), but less likely to contact their local MP (-22.3).

With regard to the respondents' status, the local councillor was favoured more by the retired than by the other groups; while the local council offices were less likely to be contacted by students, the retired and those running a home. Students, meanwhile, felt more inclined to contact both parties (the Government and the local council). Educational attainment was also a significant factor: contacting the local MP was favoured more by the less well-educated; while making contact with both parties was preferred by the better educated.

The political party to which the respondents' local councillor(s) or MP belonged also appeared to be a significant factor in the response to this question. Indeed, the proportions who would make contact with their local councillor ranged from *none* of those with a Plaid Cymru councillor (i.e. in Aberystwyth, where it has to be said the local council came in for severe criticism from respondents) to 43.8% with a Conservative councillor; while the proportions likely to make contact with the local MP ranged from 13.2% of those with a Conservative MP to 50.0% of those Belfast respondents with a Democratic Unionist MP. Meanwhile, levels of potential contact with local council offices were far less in those areas with a hung council than in those areas where a single party is in overall control.

### **3.2.3 Survival Information**

The next section of the questionnaire focused on what might be termed survival information - i.e. information to help people overcome the problems that occur in day-to-day life. It asked whether or not respondents had ever encountered a problem regarding employment, education, housing, or welfare benefits; it asked for brief details on the nature of these problems, plus the information sources used to help them solve the problems.

## ***Employment problems***

Just 141 (15.7%) indicated they had had an employment problem. Of these, 13 did not wish to specify the nature of the problem. The specified problems, plus the information sources used (where the problems had been solved), are outlined below

### **Finding work (71 respondents)**

Job Centre (26), newspapers (10), careers service (8), family and friends (5), public library (4), employment agencies (2), specialist journals (2), adult education centre (1), CAB (1), DSS (1), Internet (1), job club (1), potential employers (1)

*Plus:* not specified (10), unresolved (9), 'solved it myself' (2),

### **Redundancy (17)**

CAB (4), Job Centre (3), family and friends (2), trade union (2), DSS (1), solicitor (1),

*Plus:* not specified (3), unresolved (1), 'solved it myself' (1)

### **Terms and conditions of employment (9)**

trade union (4), ACAS (1), employer (1), purchased books on subject (1)

*Plus:* not specified (1), unresolved (1)

### **Unemployment benefits (5)**

DSS (3), CAB (1)

*Plus:* unresolved (1)

### **Unfair dismissal (5)**

CAB (3), solicitor (1)

*Plus:* not specified (1)

### **Obtaining childcare when at work (3)**

family and friends (1)

*Plus:* unresolved (2)

### **Industrial disputes (3)**

trade union (2), CAB (1)

### **Early retirement (2)**

trade union (1)

*Plus:* not specified (1)

### **Sexual harassment (2)**

trade union (1)

*Plus:* 'solved it myself' (1)

### **Trade union membership (2)**

trade union (1)

*Plus:* unresolved (1)

### **Bullying in workplace (1)**

trade union

### **Lack of communication in workplace (1)**

'didn't try'



**Disability discrimination (1)**  
local council social services department

**As employee, personal problem with employer (1)**  
CAB

**As supervisor, personal problems with staff under my control (1)**  
work colleagues

**As employer, finding suitable staff (1)**  
Internet

**Income tax (1)**  
Inland Revenue and my employer

**Racial discrimination (1)**  
'solved it myself'

**Setting up own business (1)**  
accountant

**Stress-related absence (1)**  
'didn't try'

Employment problems were cited by a significantly greater proportion of male respondents (20.2%) than female respondents (12.9%).

### ***Education problems***

A smaller number of respondents (118, 13.1%) cited an education problem. Of these, 8 preferred not to specify the nature of the problem.

**Selecting a school or university for respondent or respondent's child (25 respondents)**  
family and friends (8), schools and universities (6), local education authority (4), public library (3), careers service (2), newspapers (2),  
*Plus:* not specified (4), unresolved (2), 'solved it myself' (1)

**Funding and grants (21)**  
local education authority (9), schools and universities (4), CAB (1), careers service (1), National Union of Students (1), newspapers (1), public library (1), school governors (1), specialist journals (1)  
*Plus:* unresolved (5), not specified (1),

**Standard of education provided (15)**  
schools and universities (5), family and friends (1)  
*Plus:* unresolved (6), not specified (2), 'didn't know where to go' (1)

**Special needs or health problem affecting education of respondent or respondent's child (14)**

local education authority (2), schools and universities (2), charitable/representative organisations (1), local council social services department (1), local MP (1), public library (1), school governors (1), television (1)

*Plus:* unresolved (5), not specified (1), 'no information available' (1)

**Further options when leaving school or university (8)**

careers service (3), public library (3), Job Centre (1)

*Plus:* unresolved (1), 'solved it myself' (1)

**Selecting a course (8)**

public library (4), local education authority (1), schools and universities (1), work colleagues (1)

*Plus:* unresolved (1)

**Bullying at school (4)**

local education authority (2), teaching staff at schools (2), family and friends (1)

**Disputes with teaching staff (3)**

'solved it myself' (2), not specified (1)

**Restrictive curricula (2)**

school inspectors (1)

*Plus:* unresolved (1)

**Suspension or expulsion (2)**

teaching staff at schools (1)

*Plus:* not specified (1)

**Adult literacy (1)**

not specified

**Obtaining childcare when returning to education (1)**

unresolved

**Class sizes (1)**

unresolved

**Educating child at home (1)**

specialist groups and organisations

**Lack of resources in academic library (1)**

university concerned

**School closures due to strikes (1)**

school governors

**Cutting of school meals provision (1)**

local education authority

**Truancy of respondent's child (1)**

local education authority

Unsurprisingly, education problems were cited most frequently by students and by those aged 16-44, and least frequently by the retired and those aged 55 and over.

***Housing problems***

Housing problems were cited by 122 (13.6%) respondents; 9 preferred not to specify the nature of their problem.

**Obtaining council housing (42 respondents)**

council housing department (22), CAB (3), local councillor (3), local MP (3), housing associations (2), family and friends (2), other advice centres (2), representative/pressure groups (2), council social services department (1), doctor (1)

*Plus:* unresolved (6), not specified (3)

**Getting council/landlord to repair or improve accommodation (24)**

council housing department (12), solicitor (4), local MP (3), local councillor (2), family and friends (2), building society (1), housing associations (1), landlord (1), representative/pressure group (1),

*Plus:* not specified (2), unresolved (1)

**Obtaining residential care or sheltered housing (8)**

council housing department (2), council social services department (2), local councillor (1), local MP (1)

*Plus:* unresolved (2)

**Problems with landlord (8)**

other advice centres (5), solicitor (1), university student advice service (1),

*Plus:* 'solved it myself' (1)

**Claiming housing benefit (5)**

CAB (1), family and friends (1), housing benefit office (1), other advice centre (1)

*Plus:* unresolved (1)

**Rent arrears (5)**

council housing department (3), CAB (1)

*Plus:* unresolved (1)

**Problem neighbours (4)**

council environmental health department (1), council social services department (1), family and friends (1), local councillor (1),

*Plus:* 'solved it myself' (1)

**Finding privately-owned accommodation (3)**

family and friends (1)

*Plus:* not specified (1), 'solved it myself' (1)

**Finding rented accommodation (3)**

housing associations (1)

*Plus:* unresolved (2)

**Obtaining student accommodation (3)**

CAB (1), university student advice service (1)

*Plus:* unresolved (1)

**Homeless (3)**

council housing department (1), council social services department (1), special representative/pressure groups (1)

**Obtaining/paying mortgage (3)**

council housing department (1), public library (1)

*Plus:* 'solved it myself' (1)

**Buying a council house (2)**

council housing department (1), special representative/pressure groups (1), solicitor (1)

**Losing home through financial problems (2)**

council housing department (2)

Housing problems were cited least frequently by the youngest and the oldest respondents (i.e. those aged 16-19 and those aged 55 and over) and most frequently by those aged 20-44. In terms of status, retired respondents indicated far fewer problems than those in the other groups. Social class was also a significant factor, although no clear pattern emerged, with the proportions citing a problem ranging from 10.2% of Class I to 22.5% of Class II and 22.9% of Class IV,

***Welfare benefits problems***

Exactly 15% (i.e. 135) of the respondents indicated they had had a welfare benefits problem. All were concerned with claiming, or establishing entitlement to, a wide range of benefits, including Attendance Allowance, Child Benefit, Disability Living Allowance, Family Credit, Jobseekers Allowance and Retirement Pensions. The sources of their information were:-

DSS (25), CAB (22), council social services department (11), family and friends (10), Benefits Agency (6), doctors and other health professionals (6), Job Centre (6), other advice centres (6), charitable/voluntary organisations (5), local councillor (2), special benefits telephone hotlines (2), community centre (1), council housing department (1), post office (1), public library (1)

*Plus:* not specified (19), unresolved (18), 'solved it myself' (3), 'no information available' (2), 'didn't bother looking' (1)

A significantly greater proportion of rural respondents (22.7%) cited a benefits problem than did the urban respondents (13.5%). In terms of age group, there had been far fewer problems encountered by the youngest (16-19) and the oldest (75 and over) respondents, with most benefits problems being cited by those aged 20-44. Perhaps unsurprisingly, disabled respondents had encountered more problems than able-bodied respondents (+11.9 points).

## **Disadvantaged through lack of information**

Respondents were asked if they could think of an example when they had been at a disadvantage because they had been unable to obtain information, and overall 234 (26.1%) respondents cited an example.

A small number (13) of these respondents actually indicated personal circumstances which resulted in them being unable to access information. These circumstances were: no computer or Internet access at home (4 respondents); immigrants with a lack of native language skills (3, including 2 non-Welsh speakers living in Aberystwyth); lack of personal time (2, one of them a single mother); lack of literacy skills (1); lack of personal knowledge of where to obtain information (1); lack of local information providers (1, in Moss-side, Manchester); and being disabled and therefore unable to access information providers (1).

Of the remaining respondents, 12 said there had been too many examples of being disadvantaged to select just one. The others cited individual examples (see below), although amongst certain respondents there was a noticeable degree of duplication with the answers provided to Question 6.

### *Welfare benefits (44)*

A substantial proportion (44 respondents) gave an example relating to claiming, or establishing entitlement to, welfare benefits. As with Question 6, a range of benefits were cited, including Disability Living Allowance, Housing Benefit and Retirement Pensions.

### *Education (34)*

Some 34 respondents cited an educational issue, and these largely related to the same types of problem that emerged in Question 6, namely: obtaining funding and grants; selecting a school or university; choosing a course; finding information to assist with coursework and assessments; special needs or health problems that affect education; disputes with teaching staff; restrictive curricula; and bullying.

### *Employment (22)*

Issues relating to employment were cited by 22 respondents, the vast majority (17) of which concerned finding work. Other examples concerned lack of communication in the workplace, industrial disputes and employers' pension schemes.

### *Financial matters (21)*

Examples relating to financial matters were given by 21 respondents. These included: poll and council tax payments and rebates; 'other taxes', such as income tax, National Insurance and Gift Aid; personal investments and independent financial advice; mortgages; and motor and health insurance.

### *Housing (18)*

Eighteen respondents cited examples relating to housing problems, including: obtaining council housing; finding rented accommodation; obtaining student accommodation; buying a council house; getting the local council or a landlord to repair or improve accommodation; and finding sheltered housing for an elderly relative.

*Health and Medical issues (17)*

Medical issues were cited by 17 respondents. These related to accessing personal medical records, as well as to obtaining information on particular ailments, hospital waiting lists, free prescriptions and local doctors.

*Local planning (16)*

Sixteen respondents cited examples relating to local planning matters including: obtaining permission to extend or improve their own premises; the unnotified removal of trees or the digging up of roads; establishing rights of way; and finding information on council plans to build on green/conservation areas or to remove local amenities, such as play areas.

*Traffic problems (7)*

Traffic issues were mentioned by 7 respondents. All were concerned with local council plans to relieve traffic congestion and/or speeding which affected the thoroughfares outside the respondents' homes.

*Legal issues (5)*

A lack of information on legal matters was cited by 5 respondents. Their legal problems concerned: power of attorney; road traffic offences; accident compensation; and the minimum age for baby-sitters.

*Consumer/utilities (4)*

Four respondents cited consumer issues. These related to: choosing a particular type of product; finding reliable local tradesmen; and obtaining information from utilities (i.e. electricity, gas and telecommunications) companies.

*Marital/relationship problems (3)*

Three respondents mentioned examples relating to marital or relationship problems; these were connected with divorce proceedings or obtaining Child Support Agency payments.

*Recreation and hobbies (3)*

For 3 respondents an information deficit had affected their recreational activities, including DIY, genealogy and handicrafts.

*Social services (3)*

Three respondents had encountered difficulties in obtaining information from and about their local social services. Their particular problems related to: access to social services information whilst in prison; obtaining help for an elderly relative; and establishing the correct complaints procedure.

*Transport and travel (3)*

A further 3 respondents cited transport and travel issues; these concerned obtaining local bus timetables and obtaining information on prospective travel destinations, both at home and abroad.

*Crime and security (2)*

Two respondents had failed to obtain information on crime and security issues, namely information on a spate of local burglaries and information on the closure of a local police station.

In addition, single respondents indicated a lack of information on the following issues: the local council's decision-making process; putting dogs in quarantine; local environmental

pollution; setting up their own business; local library closures; Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS); and the availability of government white papers.

Interestingly, examples were cited more frequently by those respondents that might not normally be associated with disadvantage - i.e. those in Social Classes I and II, and those who had obtained degrees. This might relate more to a lack of *awareness* of disadvantage amongst those in the lower social classes and the less well-educated.

### **3.2.4 Well-informed and active citizens**

The next section of the questionnaire sought to measure how well-informed the respondents were about citizenship information matters, and to examine their levels of participation in the democratic process.

Respondents were firstly asked how well informed they felt they were about five different citizenship topics (see Table 55).

**Table 55: How well informed would you say you are about the following topics (%)**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Expert</b>	<b>Well informed</b>	<b>Adequately Informed</b>	<b>Poorly Informed</b>	<b>Not interested</b>
National politics	1.0	24.2	44.1	13.9	16.5
Local politics	0.6	16.5	40.5	27.2	15.0
Legal rights	1.1	17.7	40.9	31.3	8.6
Welfare benefits	2.1	17.1	31.8	30.7	17.8
Equal rights	2.6	22.0	41.8	20.7	12.5

In terms of gender, there was only one significant difference: a greater proportion of males felt well informed about national politics (+14.7 points), while a greater proportion of females felt poorly informed (+7.3) or were not interested (+5.3). With regard to age group, older respondents felt better informed than younger respondents about local politics and equal rights.

With social class and educational attainment, meanwhile, those respondents in professional and managerial occupations or who had completed a degree course felt better informed and more interested in national and local politics and in equal rights than the other occupational classes and the 'school-leavers'. Status was a significant factor regarding equal rights: students were the best informed and most interested group, while retired respondents were the most poorly informed and least interested. With regard to welfare benefits, able-bodied respondents were less well informed (-16.9 points) and more disinterested (+10.8) than those with a disability.

When taking into account the political party of the respondents' local MP, significant differences were found in levels of awareness of and interest in national politics. Proportions of those who felt well informed about national politics ranged from 14.4% of those with a Liberal Democrat MP to 29.3% of those with a Conservative MP. The most poorly informed (21.7%) and disinterested (30.0%) respondents were those with an Ulster Unionist MP.

## Membership of groups and societies

Respondents were provided with a list of six types of group or association, and asked if they were a member of any. Table 56 lists these groups and the number of respondents who were members of each.

Type of group	No.	%
Club or society (for hobbies and pastimes)	291	32.4
Charitable group	226	25.2
Professional or trade association	149	16.6
Trade union	122	13.6
Pressure group	62	6.9
Political party	60	6.7

Respondents were also given the opportunity of indicating any other groups or organisations they belonged to. Those cited were: churches and other religious groups (3.8%); community groups and residents' associations (1.3%); Neighbourhood Watch groups (0.7%); Parent/Teacher Associations and school boards (0.4%); support groups for particular medical complaints and conditions (0.4%); the University of the Third Age (0.2%); and children's panels (0.1%).

In terms of age, membership of pressure groups was significantly higher amongst those aged 30-64, with the highest proportion (13.6%) in the 55-64 group; membership of charitable groups was lower amongst those under 30 years of age. When compared with ethnic minority respondents, a greater proportion of white respondents (+4.1 points) were members of a pressure group.

Status also affected membership of groups and societies: membership of pressure groups was much higher amongst employed respondents; membership of charitable groups was higher amongst the employed and the retired; membership of clubs and societies was lower amongst jobseekers and those running a home; while, not unexpectedly, 35.1% of those in paid employment were members of a trade union compared with 3.3% of the self-employed respondents. Membership of pressure groups, charitable groups, professional associations, and clubs and societies was significantly higher amongst the professional and managerial occupations; while membership of *all* types of group or society was higher amongst the better-educated respondents. When compared with the able-bodied, a higher proportion of disabled respondents (+10.0 points) were members of a charitable group.



## Voting frequency

Respondents were asked how regularly they vote at national, local and European elections. Twenty respondents (2.2%) were not eligible to vote, for reasons of either age or nationality. Interestingly, 19 (2.1%) respondents - 13 in Cambridge, 4 in Manchester, and 2 in Aberystwyth - could not remember voting in a European election, or indeed were adamant that such a vote had never taken place in their area.

Type of election	Always	Sometimes	Never	Don't know
National elections	77.2	11.6	8.8	-
Local council elections	65.8	17.3	14.5	-
European elections	45.3	9.7	40.5	2.1

These figures compare with the 71.5% turnout for the general election of May 1997 (Austin, 1998); the average UK sub-national elections turnout of 40% (Rallings *et al*, 1996); and the 36.1% turnout in the UK for the June 1994 European Parliament elections (Morgan, 1994). It would seem that respondents tend to overestimate their participation in this respect.

With regard to age group, the proportions who always vote at all three types of election generally grew larger as the respondents grew older. For example, the proportions who always vote at national elections ranged from 58.3% of those aged 20-29, to 92.1% of those aged 75 and over. Status was also an important factor: in all three types of election, jobseekers were least likely to vote, while retired respondents were most likely to vote. Interestingly, disabled respondents, when compared to the able-bodied, were more likely to always vote at local elections (+16.1 points).

## Active participation in political process

The survey then asked respondents whether, apart from voting, they actively participated in the political process. Just 92 (10.2%) indicated that they do participate, although, of these, a small number (5, 5.4%) preferred not to specify how. The manner in which the others participate is illustrated in Table 58.

**Table 58: Ways in which respondents participate in political process (of the 92 respondents who actively participate)**

	No.	%
Active member of a political party	15	16.3
Canvass/campaign on behalf of a party	15	16.3
Letter writing	14	15.2
Attend political meetings and debates	12	13.0
Actively discuss politics with family/friends	10	10.9
Go on demonstrations and marches	8	8.7
Active member of a pressure group	7	7.6
Sign or raise petitions	5	5.4
Respondent an elected member of local auth.	4	4.3
Active member of a community group	3	3.3
Lobbying	3	3.3
Active in a trade union	2	2.2
Fundraise for, or make donations to, a political party	2	2.2
In regular contact with local MP	2	2.2
Participate in mock elections and debates at school	2	2.2

In general, participation was higher amongst the professional and managerial occupations, and those who had received a more advanced education.

### **3.2.5 Freedom of Information**

Respondents were asked for their opinion on the importance of Freedom of Information, and if they felt that access to accurate and unbiased information was important for exercising their rights as citizens. The response to both questions appears in Table 59.

**Table 59: Importance of Freedom of Information and access to accurate and unbiased information (%)**

	Very important	Quite important	Not important	Don't know
Freedom of Information	66.5	25.2	3.0	5.0
Access to accurate and unbiased information	72.0	19.7	2.7	4.8

Compared with respondents in rural areas, significantly greater numbers of urban respondents felt that Freedom of Information (+14.2 points) and information access (+12.9) were very important. In general, both issues were perceived as being more important by those of a higher occupational class and standard of education.

Respondents were also asked to explain why they had responded in the manner they did. A number of respondents who had answered 'very important' or 'quite important' to both questions found it difficult to express their reasons, and simply stated, for example, "it's obvious", "because it is", "it's common sense" or "it's a natural response". The remaining respondents, however, did attempt to put their feelings into words, and a small, representative selection of quotes is presented below.

## **Freedom of Information**

For many of the respondents who indicated that Freedom of Information was ‘very important’, the underlying reason for their response was that they believed it was a basic human or democratic right:

*“It’s essential to a democratic society”*

*“It’s the fundamental right of every citizen to have access to information”*

*“If you’re not informed it’s not a democracy”*

*“It’s not right or democratic for other people to decide what you should know”*

*“It’s a basic human right and needs to be enshrined in law”*

For others, the accountability of politicians and other officials was their prime concern:

*“You need to know because these people are making decisions about your life”*

*“We vote for MPs to work for us, and it’s important to know what they’re doing”*

*“We should know because it’s our country and we voted them in”*

*“People should know what’s going on. We pay our taxes, and we should know how it’s spent and how it’s going to affect us”*

Indeed, amongst certain respondents, it was clear that there was an element of mistrust concerning their elected representatives:

*“There are certain things which the Government has done which are morally wrong. With Freedom of Information they wouldn’t have got away with it”*

*“So we can find out what the sneaky little buggers are up to”*

Some respondents felt that freedom of access to personal information was particularly important:

*“Everybody should be able to see what’s written down about them”*

*“We should have access to all our personal records”*

*“You should be able to find out what they know about you”*

*“Information that relates to individuals should be freely available”*

With regard to those respondents who felt Freedom of Information was ‘quite important’, a number felt that not all information should be accessible, particularly if it concerned national security:

*“Certain information is too sensitive for the general public”*

*“We should have access to information, but I accept that the Government sometimes has to withhold information”*

*“For reasons of national security, there should be secrets”*

*“There are some things the public should not know - Defence of the Realm and all that”*

Others warned of the dangers of receiving too much information:

*“We need to know what’s going on, but having too much information can confuse people and be misinterpreted. If you don’t understand it it means nothing”*

*“People can get too much information and become confused”*

*“If the Government gives out too much information, too soon, without the full facts, then it can unnecessarily frighten people”*

Meanwhile, those respondents who believed Freedom of Information was ‘not important’ could be divided into three basic groups. Firstly, there were those who were simply not interested:

*“I don’t care”*

*“I don’t need it. I’m not bothered about it”*

*“I’m not particularly interested in politics”*

Secondly, there were the older respondents (generally in the 65 or over age group) who believed that, because of their age, Freedom of Information was of little interest to them:

*“Not to us. We’re getting passed it. It might be important to the younger ones”*

*“Because it doesn’t affect my age group”*

*“It’s important to the younger generation, but not to me”*

Thirdly, there were those who were quite cynical about the real value of a Freedom of Information Act:

*“It’s an irrelevance - it won’t make any difference”*

*“It’s a label only - the content can be diluted to suit the Government of the day”*

*“The stuff that really counts won’t be told”*

Finally, with regard to those respondents who could not offer an opinion on the importance of Freedom of Information, there were those who were genuinely undecided:

*“I’m in two minds - it’s both valuable and dangerous”*

*“There are two sides to this”*

*“It depends on the type of information. It could be a security issue”*

And there were those who felt they could be better informed about the topic:

*“I don’t know enough about the subject”*

*“I hadn’t heard about it”*

*“I don’t understand it. I need information about Freedom of Information”*

### **Access to accurate and unbiased information**

With regard to the perceived importance of access to accurate and unbiased information, for exercising their rights as citizens, many respondents appeared to find it difficult to find new ways of expressing their feelings and simply repeated their answer to the Freedom of Information question. As a result, the beliefs that such access is a basic right, and that access to information ensures the accountability of elected representatives, were recurring themes. However, a number of respondents who felt information access was ‘very’ or ‘quite important’ believed that it helps the individual to make informed decisions and judgements:

*“Knowing both sides of the story means you can make decisions and not be influenced”*

*“Everybody has the right to know, to make up your mind better”*

*“If you haven’t got the full information you can’t come to the proper conclusion. You need all the facts”*

*“It makes it easier to form opinions and take decisions”*

*“So you can make an informed choice, you know what you’re talking about, and you get your facts right”*

*“Otherwise your judgement is based on prejudice or hearsay”*

Amongst those respondents who felt information access was unimportant, or who were unsure of its importance, there were again those who were simply not interested in obtaining information, and those who believed that information access was no longer relevant because of their mature years. There were, however, some respondents who were unconvinced that access to *unbiased* information was attainable:

*“Is it possible to have unbiased information?”*

*“It’s impossible to get unbiased information”*

*“There’s no such thing as unbiased information”*

*“It’s difficult to get unbiased information”*

### **3.2.6 Use of Computers**

In a closed question, respondents were asked if they had satellite or cable television at home, a personal computer at home, or access to the Internet, either at home or at work. The response is summarised at Table 60.

<i>Table 60: Access to Information and Communication Technologies</i>		
<b>Type and location</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Satellite or cable TV at home	237	26.4
Computer at home	353	39.3
Access to Internet at home	131	14.6 (37.1% of those with a computer at home)
Access to Internet at work	113	12.6 (35.3% of those in employment)

Although the question was not specifically asked, 48 (61.5%) of the 78 students in the sample indicated that they had access to the Internet at their school, college or university. It is perhaps fair to assume that most, if not all, of the other 30 students will also have Internet access.

While there were no significant gender differences in the levels of access to satellite/cable TV and to personal computers, the proportion of males with Internet access at home was much higher (+11.1 points). With regard to age group, access to ICTs unsurprisingly tended to decrease as respondents grew older.

In terms of status, higher proportions of students and those in employment had a computer at home; while perhaps surprisingly, proportions with access to satellite/cable TV were greater amongst students, jobseekers and those running a home, than they were amongst those in employment. Access to satellite/cable TV was also significantly lower amongst the better-educated. However, access to a computer and the Internet, either at home or at work, was generally greater amongst the higher classes and the better-educated. Interestingly, none of the employed, disabled respondents with access to a computer at work had access to the Internet.

### **Potential use of computers**

The respondents were then asked if they would use computers to take part in any of four different democratic activities, if computers were available for them to use, either at home, at work or in public places. Table 61 summarises the response.

<i>Table 61: Potential use of computers (%)</i>			
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
To vote in elections	54.7	44.2	1.1
To take part in political debates	35.0	63.5	1.5
To let Government know what you think about particular issues and decisions	53.5	46.1	0.4
To obtain official Government information	59.8	39.5	0.6

Compared with respondents in rural areas, urban respondents were far more willing to use a computer to vote (+18.5 points), debate (+12.3), make their own feelings known (+14.6) and obtain official information (+14.2). With regard to age group, there was an increasing unwillingness to use computers for all four activities as the respondents grew older: for example, 76.2% of those aged 16-19 were willing to use a computer to vote, compared with just 27.7% of those aged 75 or over. Similarly, in terms of status, retired respondents were least likely and students were most likely to use a computer for all four activities: for example, the proportions willing to take part in an electronic debate ranged from 18.9% of the retired to 61.5% of students. In general, those respondents with a higher occupational classification and/or a higher academic qualification were more willing to use a computer for these purposes. Interestingly, able-bodied respondents were more willing to use a computer to vote (+23.0), make their own feelings known (+26.6), and obtain official information (+29.1).

### Concerns over computer confidentiality

Respondents were asked if they might have any concerns over confidentiality if they were ever to use a computer to vote or take part in a debate. Of those respondents who said they would use a computer to vote in an election, 47.7% were worried about confidentiality. Similar figures were found amongst those who would take part in computer debates (47.5%), and those who would use a computer to provide feedback to the Government on particular issues (50.6%).

### Preferred method of making feelings known

From a list of six options, respondents were asked how they would prefer to make their own feelings known on a subject they felt strongly about (see Table 62).

<b>Method</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Write to someone, such as the Press or my local MP	596	66.4
Speak at a public meeting	52	5.8
Take part in a debate by computer	49	5.5
Phone in to a radio or TV debate	42	4.7
Speak on a televised studio debate	21	2.3
Not interested in making own feelings publicly known	135	15.0

With regard to age group, unsurprisingly given the findings outlined above, there was decidedly less interest amongst older respondents (and, in terms of status, the retired) in taking part in an electronic debate. Indeed, amongst the oldest respondents (i.e. aged 65 and over) the proportion who were not interested (26.8%) in making their own feelings known at all was more than double that of the other age groups. Ethnic minority respondents, meanwhile, were less willing to write to someone (-11.7 points) but more willing to take part in a debate by computer (+11.3) than the white respondents.

With social class, meanwhile, although no real patterns emerged, particular classes were more willing to use particular methods: a significantly higher proportion (17.6%) of Class III(M) would speak at a public meeting, while 10.2% of Class I would speak on a televised studio debate. Class V respondents showed least interest in making their own feelings

publicly known (29.4%). In terms of educational attainment, an even higher proportion of the better-educated (78.9% of those with a postgraduate degree) would write to someone; and indeed, in general, interest in making their own feelings publicly known was greater amongst those with a higher level of education.

### **3.2.7 Public Libraries and other information sources**

#### **Preferred source of government information**

From a list of 11 organisations, individuals and locations, respondents were asked from which one they would prefer to obtain official Government information, and the results are illustrated in Table 63. Ten respondents preferred not to answer the question; 9 indicated they could not select just one of the sources; 7 said they were not interested in obtaining Government information; 5 had no real preference; while one respondent indicated that she could not use any of the sources as she was housebound. Meanwhile, a small number of respondents cited other sources: the Internet via their own computer at home (3); through the mass media (1); public houses (1); via unspecified 'independent' organisations, rather than those on the list provided (1); and through 'my own contacts' (1).

<i><b>Table 63: Preferred source of Government information</b></i>		
<b>Source</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Public libraries	388	43.2
Post offices	132	14.7
Citizens Advice Bureaux	108	12.0
Local MP	52	5.8
Local council offices	49	5.5
Offices of Govt. departments and agencies	36	4.0
Schools	32	3.6
A computer in a public place, such as a shopping centre	31	3.5
Banks and building societies	18	2.0
Medical centres and doctors' surgeries	9	1.0
Community and leisure centres	4	0.4

This is a significant reinforcement of the finding in the first survey in relation to the importance of public libraries. Here again the greatest proportion (although smaller than in survey 1) would approach public libraries.

While the public library was the most frequently cited source by all age groups, the response of 46.6% in the 30-64 age groups was greater than that of the 16-19 group (33.3%) and those aged 65 and over (35.5%). CABx, meanwhile, were cited more by the older groups, ranging from just 4.8% of those aged 16-19 to 23.8% of those aged 75 and over.

Similarly, with regard to status, the public library was the top response from all groups, although this ranged from 39.4% of the retired to 55.1% of students. Interestingly, post offices were most popular with jobseekers (20.0%) and least popular with students (6.4%). Educational attainment was also an important factor: a significant preference for approaching CABx and the local MP was displayed by the less well-educated.

Disabled respondents, when compared with the able-bodied, had a preference for approaching CABx (+15.4 points) but were less inclined to visit a public library (-13.7).



## Reasons for preferring source

The respondents were then asked for what reasons they would prefer to obtain information from their chosen source, and these are illustrated in Tables 64a and 64b.

	Accessible	Visit regularly	Reputable	Atmosph.	Straight from source	Holds relevant material	Helpful staff
Public library (388 respondents)	40.2	13.4	10.8	10.8	-	5.2	3.1
Post office (132)	51.5	37.1	2.3	0.8	-	1.5	1.5
CAB (108)	16.7	0.9	35.2	-	-	1.9	14.8
Local MP (52)	1.9	-	23.1	-	40.4	7.7	-
Council offices (49)	42.9	8.2	12.2	2.0	8.2	14.3	-
Govt depts (36)	11.1	2.8	13.9	-	47.2	13.9	-
Schools (32)	40.6	34.3	3.1	-	-	-	-
Computers in public places (31)	71.0	12.9	-	-	-	-	-
Banks and Build. Societies (18)	44.4	44.4	5.6	5.6	-	-	-
Medical Centres (9)	22.2	33.3	11.1	-	-	-	11.1
Community Centres (4)	25.0	75.0	-	-	-	-	-

	'Logical place'	Impartial	Anon.	Work there etc.	One-to-one	Other	Not specified
Public library (388 respondents)	3.6	2.6	3.1	1.0	-	1.3	4.9
Post office (132)	0.8	-	0.8	0.8	-	-	3.0
CAB (108)	2.8	12.0	3.7	0.9	5.6	2.8	2.8
Local MP (52)	3.8	-	-	5.8	9.6	1.9	5.8
Council offices (49)	-	-	-	4.1	-	2.0	6.1
Govt depts (36)	8.3	-	-	-	-	2.8	-
Schools (32)	3.1	-	-	15.6	-	-	3.1
Computers in public places (31)	-	-	9.7	-	-	3.2	3.2
Banks and Build. Societies (18)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Medical Centres (9)	-	-	-	11.1	-	-	11.1
Community Centres (4)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The 'other' reasons were: 'you can enquire by phone'; 'they're child-friendly places'; 'they can refer you if they don't have the information'; and 'they hold up-to-date information'.

For urban respondents, when compared to rural ones, the reputation of the information provider was of greater importance (+7.7 points) than their habit of visiting the source regularly (-10.6). However, for female respondents, when compared to males, the fact that they visit the source regularly is of prime concern (+13.1). Meanwhile, ethnic minority

groups, when compared to white respondents, were more concerned with reputation (+9.4) and the fact that the information would be straight from the source (+9.5), than the accessibility of the provider (-8.3) or the fact that they visit the source regularly (-8.8).

### Public library membership

Respondents were asked if they were a member of a public library, and 651 (72.5%) indicated that they were; this is higher than the national figure of 58% cited in *New Library: the People's Network* (Library and Information Commission, 1997).

Membership was lowest amongst those running a home (63.9%) or seeking work (64.6%) and highest amongst the students (88.5%). Membership was also higher amongst the higher social classes (ranging from 47.1% of Class V to 79.4% of Class II) and the better-educated (ranging from 64.9% of the 'school-leavers' to 83.7% of those with an undergraduate degree).

The 247 respondents who were not members of a public library were asked what might encourage them to join. Of these, 83 (33.6%) indicated they were not interested in joining a library, while 46 (18.6%) could not specify an encouraging factor. Fourteen (5.7%) said they would be joining a library soon, while another 5 indicated that theirs was a temporary lapse in membership. The rest, meanwhile, cited a range of potential inducements, or barriers, to library membership (see Table 65).

<i>Table 65: What might encourage you to join a public library? (of the 247 non-library members)</i>		
	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
More personal time	37	15.0
If a definite need for their services arose	12	4.9
Better selection of stock	12	4.9
Health problem prevents me from using libraries	6	2.4
If libraries were more accessible and conveniently located	5	2.0
When my children start to read	5	2.0
I'm too old now	5	2.0
My local library has closed	3	1.2
If services to housebound improved	3	1.2
If their information provision was better	2	0.8
If opening hours were more convenient	2	0.8
If they lost their dry image	2	0.8
I just use a family member's library card	2	0.8
If facilities in general were better	1	0.4
If there were more public access computers	1	0.4
Literacy problem prevents me from using libraries	1	0.4

### Suitability of public libraries for obtaining citizenship information

Respondents were asked if they felt that public libraries were suitable places for obtaining information on the following five topics: their local council; welfare benefits; job opportunities and careers; housing; and consumer advice. Their response is illustrated in Table 66.

Type of information	Yes	No	Don't know	Not interested
Local council	82.0	11.7	4.8	1.6
Welfare benefits	65.1	27.4	5.4	2.0
Job opportunities and careers	61.4	30.7	6.1	1.8
Housing	53.5	38.2	6.3	2.0
Consumer advice	67.8	23.6	6.5	2.1

Those respondents who believed public libraries were unsuitable places for these types of information, were then asked to suggest more suitable locations. (It will be noticed that one respondent, from Aberystwyth, felt that the National Library of Wales was the most suitable location for information on all five topics).

### Local council information

Of the 105 respondents who thought libraries were unsuitable locations for council information, 26 (24.8%) could not specify a more suitable source, while a further 19 (18.1%) simply indicated that the information should be obtained at a 'more relevant' or 'more appropriate' agency.

Location	No.	%
Local council offices	43	41.0
Citizens Advice Bureau	5	4.8
Local councillor	3	2.9
Local MP	2	1.9
Benefits Agency	1	1.0
Community centre	1	1.0
Local free newspaper	1	1.0
Internet	1	1.0
National Library of Wales	1	1.0
Other advice centres	1	1.0
Post office	1	1.0
Solicitor	1	1.0

### *Welfare benefits information*

Of the 246 respondents who felt libraries were unsuitable locations for benefits information, 37 (15.0%) could not name a suitable location, and a further 25 (10.2%) stated it should be held at a 'more relevant or appropriate agency'.

<i>Table 68: Suitable location for welfare benefits information (of 246 respondents)</i>		
<b>Location</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Citizens Advice Bureau	56	22.8
DSS	50	20.3
Local council social services department	31	12.6
Benefits Agency	18	7.3
Job Centre	18	7.3
Post office	13	5.3
Other advice centres	3	1.2
Community centre	2	0.8
Doctor or other health professional	2	0.8
Local council housing department	1	0.4
Local councillor	1	0.4
Family and friends	1	0.4
National Library of Wales	1	0.4

### *Job opportunities and careers information*

Of the 276 respondents who felt libraries were unsuitable locations for job or career information, 34 (12.3%) could not name a suitable location, and a further 25 (9.1%) stated it should be held at a 'more relevant or appropriate agency'.

<i>Table 69: Suitable location for job or career information (of 276 respondents)</i>		
<b>Location</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Job Centre	177	64.1
Newspapers	18	6.5
Careers service	13	4.7
Employment agencies	10	3.6
Citizens Advice Bureau	5	1.8
DSS	5	1.8
Job clubs	4	1.4
Benefits Agency	2	0.7
Post office	2	0.7
Community centre	1	0.4
Local council housing department	1	0.4
Local councillor	1	0.4
Internet	1	0.4
National Library of Wales	1	0.4
Other advice centres	1	0.4
Schools	1	0.4

### ***Housing information***

Of the 343 respondents who felt libraries were unsuitable locations for housing information, 44 (12.8%) could not name a suitable location, and a further 25 (7.3%) stated it should be held at a 'more relevant or appropriate agency'.

<b>Location</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Local council housing department	212	61.8
Citizens Advice Bureau	23	6.7
Estate agents	18	5.2
DSS	5	1.5
Housing associations	5	1.5
Benefits Agency	4	1.2
Other advice centres	4	1.2
Post office	3	0.9
Community centre	2	0.6
Local councillor	2	0.6
Local MP	2	0.6
Solicitor	2	0.6
Doctor or other health professional	1	0.3
Family and friends	1	0.3
Internet	1	0.3
Mass media	1	0.3
National Library of Wales	1	0.3

### ***Consumer information***

Of the 212 respondents who felt libraries were unsuitable locations for consumer information, 43 (20.3%) could not name a suitable location, and a further 18 (8.5%) stated it should be held at a 'more relevant or appropriate agency'.

<b>Location</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Citizens Advice Bureau	113	53.3
Local Consumer Protection or Trading Standards office	22	10.4
Consumer programmes on radio and TV	4	1.9
Shops	4	1.9
DSS	2	0.9
Post office	2	0.9
Other advice centres	2	0.9
Specialist consumer groups	2	0.9
<i>Which?</i> magazine	2	0.9
Benefits Agency	1	0.5
Local council housing department	1	0.5
Internet	1	0.5
National Library of Wales	1	0.5
Solicitor	1	0.5
Teletext and Ceefax	1	0.5

## Awareness of citizenship information held by public libraries

The survey then investigated the respondents' awareness of the types of information that public libraries hold. They were asked if they were aware that most public libraries hold official government publications, health care information, and information on educational opportunities, legal rights, and the European Union. The response is illustrated in Table 72. Overall, 672 (74.8%) were unaware of at least one of the information types held by libraries.

As can be seen, a small number of respondents stated that, while they did not actually know that libraries held this information, they would have presumed that they did so. Meanwhile, 3 of the respondents indicated that they were not interested in any of the five information types.

Type of information	Yes	No	Presumed
Official government publications	53.5	45.8	0.4
Health care	53.6	45.1	1.0
Educational opportunities	69.0	30.2	0.4
Legal rights	53.7	44.9	1.1
European Union	36.9	61.1	1.7

Interestingly, when compared to white respondents, a significantly higher proportion (ranging from +13.4 points to +17.9 points) of the respondents belonging to ethnic minority groups were aware that libraries held material on all five subjects. There was less awareness of libraries holding government publications amongst the lower occupational classes (from 29.2% of Class IV to 79.6% of Class I); and, with the exception of health care information, there was a greater awareness of library holdings amongst the better-educated respondents.

The 672 respondents who were unaware of at least one of the information types held by libraries, were asked how libraries could let them know more about the types of information they hold. Of these, 82 (12.2%) could not offer any suggestions, while 13 (1.9%) were not interested.

A small number of respondents cited obstacles which currently prevent them from using libraries, arguing that if these barriers were to be overcome, they would make more use of libraries and thereby be more aware of the services they offer. These obstacles were: inconvenient opening hours (5 respondents); libraries' dry image (4); staff shortages (3); inaccessible buildings (2); and poor mobile library service (1).

Twenty-five respondents (3.7%) argued that libraries should not waste their already meagre resources on advertising information services, and that if people require information they can go into libraries and ask for it. Three respondents, meanwhile, believed that libraries should simply 'concentrate on books'.

The remainder of the sample indicated a range of methods, and these are shown in Table 73

<b>Method</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
More publicity in general	145	21.6
Leaflets and posters in the library	118	17.6
Mailshot / Leaflets through your door	102	15.2
Better signposting in library	55	8.2
Advertise in local media	47	7.0
Special displays and exhibitions in library	16	2.4
Library website on Internet	16	2.4
Leaflets and posters in other public places	9	1.3
Open days and special library tours	9	1.3
Word of mouth from library staff	7	1.0
Give you information when you join library	5	0.7
Outreach work in schools and the local community	5	0.7

Significantly, there was a greater plea for more publicity in general from non-members (26.1%) than from current library members (19.4%).

### **3.2.8 Additional points raised by respondents**

Finally, the questionnaire gave the respondents the chance to raise any points that had not been discussed, and overall 174 (19.4%) took the opportunity to make a point or ask a question.

#### *Public libraries*

Some 62 respondents chose to discuss their local public library service. While a small number (8) sang the praises of their local library, several more focused on negative aspects. Six respondents, for example, criticised continuing library cutbacks, while a further 4 bemoaned the complete closure of their nearest library. Nine respondents were critical of the stock selection in their local library, while 5 spoke of inconvenient opening hours. Noisy libraries (2 respondents), unfriendly staff (2) and a 'dry' image (1) were also cited. A further 8 respondents felt that libraries should publicise their services more.

Twelve respondents chose to discuss the suitability of public libraries as information providers. While most (11) were of the opinion that libraries were well-placed to provide an information service, one respondent believed that libraries' ever-increasing focus on information provision was having detrimental effects on the traditional lending service, and that it also results in libraries becoming more daunting places to visit, particularly for children.

Public access to Information and Communication Technologies (in particular the Internet) in libraries was discussed by 4 respondents; while one commended their local library's efforts, the other three felt that libraries were slow to embrace new technology. Finally, one respondent felt it would be good to see more Citizens Advice Bureaux appearing in branch libraries.

### *Other information providers and preferred methods of information delivery*

Sixteen respondents commented on other information providers (i.e. other than public libraries) or on preferred methods of information delivery. With regard to information providers, one respondent regarded the CABx network as being too middle-class, while another was critical of the information service at their local town hall. One felt that greater public access should be allowed to his local university library, while one believed the opening hours of his local welfare rights office were too inflexible. Two respondents felt that their local councillor and MP should have a higher profile and hold more surgeries.

One respondent indicated his mistrust of most of the information providers mentioned in the survey, as they were largely government funded; he instead preferred to rely on a network of family and friends for information. One respondent felt it would be nice to know, generally, what information is available and from where; while two respondents felt there should be 'one-stop-shop' information centres available in council estates and deprived areas. Another respondent emphasised the importance of disabled access to buildings hosting information services.

With regard to methods of information delivery, two respondents felt it would be useful if a newsletter or free paper containing citizenship information was delivered to households on a regular basis; while another respondent felt that local radio was often overlooked as an information provider. One respondent preferred to write away for information, while another indicated a preference for face-to-face communication.

### *Access to information*

Twenty-five of the respondents discussed aspects of access to information. Of these, 7 reiterated their feelings on the importance of accurate and unbiased information to the citizen, while a further 9 emphasised the importance of access to local and national government information. Three respondents were concerned about access to personal information held, say, on computer databases or in doctors' notes; while 2 were wary of a developing gap between the 'information rich' and 'information poor'. Meanwhile, 4 respondents warned of the dangers of 'information overload', arguing that *concise* information is what is required.

### *Electronic information and use of ICTs*

Electronic information and the use of ICTs was discussed by 17 respondents. Of these, 9 were very much in favour of public access computers in locations such as CABx and shopping centres. However, one respondent believed that public access computers would be abused or vandalised; while another respondent questioned the current levels of technological expertise amongst staff in the proposed locations. Four respondents questioned the comprehensiveness, currency and accuracy of the information currently available on the Internet; while two respondents highlighted current inequalities in access to computers.



### *Citizenship information project and questionnaire design*

Eighteen respondents chose to comment on the citizenship information project as a whole, or on the design of the survey being conducted. Of these, 2 felt it was “good to be asked about the things that matter”, while 3 questioned the role of the British Library in the project. Four respondents felt the questionnaire was too narrow in scope, paying too much attention to government and computer-based information; while, contrarily, one respondent believed it was too wide-ranging. One respondent felt the questionnaire was simply too long; while 5 respondents, all from Aberystwyth, felt it should also have been available in the Welsh language. One respondent, from Belfast, questioned the survey’s applicability in Northern Ireland where there was, he maintained, a different cultural appreciation of the public library; while another respondent felt it would have been interesting to conduct a similar survey when the Conservative Party was in power, in order to identify any differences in information needs and availability under different governments.

### *British Library at St. Pancras*

Prompted, presumably, by learning that the current project was funded by the BLRIC, 8 respondents (all of them from Camden) chose to discuss the new British Library building at St. Pancras. While one was critical of the architecture, the others were concerned about public access to the building, in particular the prospect of the introduction of admission charges.

### *Personal problems, current affairs and policy issues*

The remaining (28) respondents either discussed a personal problem requiring the use of citizenship information, or highlighted a current affairs or policy issue that was of personal significance, or, in some cases, appeared to be a particular bugbear.

The personal problems cited were: problem neighbours (2 respondents); obtaining childcare (2); going to a small claims court (1); choosing a school for children (1).

The current affairs and policy issues were: inefficient local councils (4); gay rights (2); immigration, of ethnic minority groups to the UK (2); immigration, of English people to Wales (2); OAP poverty (2); the state of the NHS (2); the aftermath of the death of Princess Diana (1); the costs of national utilities, particularly water (1); drug abuse (1); environmental issues (1); genetically engineered food (1); lack of local amenities (1); law and order issues (1); and parliamentary reform (1).

### **3.3 USER STUDY 3: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

#### **3.3.1 Difficulties in obtaining information**

The focus group participants were initially asked to comment on the information access difficulties cited by the Stage 1 survey respondents. A number of the groups agreed that jargon in official documents is a particular problem and effectively acts as a barrier to access. It was noted that there have been recent efforts to produce official documentation in simpler language, but that these have met with differing degrees of success. A member of the government group cited the example of welfare benefits forms, where attempts to simplify the language have resulted in substantially longer documents; it was suggested that these prove rather daunting, even for the most literate members of the public. A number of the groups also agreed that the public can encounter difficulties in using information systems, particularly electronic systems. It was felt that this was a particular problem amongst elderly users, although several participants believed that older people, when shown how to use them, are more than capable of using new technologies effectively.

Commenting on the fact that some survey respondents cited information professionals' lack of knowledge as a barrier to access, one member of the business community group suggested that this might be caused by members of the public being unable to adequately express their specific needs, thus causing the information providers to go off on the wrong track. Similarly, a member of the group representing jobseekers suggested that many of the barriers to information access are effectively of the jobseekers' own making, for they will avoid approaching information providers and giving specific personal details for fears that in doing so they will incur a financial loss, perhaps through a reduction in benefits or a change to their tax code.

Two of the groups - the information providers and the government group - felt that the most basic barrier to access was the public's general lack of awareness of where to go to obtain citizenship information. Amongst the government group, for example, it was suggested that many members of the public are completely unaware of the identity of their local councillor or MP; and it was estimated that around half of the enquiries received in MPs' offices are actually in connection with local council business.

Three of the groups indicated particular barriers encountered by members of the communities or sectors that they represent. The group representing ethnic minorities highlighted the problem of language, and a lack of adequate translations of official documents in minority languages; as evidence, one member of the group, an officer in a local authority interpretation and translation service, produced figures showing a significant growth in use of the service during the first three years of its existence. The group representing disabled people cited inadequate physical access to the premises of information providers, and difficulties in finding citizenship information in alternative formats, such as audio tape, large print or Braille. The education sector group emphasised the difficulties in providing citizenship material at a level suitable for schoolchildren's project work. Indeed, it was stated that school library budgets are currently in such a delicate state that it is impossible to regularly buy or renew useful publications, such as those produced by the Office for National Statistics, and therefore children are regularly referred to public libraries. It was indicated, however, that many children find public libraries rather intimidating, and can face a somewhat frosty reception from public library staff, particularly if, in an effort to feel more at ease, the children enter the library in groups of three or four. The education sector group suggested that this can have rather unfortunate consequences:-

*"The very ones who'll need the citizenship information in future are the very ones who'll be put off. They won't go back again."*

### **3.3.2 Satisfaction with information**

The groups then discussed the respondents' levels of satisfaction with information and information providers. The finding that respondents indicated most satisfaction with business and financial information generally caused little surprise: the business community group felt that business and financial information can very often stand on its own, without need for interpretation or facilitation on the part of information professionals; while a number of participants in the other groups suggested that those involved in business and financial affairs will generally be better educated and more literate (and therefore better placed to comprehend information) than the users of the types of information (e.g. welfare benefits) with which there was less satisfaction. The education sector group, however, felt that the presentation of business and financial information was often inappropriate for youngsters

There was general agreement throughout all groups that welfare benefits information was problematic: 'a quagmire' and 'a nightmare' were just two of the terms used to describe the intricacies of the benefits system. Participants felt that they, as relatively well-educated and literate individuals, struggled to understand benefits information, and could therefore only speculate as to the effect on less literate people or those whose first language is not English. Members of the information providers group felt that many people are unaware of the existence of agencies, such as welfare rights units, that can assist them in understanding benefits information. With regard to legal information, participants offered three potential reasons for public dissatisfaction: that the public often ask unqualified information providers to *interpret* the law for them, rather than simply supply information, and that refusal to do so creates dissatisfaction; that the response to a legal query, although correct, is not the answer the enquirer *wants to hear*; and that, in Scotland, general legal materials aimed at the layman focus largely on English law, and fail to take into account Scottish differences.

There was also general agreement with the survey respondents' dissatisfaction with government departments and agencies as information providers. It was felt that it is difficult for members of the public to establish which department or agency deals with particular issues or holds particular kinds of information; that members of the public with an enquiry can be passed from department to department without reason or ultimate satisfaction; that answers to enquiries, when given, can be of insufficient depth and detail; and that there can be inconsistencies in the responses to one question from different departments. In addition, the representative of elderly people believed that many older people feel intimidated by the bureaucracy in government departments, and that they would rather make their enquiries through less formal channels, such as voluntary agencies.

### **3.3.3 Past and predicted future information needs**

Participants were presented with the respondents' top six citizenship information needs, both in the past and the predicted future. There was general surprise in the predicted drop in interest in information on education (down by 8.8 percentage points, compared with actual past use), particularly given the current emphasis on the concept of lifelong learning, and the belief that, though respondents may not want education information for themselves, they might require it for their children. It was suggested by some participants that the public interprets education as something that is done formally before entering employment and is

then dismissed. There was little overall surprise expressed with the other positions, although individual participants felt that health care information (in 6th position) might have been higher, and that housing information (13th in the past, 17th in the future) might have been in the top six positions.

Whilst acknowledging the survey's finding that there was significantly greater interest in welfare benefits, health care and equal rights information amongst disabled people than amongst more able-bodied people, the group representing disabled people felt it was important to recognise that the information needs of people with a disability are as diverse as those of anyone else, and that they would be surprised if leisure and recreation information was not also the first choice of disabled people (*Note*: the top two information needs of disabled people were benefits and health care, although leisure information moved from 8th place in the past to 3rd place in the future). The representative of elderly people was surprised to learn that the older respondents' predicted interest in health care information was less than their past need. The jobseekers group, meanwhile, pointed out that unemployed people are particularly interested in specific types of employment information, namely: factual information about potential employers, to be used at the job interview stage; information about the jobs themselves, as job titles in advertisements can be somewhat obscure; and information on what direction to take, should a career change be necessary or desirable.

Commenting on the relatively low positions of need for information on local, central and European government, the government group pointed out that these three levels of government encompass responsibility for the top six subjects (i.e. leisure, employment, legal, transport, education and health care). It was suggested that the public perhaps do not associate, say, leisure information with local government, who are one of its biggest producers and providers.

When discussing possible information needs variations in terms of gender, the women's group highlighted the relatively common occurrence of older women, whose husbands have always dealt with all 'official' matters and paperwork, suddenly becoming widows and being faced with unfamiliar information needs. The representative of elderly people agreed that this was the most common scenario, but indicated that occasionally it is a widower who finds himself in this position.

### **3.3.4 Reasons for requiring information**

Participants were also presented with the respondent's top six reasons for requiring information, both in the past and the predicted future. Again, there were few comments on the overall positions. The business community group expressed surprise at the high position (3rd in the past, 2nd in the future) of requiring information to satisfy a general interest; it was suggested that the fact that 75% of the completed questionnaires had been distributed in public libraries was an influential factor here, as people requiring information out of a general interest are probably more inclined to visit their library to obtain it. The business group, using the number of jobseeking-related queries they receive as a gauge, also felt that jobseeking reasons might have been in a higher position (i.e. than 6th in the past, 5th in the future). The jobseekers group, meanwhile, pointed out that jobseeking reasons could be broken down into more specific categories, including: for filling in application forms; for letter writing; for developing interview skills; and, most frequently, for preparing CVs.

On discussing the significantly lower interest amongst older people in seeking information for educational purposes, the representative of elderly people believed that older people are

now actually increasingly inclined to attempt to further their education. Although it was felt that this is perhaps linked to social class:-

*"To some extent it may be a class thing. Middle-class people with an assured income, background and freedom of mind are more inclined to use their leisure time to take up study. But people like ourselves are more concerned with living from day to day, although we would perhaps like to be in that position."*

The representative of elderly people also disputed the survey finding that older people are less interested in obtaining information for political decision-making purposes, and indeed appear to be less interested in citizenship information in general. As evidence, he pointed to the growing membership of representative groups such as the National Pensioners' Convention and the Scottish Pensioners' Forum, although it was acknowledged that interest in joining such groups appeared to be less amongst the younger, more recent pensioners.

Commenting on the survey finding that disabled people were less interested than able-bodied people in seeking information for a number of reasons (including educational, recreational and a general interest), the group representing disabled people suggested that this might be due more to the respondents' economic status rather than their disability. It was emphasised that it is generally impossible to label disabled people as a group, but one thing that can be said is that they do tend to be poorer than others.

The group representing ethnic communities were unsurprised that, when compared to white respondents, the ethnic minority respondents showed a significantly greater interest (+9.4 points) in obtaining information for religious purposes; it was indicated that amongst certain communities (e.g. the Muslim community) religion and day-to-day life were inextricably linked, probably more so than in the predominantly Christian communities throughout the UK.

When presented with the relatively low position (12th) of information seeking for political decision-making purposes, the government group acknowledged that, other than when casting their votes, there appeared to be considerable public apathy about participation in the democratic process. One group member suggested that excessive political coverage in the mass media might be partly to blame. It was agreed that, amongst local government at least, a more pro-active approach to public participation is developing, although the success of this approach has been variable. The example was cited of housing policy discussion fora attracting very low attendances, despite members of tenants' groups being specifically targeted.

### **3.3.5 Preferred sources of information**

The groups were then presented with the survey sample's top six preferred sources of information, both in response to the initial open question in the survey and the closed question which listed 12 possible sources. While it is perhaps fair to say that the consensus was that public libraries would indeed be the most popular source for the public as a whole, there was also general agreement that the extent of their popularity, in terms of the survey findings, would have been influenced by 75% of the completed questionnaires having been distributed in public libraries.

The individual groups, however, cited particular sources which were important information sources for the communities they represent. The business group highlighted the importance of networking with fellow members of the business community; the education group stated

that family and friends were important sources of employment and careers information for young people; the group representing women also cited family and friends, as well as post offices (which many women visit regularly to collect Child Benefit, Family Credit, etc.) and professional people, particularly doctors; and the group representing ethnic groups suggested that community centres and, for Muslim communities, mosques were important information sources. The representative of elderly people pointed out that home helps can prove useful sources, and re-emphasised his belief that government departments and agencies are possibly the last place that older people would visit, preferring instead voluntary organisations and agencies.

Commenting on the survey finding that disabled people, when compared with more able-bodied respondents, are more inclined to approach their local MP, the group representing disabled people suggested that their information needs are perhaps more urgent and crucial to their success as individuals, therefore they have to take more extreme measures. It was also suggested that simply posting a letter or request for information to the local MP is a more attractive alternative to entering often inaccessible public buildings. One participant felt that the high profile of a local MP, Anne Begg, herself a disabled person, might encourage more disabled people to contact her for information.

The jobseekers group, meanwhile, discussed the finding that there were twice as many jobseeking respondents in the CABx as in the public libraries, and that the jobseeking respondents had shown a significant preference for using CABx, when compared with the survey sample as a whole. This caused little surprise, as it was felt that unemployment inevitably creates other social and financial problems which CABx are in a better position to solve. The unemployed respondents had also indicated a significant preference for contacting their local MP and again the jobseekers group did not find this surprising, for it was indicated that when, say, a local business closes down with the loss of many jobs, it is the local MP who is seen as the most obvious channel for complaints and information seeking.

### **3.3.6 Preferred methods of acquiring information**

On discussing methods of obtaining information, there was general agreement that face-to-face communication would indeed be the preferred option of the population as a whole. However, there were conflicting opinions on the merits and positions of a number of the other methods. The relatively low position (7th) of television surprised some participants, but others felt that it was used more as a source of entertainment than for information. The relatively high position (6th) of radio was also the subject of some disagreement: while some participants felt people do not use radio for acquiring information 'these days', others believed that local radio is an excellent source of community information for all ages and pointed out that stations aimed at a young audience, such as Radio 1, regularly host helplines on topics such as university and college admissions and drug advice. There were also mixed opinions on the position of leaflets (8th): whilst some participants felt the position should be higher, based on the rate with which they disappear from their premises, others reported low levels of use and were critical of their superficiality and lack of currency.

There was some surprise expressed at the position of computers (9th), but it was acknowledged that the age of the respondents would be an influential factor here. It was felt that younger people would be more willing to use computers, and the education group indicated that in school libraries which have printed and electronic versions of the same material (e.g. careers information), schoolchildren would rather wait until a computer is free

than use the hard copy. Indeed, it was felt that many youngsters are more interested in simply using the technology than developing their information seeking skills:-

*“They don’t care what information they get, as long as they can use a computer...”*

The jobseekers group felt that newspapers, with their regular job advertisements, would be higher up in the jobseekers’ list of preferences (it actually was, in 3rd place). While the government group expressed alarm at the extent to which members of the public form their opinions based only on what is published in the press:-

*“Most people seem to get their information from the Evening Express (a local newspaper in North East Scotland), therefore anything there must be true”.*

The group representing ethnic minorities, commenting on the survey finding that 18% of ethnic minority respondents would prefer information to be provided in a minority language, felt that this figure was rather low, and might have been affected by the high proportion of public library users in the sample, who were possibly better-educated and had greater language skills. It was felt that if the survey had taken place outwith the library setting, and with respondents with little or no English, then the percentage would have been much higher. It was also pointed out that many members of ethnic communities (the example was given of a local Chinese community) will be unable to *read* their preferred language, therefore face-to-face communication in the desired language would be more appropriate.

Meanwhile, the group representing disabled people emphasised that preferences would depend on the nature of the individual’s disability. The example was given of people who have become deaf or hard of hearing, where face-to-face communication would only be appropriate if, for example, the enquirer could lip read or if both enquirer and information provider had sign language skills; for people in this situation, printed information, subtitled television or Teletext might be preferred. For people who have been profoundly deaf since birth, however, English will not be their first language, therefore their preference will be for British Sign Language rather than any text-based forms.

### **3.3.7 Predicted use of public access computers**

The groups were then presented with details of the survey sample’s predicted level of use of computers in public places. A number of comments were received regarding the structure of the question; it was felt that if the choice of stated locations had been wider than the four provided (i.e. those cited as likely locations in the *government.direct* Green Paper) then the results might have been significantly different. There were suggestions that health centres, doctors’ surgeries, community centres, leisure centres, CABx and Jobcentres would all have been selected by substantial proportions of the sample. There were some doubts as to the suitability of shopping centres as locations for computers, for fears of vandalism and because of a lack of privacy; as one participant stated:-

*“I can’t imagine standing in the middle of Safeways trying to find out about a support group for AIDS or something.”*

A number of participants also suggested that, wherever computers are eventually located, the public will still require some human support, to explain how to operate the systems and provide solutions when problems are encountered.

It was indicated to the group representing disabled people that, when compared to able-bodied respondents, the disabled people in the survey sample seemed less willing to use computers in all of the stated public places. It was pointed out by group members that around 70-80% of disabled people were not born with their particular disability but have acquired it during their lifetime; as a result the average age of the disabled population tends to be higher than that of the UK population as a whole (*Note:* in the sample, just 8.1% of the disabled respondents were aged 29 or under, 52.0% were 30-54, and 39.0% were aged 55 and over). It was suggested, therefore, that this apparent reluctance to use computers may be linked more to age than to disability. Indeed, it was felt that young disabled people view computers as offering opportunities and a way of counteracting a disabling environment.

### **3.3.8 Perceived importance of information**

Finally, the groups discussed the findings relating to the sample's thoughts on the importance of access to accurate and unbiased information for exercising their rights as citizens. One participant felt that the figure of 79.2% who felt information access was very important was rather high and influenced by the large proportion of library users in the sample. It was suggested that current library users have already seen the importance of information, and are motivated individuals who are likely to be less apathetic when it comes to exercising their democratic rights.

Participants were asked if it was a cause for concern that young people aged 19 or under were less certain of the importance of information. While one or two suggested that this was perhaps just typical of 'today's youth', who show an interest in very little, the general feeling was that this was not a cause for concern, and that as these people mature and begin to encounter situations which require information then awareness of its importance will grow accordingly:-

*"They just haven't met a situation where they've needed information. Until you're working or you're independent then you don't come across these circumstances. It's a natural progression - as kids grow up and become adults they'll see a need for the information."*



### **3.4 CITIZENSHIP INFORMATION SERVICE PROVISION: CASE STUDIES**

#### **3.4.1 Background to organisations visited**

The total number of case study organisations visited was 27.

#### **Public Libraries**

In its 1993 *Charter for Public Libraries*, the Library Association stated that the role of the UK public library network is to “give everyone access to books, information and works of creative imagination which will:

- encourage them to take part in cultural, democratic and economic activities;
- educate them, either formally or informally;
- help them make good use of their free time;
- promote reading as a basic skill for life; and
- make them aware of the value of information and encourage them to use it.”

Thirteen public library authorities were visited during this stage of the research. As has already been explained, geographical spread and proximity to library schools were the major reasons why these particular services were asked to participate in the project; however, the resultant sample represents a healthy mix of large and small authorities, and of metropolitan and rural areas. This is illustrated in Table 74, using statistics obtained from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy public library statistics 1996-97 actuals (CIPFA, 1998).

<b>Library Authority</b>	<b>Resident population</b>	<b>Area (Hectares)</b>	<b>Service points</b>	<b>Staff estab (FTE)</b>	<b>Enquiries</b>	<b>Visits</b>
Aberdeenshire <sup>1</sup>	226,060	629,047	42	97.1	-	-
Belfast	297,300	13,979	23	200.0	756,251	1,782,049
Birmingham	1,020,600	26,785	44	582.8	1,668,836	6,227,624
Brighton & Hove <sup>2</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cambs	703,300	339,963	59	248.9	946,385	4,429,191
Camden	189,100	2,172	14	164.0	421,093	1,326,171
Ceredigion	69,500	179,399	14	32.6	26,438	276,421
Leicestershire	927,500	255,087	91	362.0	707,888	5,188,114
Liverpool	468,000	11,292	28	270.0 <sup>3</sup>	623,935	2,065,359
Manchester	430,800	11,612	27	368.0	974,581	3,904,404
Newcastle	282,300	11,179	23	208.4	617,515	2,245,100
Sheffield	530,400	36,734	32	243.9	403,221	1,544,865
Somerset	482,700	345,200	43	175.0	495,391	3,382,521

1. No enquiries or visits figures available for Aberdeenshire

2. No figures available. Brighton and Hove became a new unitary authority in April 1997, having formerly been part of East Sussex.

3. Liverpool staff figure is for actual staff in post.

## Citizens Advice Bureaux

The Citizens Advice Bureau is, of course, a familiar sight in most towns and cities, and the development of the United Kingdom's network of Bureaux, since it was established at the outbreak of the Second World War, has been relatively well documented elsewhere (see, for example, Ward and Mason, 1986). Initially financed by the Ministry of Health, post-war funding was the responsibility of local councils. Indeed, local authorities still provide over 85% of CABx funding, although increasingly this is through contracts for service level agreements with bureaux being assessed against performance indicators. Additional finance can come from a range of private sector and charitable sources, and a number of bureaux have been beneficiaries of National Lottery funding.

CABx in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are coordinated and supported by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB) and by nine regional offices. Bureaux in Scotland, due largely to increasingly distinct regulatory and administrative needs, are served by a separate, autonomous body, Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS). Both NACAB and CAS receive most of their income from the Department of Trade and Industry.

CABx throughout the UK, including of course those participating in this project, share two common aims, namely:

*to ensure that individuals do not suffer through lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities or of the services available to them, or through an inability to express their needs effectively*

and equally

*to exercise a responsible influence on the development of social policies and services, both locally and nationally*

CABx are also governed by four basic principles, that the service they provide should be:

- Free
- Impartial
- Independent
- Confidential

Seven CABx were visited during the project: Aberdeen, Aberystwyth and District, Central Belfast, Brighton, Charnwood (as part of the visit to Charnwood Community Council, see below), Manchester, and Peterborough and District.

## Other Information and Advice Agencies

The other information and advice agencies participating in the project will be less familiar to most readers. With this in mind, a brief portrait of each one is presented here.

The **Byker Advice and Information Project** in Newcastle upon Tyne was established in 1993 with funding from Newcastle City Council, the local Training and Enterprise Council, and various charities and trusts. Originally envisaged as a much needed welfare rights service, following the demise of a local Welfare Rights Advisor post, the Byker Project now also provides advice and information on other topics, including consumer issues and housing.

Formed in 1966, the **Charnwood Community Council** is a Council for Voluntary Service based at John Storer House in Loughborough. It is supported by grants and voluntary contributions from Leicestershire County Council, Charnwood Borough Council, and various charitable trusts and businesses, as well as through the provision of services such as catering and the letting of accommodation. The Council provides an information service to local individuals, groups and organisations involved in community action, but is unusual in that it also operates a Tourist Information Centre. John Storer House also hosts the Charnwood CAB.

The **Gordon Rural Action and Information Network (GRAIN)** was established in 1979 and is the Council of Voluntary Service for Central Aberdeenshire. It has three generalist advice centres, in Ellon, Huntly and Inverurie. Funding for the advice centre division of GRAIN largely comes from an Aberdeenshire Council grant and from donations by charitable trusts.

The **Langsett Advice and Area Resource Centre** was formed in 1979, as the Langsett Advice Centre, and provides generalist advice to residents of the Upperthorpe, Netherthorpe, Walkley and Stannington areas of Sheffield. Funding primarily comes from Sheffield City Council. At the time of writing, the Centre had been threatened with closure, but appeared to have been saved following an 850-signature petition from the local community.

Established in 1988, the **Orrell Park Advice Centre** in Liverpool provides information and advice to the residents of Orrell Park and the surrounding areas. Advice on disability benefits is a particular speciality. Originally funded by Sir John Moores, the famous Liverpool entrepreneur and philanthropist, the Centre's main benefactor now is Liverpool City Council, with additional finance coming, whenever possible, from charitable trusts.

The **St. James Community Support and Advice Centre** in Aston, Birmingham was established as a Christian project in the late 1970s by the Parochial Church Council of St. James. Around 90% of its users are from the local Sylheti and Mirpuri communities. The main sources of funding are Birmingham City Council and the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

The **Turnpike Lane Advice Bureau** is one of three advice and information centres operated by Haringey Council in London, the others being at Hornsey and Tottenham. As well as general information, the Bureau offers free advice on benefits, housing and debt.

The West Somerset Community Information Bureau in Minehead was formed in 1978, and in 1997 became the **West Somerset Advice Bureau**, as it felt this more accurately reflected the nature of its work. The Centre regards itself as the equivalent to a CAB, but without the backing or support of NACAB. Financial support chiefly comes from Somerset County Council and West Somerset District Council.

### **Demographic features of areas served by case study organisations**

Representatives of the case study organisations were asked about any local demographic factors that might have a significant impact on citizenship information need. Virtually all cited high levels of unemployment and an ageing population, and a significant number specified high concentrations of ethnic minority groups (see Section 3.4.2 below). Many of the organisations serve inner city areas, therefore general poverty, deprivation and homelessness are also common problems.

A number of the areas surveyed, however, have particular, local features which perhaps set them apart from the others. In Brighton, for example, the existence of a prominent gay community means that there is an equally prominent need for information on gay rights and HIV/AIDS issues. Aberdeen, due to the local oil industry, has a high proportion of contract and agency workers on insecure, short-term contracts, as well as particularly high housing costs, therefore financial problems and debt are rife. Somerset has substantial seasonal unemployment problems (i.e. outside the tourist season), particularly in the coastal towns and villages; it also has a significant travellers population, especially during the period of the Glastonbury festival. Belfast, meanwhile, has had its own, more obvious problems, although thankfully less so in more recent times: the Belfast Group of CABx have had to deal with problems (e.g. dealing with the aftermath of bombings, or of residents being burnt or intimidated out of their homes) which other UK bureaux are less likely to encounter.

### **Catchment areas**

Most of the case study organisations are situated centrally within their particular town or city and tend to attract users not just from the centre of the town/city but also from the suburbs and sometimes further afield. Even those organisations established to serve a particular community, such as the Byker Project and the Langsett Centre, find that some clients come from outwith that area. Staff in the organisations offered four reasons for this phenomenon.

Firstly, and most simply, there are no suitable information or advice providers in the 'incoming' users' own areas. Secondly, and generally applicable to those organisations in a central location, their users come in to the town/city centre on a regular basis anyway, either to work, shop or study. Thirdly, some users perceive a centrally located organisation as 'head office' in nature and capable of providing better information and advice than those organisations in the suburbs or 'the sticks'. Fourthly, some users, particularly of CABx and other advice agencies, do not want to go to their local organisation with a problem, for the fear of being recognised. As one CAB manager explained:

*'They don't want to see people they know in the waiting room, and they're worried that the person who's dealing with them will be a next-door neighbour or friend.'*

This was a phenomenon identified during previous research conducted by the authors on the information needs of the close-knit, rural communities of the Shetland Islands (Beer *et al*, 1998). However, during the current research, while it was certainly recognised by organisations serving predominantly rural communities (e.g. Aberystwyth and District CAB), it was also identified by organisations in large cities (e.g. Belfast Group of CABx and Manchester CABx Service), who believe that communities in, say, particular city housing estates are equally close-knit, and therefore force certain individuals with problems to seek anonymity in bureaux and agencies in other areas.

### **3.4.2 Extent of citizenship information provision**

#### **Information provision vs Advice**

The provision of accurate information and impartial advice is, of course, the *raison d'être* of those CABx and other advice agencies discussed here. For public libraries, though, while the importance of information provision is unquestionable, the provision of advice is a somewhat thornier issue. Indeed, as has already been stated, during the late 1970s and early 1980s an interesting debate arose as to whether the public library, in providing a community/citizenship information service, should simply ensure the information is made available to the public, or should become involved in providing advice, counselling or advocacy. As Allan Bunch (1988) has explained, opinions were decidedly mixed: while some public librarians felt it was impossible to separate information from advice, others believed that libraries should retain a passive role. Moore and Steele (1991) observed that this debate led to a general consensus that public libraries should concentrate on the provision of factual information and on referral, rather than on the provision of an advice service.

In the vast majority of the case study libraries this is certainly the case, due largely to a lack of specialised knowledge, plus fears of possible repercussions should unsuitable advice be given. The one exception is in the Sheffield Information Service - a section of Sheffield Libraries and Information Services based on the ground floor of the Central Library. It consists of three services: a reception service for Sheffield Libraries and Information Services; a city-wide information resource centre which gathers and distributes information on, for example, local clubs and organisations, city council services, statutory agencies and services, and further and adult education; and, most importantly in terms of this project, a generalist advice centre where trained staff provide information and advice on everyday problems including welfare rights, employment, housing, and family and personal matters. In the other twelve library authorities, meanwhile, the extent of and approach to citizenship information provision is somewhat varied, and this will be discussed in greater detail below.

#### **Other services**

In addition to providing information and advice to members of the public at their premises, most of the CABx and other advice agencies carry out home visits to housebound clients, although these are naturally restricted by geographic area and, as they are open to abuse, are generally not widely publicised. One bureau, in a predominantly rural area, also carries out visits to people who are not necessarily housebound but who live in remote locations with no public transport; again this service is not publicised. Amongst the library authorities, both Camden Libraries' Home Library Service and Newcastle Libraries' Housebound Readers Service can bring community information to the homes of housebound local residents.

Most of the CABx and other agencies also carry out representation work for clients at various courts and tribunals. These include Social Security Appeal Tribunals, Employment Appeal Tribunals, Disability Appeal Tribunals, Medical Appeal Tribunals, Industrial Tribunals, Immigration Appeals, Criminal Injuries Compensation Boards, Small Claims Courts, and Housing Benefit Review Boards.

## **Staff**

Each of the CABx and other advice agencies visited have paid full-time and part-time (or job-share) management, administrative and advice staff, although these vary greatly in number depending on the size of the organisation. The Aberystwyth and District CAB and the Langsett Advice and Area Resource Centre, for example, have just two paid part-time workers each, while the Manchester CABx Service has a total of 52 staff in its nine bureaux. In many cases these staff are augmented by paid project workers, on fixed-term contracts, funded by external bodies. For example, Central Belfast CAB has two money advice workers funded originally by the Allied Dunbar Charitable Trust and subsequently by Northern Ireland Electricity; and the Orrell Park Advice Centre has two disability rights workers on three-year contracts funded by the National Lottery Charities Board.

Most of the CABx and advice agencies also rely heavily on the services of unpaid volunteers, for advice work and, to a lesser extent, for administrative duties. Indeed, of the 28,000 people in the CAB service in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 90% are volunteers (NACAB, 1996). A recurring problem encountered throughout the agencies visited, particularly the CABx, was that of attracting, and retaining, volunteer staff. Most reported a high staff turnover and a current deficit in volunteer numbers: the Manchester CABx Service, for instance, requires around 200 volunteers, each working 2 days a week, to be fully functional, but actual volunteer numbers are currently closer to the 130 mark. One commonly cited reason for this high turnover was that employers hold CAB training and work experience in high esteem, and that many volunteers therefore use CAB work as a career 'stepping-stone'. There are mixed feelings about this phenomenon amongst CAB managers: whilst some find it decidedly frustrating, others are more positive, believing that ex-volunteers can usefully promote the CAB service or become important contacts, should they go on to work in other information and advice services or in, say, the voluntary sector.

With the exception of the Sheffield Information Service, which has a team of 11 full-time and 1 part-time staff to provide community information and advice, there are no dedicated community/citizenship information staff in the library authorities visited. Instead, community information services are coordinated by staff whose job descriptions encompass more general responsibilities; the job titles of these staff include Aberdeenshire's Information Services Librarian, Liverpool's Coordinator for Information and Development Services, and Somerset's Assistant County Librarian (Information Services). In three authorities - Aberdeenshire, Birmingham and Newcastle upon Tyne - reviews of community information provision were currently taking place, and therefore the appropriate staff were devoting more time to this area than might normally be expected.

## **Staff training**

CABx advisers throughout the UK all complete a basic training programme, devised by NACAB (and, in Scotland, CAS) and administered at regional and area levels. The programme covers the aims and principles of the CAB service, and looks at subjects such as benefits, housing, and consumer and debt issues; it also covers skills such as interviewing and case recording. While all of the case study CABx participate in this programme, the Manchester CABx Service has developed its own programme as a supplement; this looks at various topics, but has a particular emphasis on welfare benefits issues. Increasingly, NACAB and CAS offer specialist training courses which examine areas as diverse as advocacy and representation, employment law and income tax self-assessment, and all of the case study bureaux have participated in these. Interestingly, NACAB has recently

undertaken a review of its training, which has developed into the Competency in Advice Giving Project - a plan to give CAB workers an externally accredited qualification that will parallel National Vocational Qualifications in advice work (NACAB, 1997). Most of the case study CABs have also taken part in external training courses, organised by national organisations such as Shelter (on housing issues) and the Equal Opportunities Commission (on equal opportunities law), or by local organisations or representative groups. For example, staff from Aberystwyth CAB have attended courses on disability benefits run by the Swansea Welfare Rights Group, while Aberdeen CAB staff have taken part in courses on employment issues organised by the Scottish Employment Rights Network.

The training provision in the other advice agencies is largely a mixture of in-house programmes and on-the-job training. The West Somerset Advice Bureau, for instance, operates an induction course similar to that of NACAB, with self-learning modules on welfare benefits, housing, employment, taxation, etc.; while the Byker Project operates a basic introductory course focusing on welfare rights, devised by its paid Advice/Volunteer Support Worker, himself a former CAB worker. Some make use of external training courses, although financial restrictions can limit these opportunities: Langsett Centre staff attend sessions organised by the Sheffield Advice Centre Groups, a network of local information and advice agencies and community and voluntary organisations; GRAIN participates in a range of courses offered by the Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations; while the Orrell Park Centre takes advantage of free training offered by Liverpool City Council.

It is perhaps fair to say that, in the majority of the case study library authorities, training in community/citizenship information provision does not receive much specific attention. The tendency instead is to include an introduction to what might be termed community/citizenship information sources and enquiry work during their basic staff induction programmes, and also to rely on on-the-job training. Most of the library authorities also have a rolling training programme and some of them will occasionally cover community/citizenship information issues. Camden, for example, has run sessions on using their community information database; while Somerset (who carried out extensive training when their community information collections were established in the early 1990s, and still runs refresher courses when required) has organised events at which representatives of CABs, social services, health authorities, employment services etc. have discussed their services and the information resources they hold. Liverpool, meanwhile, has a community information skills module as part of their in-house information skills training package. Most significantly, though, staff at the Sheffield Information Service attend the Sheffield Advice Centre Groups' (SACG) training courses, which include sessions on welfare benefits, council tax, housing and debt, as well as interviewing, advocacy and negotiating skills. Sheffield are not charged for this training, but instead make payment 'in kind' by providing SACG members with information from their various databases.

### **Staff with ethnic minority language and sign language skills**

The case study organisations are located throughout the length and breadth of the UK and, as such, serve areas with varying concentrations of ethnic minority groups. Some areas such as Aberdeenshire and Somerset have relatively few residents from minority groups, and therefore the organisations located there feel little real need to employ staff with particular minority language skills to provide citizenship information and advice. Although interestingly, Aberdeen CAB has recently recruited more volunteers from ethnic minority groups, and has found that the number of clients from minority groups has also risen, due, it is believed, to this news being quickly spread throughout their close-knit communities.

Some areas contain perhaps only one or two concentrated populations of particular ethnic groups, and the case study organisations within these areas have had to decide whether their presence and level of use of the service requires the employment of staff with special language skills. For example, Peterborough and District CAB have an Italian-speaking welfare rights adviser who deals with the large local Italian community; however, the two Belfast organisations feel no real need to employ staff specifically to deal with the local Chinese community, particularly as they tend to obtain information and advice from a local Chinese Welfare Society instead. Some case study organisations with little or no minority language provision find that clients with little or no English will bring English-speaking family or friends to help them translate their problems and needs; while others have used, or at least are aware of the potential to use, their local council's translation and interpretation service.

A number of the case study organisations serve areas with high concentrations of minority groups and have found it essential to employ staff with special language skills. The St. James Centre in Birmingham has staff who speak Punjabi, Mirpuri, Bengali, Sylheti, Hindi, Gujarati and Urdu; while staff at the Turnpike Lane Advice Bureau in London speak Amharic, Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, French, Greek, Somali and Turkish. Manchester Central Library contains a Chinese Library, with community information available in both Chinese and English; and Liverpool Libraries have a Multiracial Library Promotions Unit, whose aims and objectives include "to investigate the library and information needs of Liverpool's Black community" (Liverpool Libraries & Information Services, 1997). Sheffield Libraries have had, since 1992, four posts working specifically to raise awareness and improve accessibility to information for the local Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Chinese and Afro-Caribbean communities. When first established, these posts worked closely with various advice centres in the city with the aim of creating community/citizenship information networks. While their roles are now slightly different, they still undertake work of this kind should specific information needs be identified: for example, they recently worked on providing better information on catering hygiene to the local Asian communities.

In the two Welsh organisations visited, the provision of information and advice in the Welsh language is an increasingly important issue. Ceredigion County Council has a bilingual policy, and council minutes and agendas, as well as leaflets from central government departments and agencies, are available in both English and Welsh. The vast majority of staff in the Ceredigion library service speak Welsh, and the Aberystwyth and District CAB has around 10 Welsh speakers. With regard to other indigenous languages in the UK, it should perhaps be noted that in the area of Scotland surveyed - the North East of Scotland - Scottish Gaelic is not a particularly prominent language; while in Belfast, although there is an increasing interest in the Irish language, this tends to focus on literature and does not yet impinge on citizenship information provision.

On a similar theme, a small minority of case study organisations have staff with basic British Sign Language skills. The others are generally able to call upon the assistance of external organisations and individuals, should a need arise. Manchester CABx Service, for instance, can take advantage, free of charge, of a Manchester City Council contract with sign language interpreters; while Aberdeen CAB have a useful contact with sign language skills in a nearby voluntary organisation.



### **3.4.3 Types of citizenship enquiries received**

Only two of the case study library authorities could offer any kind of statistical information on the frequency and type of community/citizenship enquiries received.

During 1996-97, the generalist advice service of the Sheffield Information Service dealt with 3,191 advice enquiries, broken down into the NACAB Information System categories: Social Security (29.5%), Consumer, Trade and Business (18.3%), Housing, Property and Land (14.3%), Employment (10.2%), Family and Personal (10.2%), Administration of Justice (5.9%), Debt (3.1%), Taxes and Duties (2.3%), Travel, Transport and Holidays (1.4%), Human Rights and National and International Structures (1.3%), Education (1.0%), Health (0.9%), Immigration and Nationality (0.9%), Communications (0.6%) and Leisure (0.1%).

Leicestershire Libraries and Information Service, meanwhile, provided details of a survey of all information enquiries received in their libraries during one week in March 1994. Of the 4,172 enquiries made that week, 14.9% were for local information, 8.0% for tourist/travel, 4.1% for education/careers, 2.3% for 'Help!' information (i.e. on disability, health, welfare rights, immigration, etc.) and 1.7% for information on the local council.

The other library authorities, though, had no mechanism for recording these types of enquiry and could therefore only offer impressionistic rather than real data. The point was made that many of the community information collections are of the 'self-help' kind, therefore it is difficult to accurately gauge the extent and nature of their use. There was widespread agreement that information on educational opportunities and issues, employment opportunities and careers, and local council information were the most popular topics. Legal, environmental and health care information were also prominent. There were fewer, but still significant, demands for information on leisure and recreation, national government, welfare benefits, the European Union, transport, consumer issues, housing, family/personal matters, taxation, and health and safety.

Enquiries in all UK CABx, meanwhile, are systematically recorded under a uniform set of subject headings, and those of six of the case study bureaux, together with national figures, can be seen in Table 75.

<i>Table 75: Categories of problems brought to case study CABx - % of totals (1996/97 unless otherwise stated)</i>							
Categories	Bureaux (and total number of enquiries received)						UK-wide <sup>2</sup> (6,956,459)
	Aberdeen <sup>1</sup>	Aberystwyth (7,943)	Brighton (12,431)	Charnwood (35,307)	Manchester (75,572)	Peterboro <sup>2</sup> (42,243)	
Benefits	13.0	20.8	26.5	17.8	40.2	19.4	28.8
Consumer & Credit (inc. utilities)	42.0	23.5	13.5	23.8	19.9	31.7	17.0
Employment	13.0	8.6	10.9	14.8	6.4	16.4	10.2
Housing	8.0	12.4	16.2	10.3	10.0	8.6	11.0
Legal	7.0	8.6	10.1	7.9	7.0	13.1 <sup>3</sup>	9.5
Relationships	5.0	6.8	8.0	9.3	3.5		7.6
Taxes	7.0	3.9	3.2	5.1	5.3	2.1	3.9
Other <sup>4</sup>	5.0	15.2	11.8	11.1	7.7	8.7	12.0

1. 1997-98 figures

2. 1995-96 figures

3. Combined total for Legal and Relationships

4. 'Other' includes: Community Care, Education, Health, Immigration, Nationality, Miscellaneous and Signposting.

Meanwhile, the top six categories of enquiry at the five bureaux in the Belfast Group of CABx, in the five year period between 1990-94, were: Social Security (48%), Consumer (15%), Other (15%), Housing (9%), Personal (7%), and Justice (6%).

As can be seen, welfare benefits and consumer issues (largely consumer debt) are the two biggest categories nationally, and that in the majority of case study bureaux they also occupy the top two places. The two exceptions are Aberdeen, where employment issues are on an equal footing with benefits information, and Brighton, where housing replaces consumer matters as the second most important issue. While benefits is by far the biggest national category, consumer/debt problems are ranked first in the Aberdeen, Aberystwyth, Charnwood and Peterborough bureaux.

While two of the other advice agencies use the NACAB/CAS categories for statistical analysis, the others have developed their own subject headings. As a result, it is not possible to present this information in tabular form. The enquiry statistics of each agency, where available, are therefore simply listed below. Again, welfare benefits and consumer/debt are the most prominent issues, although housing problems obviously form an important part of the Orrell Park Advice Centre's work; while at the St. James Centre in Birmingham (which, as already stated, is used largely by the local Sylheti and Mirpuri communities) immigration matters form a major part of the workload.

**Byker Advice and Information Project 1996-97** (1,432 enquiries)

Benefits (61.2%), Consumer (7.7%), Employment (2.4%), Housing (7.1%), Legal (3.3%), Relationship (1.5%), Taxation (3.8%), Utilities (2.3%), Other (10.7%)

### **Charnwood Community Council Information Centre 1995-96**

Dealt with 36,852 enquiries, but no breakdown available.

### **Gordon Rural Action and Information Network 1997-98**

The three GRAIN advice centres dealt with a total of 6,666 enquiries. No detailed breakdown was available, although welfare benefits and money advice were the two main topics encountered.

### **Langsett Advice and Area Resource Centre 1996-97 (6,672 enquiries)**

Benefits (43.5%), Consumer and Debt (11.3%), Housing (10.2%), Local Information (9.9%), Taxes and Duties (6.0%), Legal Advice (4.5%), Employment (3.2%), Family and Personal (2.9%), Health (2.1%), Travel, Transport and Holidays (1.7%), Family and Community Services Queries (1.5%), Education (1.0%), Local and Central Government (0.8%), Immigration and Nationality (0.7%), Communications (0.5%), Leisure (0.2%)

### **Orrell Park Advice Centre 1996-97 (4,102 enquiries)**

Welfare Benefits (34.5%), Housing (17.1%), Referrals (13.8%), Appeals and Reviews (11.3%), Debt (5.6%), Employment (3.7%), Consumer (3.1%), Legal (1.6%), Miscellaneous (9.1%)

### **St. James Community Support & Advice Centre 1995-96 (ca 13,700 enquiries)**

Welfare Benefits (41.2%), Immigration (28.8%), Debt (12.5%), Housing (7.5%), Legal (5.0%), Miscellaneous (3.7%), Personal (1.2%)

### **Turnpike Lane Advice Bureau**

No figures available.

### **West Somerset Advice Bureau 1996-97 (5,936 enquiries)**

Benefits (40.6%), Consumer (13.8%), Employment (7.0%), Housing (11.3%), Legal (9.4%), Relationship (5.8%), Tax (3.4%), Utilities (2.3%), Other (6.3%)

## **3.4.4 Public's preferred methods of contacting service and obtaining information**

Few organisations could provide anything other than impressionistic data regarding the ways in which the public make their enquiries.

Leicestershire Libraries, as part of their 1994 survey of all information enquiries, found that 83% of enquiries were made in person, 16% by telephone, and 1% by letter or fax.

In 1996-97, Aberystwyth and District CAB found that 58.0% of their clients made contact in person, 34.7% by telephone, 7.3% by letter, and just 0.1% by fax/other. These are remarkably close to national figures for 1995-96, which indicated that 54% of users made contact in person, 36% by telephone, 7% by letter, 1% by fax, 1% by home visit, and 1% by representation at a court or tribunal (NACAB, 1996).

The West Somerset Advice Bureau, meanwhile, found that 60.6% of their clients in 1996-97 were personal callers, 35.8% used the telephone, 2.2% made contact by letter, 1.1% were visited at home, and 0.3% made contact during representation at a tribunal.

The trend was similar in the other organisations, with the majority of enquiries made in person, a smaller but significant proportion made by telephone (greater in the CABx and

other agencies than in the libraries), and a small number by letter or fax. The one exception appeared to be Peterborough and District CAB, where it was estimated that the number of telephone enquiries was equal to the number of personal callers. Indeed, in a number of the CABx it was suggested that the number of telephone enquiries could potentially be far greater than it currently is; however, bureaux often simply do not have the staff to answer telephone enquiries *and* deal with personal callers. In fact, the Central Belfast CAB is taking the step of reducing its opening hours to personal callers by 50% so that it can deal more adequately with telephone enquiries.

Interestingly the Manchester CAB Service, in a 1995 user survey, asked 239 users their preferred way of getting advice from the CAB, if they were given a choice. The vast majority (97%) said they would prefer face-to-face contact with someone, with 51% preferring a personal visit with an appointment, 40% preferring to drop in to the CAB and wait their turn, and 6% preferring a home visit. Only 2% of respondents said they would prefer to contact the CAB by telephone, while writing a letter was the choice of just 0.5%.

The general feeling amongst staff in the organisations visited was that face-to-face contact was indeed the public's preferred method of obtaining information and advice:

*'People prefer a face-to-face interview with a person who appears to be listening to what they're saying. Even if we haven't done anything for them...the mere fact we've listened without butting in or being judgemental, and then shown them information in plain English explaining that what they'd been told 'officially' was correct, then they go away happy. Obviously the ones we can help are even more grateful. I think people still prefer to see someone face-to-face, taking their time, and getting the opportunity to ask questions.'*

*'If someone has quite a complex problem I think they do prefer a face-to-face interview, and they like to know that somebody's taking the time to listen to them, and to look up the information.'*

Telephone contact was perceived as a less popular method, but extremely useful if the client/user wished to retain his/her anonymity:

*'Sometimes I think people phone us in preference to calling in, because they want to be anonymous - which is perfectly okay, we don't pressurise people to give us their names. Sometimes I'm amazed how much personal and intimate information people will give over the phone to a complete stranger, but I guess that's because it's easy to do it to a complete stranger. It's much harder to confide something like that to somebody you know well.'*

It was also indicated that telephone contact was preferred by those with access problems, in terms of either geography or physical disability. Interestingly one CAB, when conducting a recent community profile, found that more women used the telephone service than visited the CAB in person. As the (female) adviser indicated:

*'I tend to find women's telephone enquiries concern relationships and sensitive stuff. I think most ladies would say the telephone's our first port of call - you can be totally anonymous.'*

Whilst telephone contact might be preferred by some users, the staff of the CABx and other advice agencies feel a more thorough job can be done if the users visit in person:

*'A lot of our enquiries are by phone. This isn't good, because we'd prefer to meet the client. In some instances we'd do half of it by phone then advise them to come in and bring their paperwork with them, so we could sit down and talk them through it.'*

*'If it's a telephone call you can't really guarantee that the information you're getting is accurate, so sometimes it's easier to get somebody in with their papers or books to check that what they're saying is accurate.'*

Similarly, whilst advice staff acknowledge that there are members of the public who would prefer to simply take away a leaflet, this is discouraged, as it is felt that simple leaflets may fail to meet the users' actual needs, which might be more fully explored with a face-to-face interview:

*'Sometimes they say they want a leaflet on redundancy, but if you actually talk to them they might have a case for unfair dismissal, and they might not know that by reading a leaflet...'*

### **3.4.5 Citizenship information sources and arrangement**

For the CABx visited, the NACAB Information System is by far the most important information source. Updated monthly by staff in the central offices of NACAB and CAS, the information system consists of some 12,000 pages arranged within the following basic subject headings:-

- |                                 |                                  |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Communications               | 8. Family and Personal           |
| 2. Travel, Transport & Holidays | 9. Social Security               |
| 3. Immigration & Nationality    | 10. Health                       |
| 4. Administration of Justice    | 11. Housing, Property and Land   |
| 5. Education                    | 12. Taxes and Duties             |
| 6. Employment                   | 13. Consumer, Trade and Business |
| 7. National and International   | 14. Leisure                      |

This is supplemented by a range of textbooks and other sources, some provided along with the Information System by NACAB and CAS, others purchased individually by the bureaux. Among the more useful sources cited were the National Council for Voluntary Organisations' *Voluntary Agencies Directory*, and the Institute of Development Studies' *Policy Briefings*; however, a mainstay for all bureaux are the Child Poverty Action Group handbooks, such as the *Child Support Handbook*, the *Council Tax Handbook*, the *Debt Advice Handbook*, and the *Jobseeker's Allowance Handbook*. Local information, particularly contact details for local groups and societies, is also important.

Of the other, generalist advice agencies, four - the West Somerset Advice Bureau, the Langsett Centre, the Byker Project, and GRAIN - subscribe to the NACAB/CAS Information System. Although, at the time of writing, GRAIN is to be severely affected by a CAS decision to withdraw its information system from non-CAB advice agencies throughout Scotland in March 1999, unless they apply to become a CAB. (Interestingly, a similar proposal for the rest of the UK was rejected by NACAB on the grounds that it could compromise their grant from the Department of Trade and Industry). While the Federation of Independent Advice Centres (of which GRAIN is a member) is currently developing its own information system, this will not be ready by March 1999, leaving GRAIN somewhat short of information to support its advice service. Other useful sources cited by the generalist agencies include the Department of Social Security's *Adjudication Officers' Guide*, and the

Social Security and Child Support Commissioners' *Commissioners' Decisions*; and all of the agencies also rely heavily on the Child Poverty Action Group handbooks. Some also subscribe to journals and magazines such as *The Adviser*, *Counterclaim*, *Money Advice* and the *Welfare Rights Bulletin*; while all agencies also maintain files of local information.

With the exception of Sheffield Central Library, which has its own discrete advice service complete with enquiry desk and interview cubicles, the central libraries in the case study authorities can be divided into two distinct groups: those whose citizenship/community information materials are dispersed throughout the library's standard classified sequence, and those who have gathered together these materials to produce a distinct community information collection. The first group comprises Belfast, Ceredigion, Manchester and Newcastle (although it should also be noted that Sheffield, in addition to its advice service, has citizenship sources scattered throughout its reference libraries), while the second group consists of the remaining authorities. The second group can be further sub-divided into those authorities whose collection consists of reference and/or lending copies of monographs and leaflets/pamphlets (Birmingham, Cambridgeshire, Camden and Leicestershire), and those whose collection is almost entirely leaflet/pamphlet based (Aberdeenshire, Brighton and Hove, Liverpool and Somerset). These collections are located in a general reference library except in Birmingham (Social Sciences Library), Camden (Lending Library) and Liverpool (where it used to be in the Commercial library, but where there are now plans to locate it just inside the Central Library's front entrance). With the exception of Ceredigion, all authorities also have small, basic community/citizenship information collections in their branch/community libraries; these are often simply leaflet-based.

In those authorities with distinct community information collections, the tendency has been to create their own subject arrangements, rather than use a parallel sequence of the standard classification. Three examples are provided below.

Birmingham's Community Information section:-

Your rights and the Law	Young people
Welfare benefits	Retirement & Elderly
Employment	Race & Immigration
Health & Safety	Consumer affairs
Transport & Travel	Disability
Personal Finance	Voluntary organisations
Housing	Women
Family & Personal	

Leicestershire's 'Help!' collections:-

Community Action	Over 60s
Consumer Advice	Personal & Family
Disability & Handicap	Race relations
Environment	Unemployment
Health	Welfare rights
Housing & Property	Women
Immigration	Work
Law & Civil rights	Young people
Money	

Somerset's Community Information section:-

Children and Young People	Health & Safety
Consumer Information	Housing and the Environment
Education	Legal Matters
Employment	Leisure and Sport
Finance	Local information

Two of the library authorities - Birmingham and Sheffield - subscribe to the NACAB Information System (at a current start-up cost of £1070, plus £840 p.a. updating subscription), while several subscribe to NACAB's Basic Pack (a condensed version of the Information System, costing £104 to set up, plus an £81 p.a. updating subscription) and/or the National Council for Voluntary Organisations' *Citizens Advice Notes Service (CANS)*. The range of monographs and textbooks held by the library authorities is too diverse to discuss here; however, among the more useful sources cited were *Charities Digest*, *The Civil Service Year Book*, *Croner's Employment Law*, *The Directory of British Associations*, *Dod's Parliamentary Companion*, and *Whitaker's Almanack*. The Child Poverty Action Group titles were again considered invaluable.

The range of leaflets/pamphlets held in the library authorities' community information collections is equally diverse, ranging from those produced by central government departments/agencies and national organisations, such as the Benefits Agency, the Department of the Environment, the Press Complaints Commission and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, to those produced by local groups and organisations, such as the Cambridgeshire Mediation Service and the Sheffield Drug Action Team. Seven of the case study authorities subscribe to Camden Information Service's Free Leaflet Information Service (FLIS) - a national service which provides information about the availability of free self-help information leaflets, and which identifies new titles, new editions, and old titles requiring withdrawal (Indeed, at September 1997, 85 UK library authorities were subscribing to this service, at a cost of £190 p.a.). In addition to those authorities with reference collections of leaflets, all of the case study authorities have community/citizenship information leaflets dispersed throughout their buildings for users to take away, as indeed do all of the case study organisations.

A number of the library authorities, in addition to their community information collections, have special collections which can certainly be described as containing citizenship information, some of them established with funding by, or in partnership with, external organisations. A selection of examples is presented here.

Newcastle, in partnership with Tyneside Careers, have an Educational Guidance Unit, containing prospectuses, careers guidebooks and directories etc, which also hosts public drop-in sessions with careers service workers; Cambridgeshire has a similar arrangement with Cambridgeshire Careers Guidance. Camden has a 'Drugs: the facts' section, established in partnership with the Home Office Drugs Prevention Initiative. Birmingham, Cambridgeshire and Somerset have environmental information collections; Birmingham has an HIV/AIDS collection; while Somerset has a Disability Resources section containing information on medical conditions, services and equipment, and discrimination. The majority of authorities have open learning collections.

Four authorities - Cambridgeshire, Camden, Leicestershire and Somerset - have what might generically be called council information points, containing local council minutes, agendas, reports, plans, and information on council services. Two of Somerset's points, in Burnham

and Frome libraries, have enquiry desks manned by council staff; while the Cambridgeshire and Camden equivalents have courtesy telephones (and in Cambridgeshire, a fax machine also) with which users can make free calls to local council departments. Liverpool Central Library has a Municipal Research Library Service which provides information, research and current awareness on local government issues; whilst aimed primarily at local authorities and councillors, it can also be used as a resource to answer enquiries from the public.

### **3.4.6 Electronic sources and use of ICTs**

Amongst the case study CABx, whilst the use of Information and Communication Technologies for administrative purposes is commonplace, their use for information retrieval and provision is less so. Aberdeen CAB and Aberystwyth and District CAB use software packages that calculate benefits entitlements, including the Imperial College School of Medicine's *Lisson Grove Benefits Program*. Aberdeen also has access to the *Grampian CareData* database of local health, social services and community information, and has a small number of CD-ROM sources, including a health information disc produced by the Health Education Board for Scotland.

However, Manchester CABx Service has been to the forefront of technological developments in CABx, and, in 1995, was the first UK CAB to have its own Web site. Through this site, users can access an *Update* bulletin board containing new items on legislative changes taken from NACAB's monthly *Update* publication; as well as a searchable *Citizen-Advice* database containing all news items previously available on the bulletin board. All Manchester bureaux now have an e-mail address, and the Blackley CAB is currently taking part in a pilot scheme which allows members of the public to submit basic enquiries by e-mail, with priority being given to those from the Manchester area. The Blackley and Harpurhey bureaux contain terminals with access to community information (i.e. job vacancies, training courses, council services, health services, details of voluntary organisations, etc) provided by the Manchester Community Information Network, an alliance of local information providers including the City Council, CABx and other advice agencies, health centres and voluntary organisations; although public use is always supervised and aided by an adviser. (Indeed, because of fears of theft and vandalism, many of the CABx and other agencies felt it unlikely that they would ever have public access ICTs left unattended in their waiting rooms, or that they would even openly advertise the existence of ICTs in their buildings). The Manchester CABx Service has also played a key role in developing the Electronic Immigration Network, a web-based source launched in 1998, which aims to link major information providers with advice workers and practitioners dealing with all issues relating to immigration, refugee and nationality law and practice in the UK.

Meanwhile, with the aid of £250,000 from European Union Structural Funds, all bureaux in Northern Ireland, including of course the Belfast Group of CABx, now have hardware and software which allow advisers to access an electronic version of the Information System, a statistical recording system, a case recording and management system, a distributed bulletin board system and a bureau-to-bureau e-mail system. The new system has not been without its teething troubles, however, and as access is limited to two computers in each bureau, advisers still rely heavily on the paper copy of the Information System. At a national level, having already had a bid for Millennium Commission funds rejected, NACAB are hopeful that their CABnet 2000 project will eventually become a reality. This project aims to network the CAB service throughout the UK and introduce an electronic version of the Information System. NACAB have since developed a proposal for public/private partnership funding, and an electronic version is currently being piloted, on CD-ROM, in bureaux throughout the country.



In the generalist advice agencies, the situation is similar to that in the CABx, with ICTs being used largely for administrative work. Both the Byker Project and the Langsett Centre have their own basic web pages; while the Charnwood Community Council has had a major role in developing the *Charnwood Online* web site, which contains links to local councils, educational establishments, clubs and societies etc., as well as a searchable *CHAIN* (Charnwood Information Network) database of local voluntary and community groups. The West Somerset Advice Bureau uses a *Ferret* program for calculating welfare benefit entitlement, and a financial statement program, written by one of its own debt counsellors, for use with debt clients.

In the public libraries, meanwhile, the most common use of ICTs for community/citizenship information provision is for what might generically be called the community information database, compiled either by the library authority itself or at a corporate level. Brighton and Hove (*ESCIS*, i.e. East Sussex Community Information Service), Cambridgeshire (*INFOCAM*), Camden (*Cindex*), Leicestershire (*Infolinx*), Manchester (*INFORM*), Newcastle (*Metronet*), Sheffield (*Community Resource*), and Somerset (*Community Information System*) all have such a database. These can be on stand-alone systems or integrated in the library's OPAC. At the simplest level, they contain details of local societies and organisations; at the more detailed level, they also contain information on, for example, training opportunities, local council services, tourist information, health information, and information on benefits and entitlements.

Five of the library authorities have Training and Enterprise Councils' *Training Access Points* in a number of their service points; these contain information on training and education opportunities. Leicestershire and Sheffield have CASCAID's *Adult Directions* program, which suggests careers based on the user's work and personal interests, and chosen occupational level. Sheffield has an environmental information database at its Upperthorpe Library, while its Central Library has the *FunderFinder* program, which identifies charitable funding opportunities. Somerset has the *DissBASE* database, produced by the Somerset Disability Information Federation, which contains both local and national disability information; while Manchester's Crumpsall and Moston Libraries have terminals with access to the Manchester Community Information Network databases described above. Aberdeenshire's HQ hosts the administrative team who compile the aforementioned *Grampian CareData* database, and terminals with copies of the database are available in each of its 36 branch libraries.

Seven of the authorities have public Internet access, while a number of the others are currently in the process of introducing the same. Use of these terminals, however, is not monitored in any great detail, so the extent to which the public use them to obtain citizenship information is not known. Cambridgeshire, though, provides a public access terminal specifically linked to the *Cambridge Online City* web site, which itself contains community information and links to information, advice and support agencies. Manchester, meanwhile, is part of the European Commission funded TARDIS research project aimed at enabling people to obtain information from touch-screen kiosks in public places. Both Manchester's Central Library and Wythenshawe Library host these *MAGIC* (Manchester Gateway to Information for the Community) *TOUCH* kiosks. As well as community information from Manchester Community Information Network, the kiosks will allow access to a range of web-based sources, including *WorkWeb* (a job search site), news and sport from the Press Association, and entertainment pages from Virgin Net. At the time of the case study visit, however, Manchester Central Library was having significant problems with the system, which was prone to 'freezing'.

Two of the libraries are making interesting use of videotelephony technology. Newcastle's Educational Guidance Unit contains a Virtual Careers Centre which, as well as providing career-choice software, allows remote access via videotelephony technology to a Tyneside Careers adviser. Camden, meanwhile, is taking part in the EU-funded TeleCommunity project. Three videotelephony links, in Holborn, Kentish Town and Swiss Cottage libraries allow people with hearing difficulties to access information about council services by interacting with an information officer with sign-language skills based at St. Pancras Library, who will answer queries and interpret between enquirers and service providers.

### **3.4.7 Production of citizenship information materials**

A significant minority of the case study organisations have produced their own citizenship information materials. In the library authorities the trend has been to produce resources based on the contents of their community information databases. Camden produces lists taken from their *Cindex* database, including *Camden Councillors' Advice Surgeries, Housing Associations and Co-operatives in Camden, Refugees in Camden* and *Women's Health in Camden*; Sheffield publishes a *Help Yourself* directory of voluntary agencies, taken from their *Community Resource* database; Leicestershire, in collaboration with Charnwood Community Council, produces lists such as *Disability Organisations for Charnwood* and *Self Help and Support Groups for People in Charnwood*; while Ceredigion publishes a *List of Clubs and Societies in Ceredigion*. Sheffield also publish titles aimed at local ethnic minority communities, including the *Sheffield Chinese & Vietnamese Directory* and the *Sheffield Pakistani Directory*; these provide details, in English and the appropriate minority language(s), of local representative groups and information and advice agencies.

With regard to the CABx and other agencies, a small number have produced self-help information packs on particular topics. West Somerset Advice Bureau has produced packs on debt and starting your own business; Brighton CAB has also produced one on debt; and Peterborough and District CAB has produced packs on a range of topics, including alcohol abuse, maternity, and funding for voluntary groups. A number have produced leaflets/pamphlets on particular topics: Aberdeen CAB has published items on bankruptcy and protected trust deeds; GRAIN has published a pamphlet on welfare benefits eligibility; and Manchester CABx Service produced a series of *Good Parenting* leaflets (also available on its web site) as part of a special Parent Advice project. Manchester CAB also produced an information leaflet in response to the IRA bombing of central Manchester in 1996, which covered issues such as insurance, personal injury and loss of employment as a result of the explosion.

### **3.4.8 User studies and studies of information needs**

Only a small number of the case study organisations have conducted recent surveys of their users and/or their citizenship/community information needs.

The Manchester CABx Service carried out a user survey in 1995 (of 239 people) and found a female-male ratio of 43%-57%. With regard to age group, 10% were aged 16-24, 40.5% were 25-44, 25% were 45-59, and 24% were aged 60 or over; just 0.5% were under 16. 35% were sick or disabled, 17% were looking for work, and 14% were carers. 39% lived alone, and 15% were single parents. 23% were from an ethnic minority group. 50% lived in council housing. Respondents were asked to think about their own needs, and suggest improvements to the CAB service. While 46% said no improvements were necessary, 17.4% wanted additional advice sessions in, for example, surgeries and community centres, 17%

requested child care/crèche facilities, 11% wanted better physical access, 5% asked for information in Braille, large print or audio tape, 3% required a language interpreter, a further 3% wanted materials in other languages, and 3% asked for a signer or induction loop.

Interestingly, the Manchester survey also included some questions on the potential use of ICTs. Respondents were asked where they would like public information kiosks with easy-to-use screens to be set up. The top responses were: libraries 47%, CABx/advice centres 38%, shopping malls 38%, doctors' surgeries 36%, supermarkets 30%, bus station 24%, neighbourhood centres 23%, community centres 20% and town hall 20%. When asked if they would expect to pay anything for using the screen, 69% said they would not.

The Byker Project, meanwhile, conducted a Client Group Survey in 1995 and discovered a female-male ratio of 53%-47%. All of its clients were white, with 13% aged under 24, and 17% aged 65 and over. 70% were on benefit and 55% in receipt of Income Support. Less than 10% were in full-time work, while 2% were in part-time work. 34% were unemployed, 30% saw themselves as long-term sick, and 20% were retired. 27% were disabled, and 22% were single mothers. Some 83% lived in council rented accommodation, and 67% had come to the Project seeking advice on benefits.

Birmingham Libraries conducted a survey of 1,309 Central Library adult users in 1995. Of these, 44% said they were "looking for information". When asked about the reasons for their visit, 53.8% said they were using the library for education and study, 36% for leisure, 14.3% for hobbies and personal pursuits, and 4% for help in finding work.

As part of its 1994 survey of information enquiries received in their libraries, Leicestershire Libraries staff *estimated* that around 13% of their enquiries were from people aged under 17, with a total of 39% of enquirers being under 24; in contrast just 9% of users of the information service were 'elderly people'. It discovered that 22.9% of all information enquiries were related to an academic study or school project. On comparing age group with the nature of the enquiry, it was found that young people most frequently requested information on education and careers; information on local studies and travel/tourism was more popular with older users; while business information featured most across the 'middle' age groups.

Somerset Libraries, as part of a plan to establish a West Somerset Information Network, were at the time of the visit about to embark on research of rural information needs. Charnwood Community Council, meanwhile, has been involved in a survey of the information needs of local voluntary organisations and community groups, as part of the Charnwood Online project

The other organisations could only provide impressionistic data on users and user needs. Although the Orrell Park Centre estimates that around 80% of its clients have some form of disability, and 90% of the St. James Advice Centre are from ethnic minority groups, most feel that their service is used by a cross-section of the population. Interestingly, five of the CABx and other agencies feel that their service is used least by the very young (i.e. aged 21 and under), perhaps because they prefer to go to organisations who specifically deal with young people's problems. In contrast, three of the library authorities feel that use of their community information collections is increasing amongst schoolchildren and students carrying out project work.

### **3.4.9 Social policy work and research**

All CABx in the UK network undertake what is termed social policy work, where advisers identify significant issues and problems brought into the bureaux and, using *evidence forms*, report these to NACAB and CAS. NACAB receives 2,000 of these evidence forms each month (NACAB, 1997) and these are used as the basis for its social policy reports and press activity. Amongst the case study bureaux, the topics identified and reported have included: problems with the Benefit Agency's telephone enquiry system, problems with British Gas' metering and billing procedures, and the lack of NHS dentists. Some bureaux have established their own social policy groups to identify, discuss and act upon local social policy issues. The Manchester CABx Social Policy Group, for example, has monitored the discretionary Social Fund, as a result of receiving large numbers of enquiries from clients who had been refused a payment. Their resultant report *Falling Through the Net* is available on the Manchester CABx Service website.

Some of the CABx have also occasionally participated in other, independent research projects. For example, Brighton CAB monitored incidences of domestic violence as part of research being conducted by Sussex University, while Peterborough and District CAB carried out similar work on behalf of a local Domestic Violence Forum. Manchester's Bradford CAB, along with the Greater Manchester Probation Service, was involved in research into the problems faced by parents of young offenders.

### **3.4.10 User satisfaction with citizenship information provision**

Studies of user satisfaction in the case study organisations are relatively rare. Birmingham Libraries examined user satisfaction as part of their 1995 user survey, and while this applied to the entire Central Library two of the resultant 'Areas for Action' impinge upon their citizenship information provision, namely that there should be increased promotion of relevant resources to independent learners, and to jobseekers and those interested in career development and training opportunities. Liverpool Libraries, meanwhile, hold regular user forums in their Central and Community libraries; while these can deal with any aspect of their service, the community information service, and in particular the range of leaflets held, has been discussed and acted upon.

None of the generalist advice agencies has carried out a user satisfaction survey. While one or two make comments/suggestions cards available, it is found that these are rarely filled in, for as one adviser observed: "*they've enough trouble with the official forms they've to fill in*". Instead, the most common measure of user satisfaction is the number of thank you cards and small gifts they receive from grateful clients.

Every 3 years, each CAB has to complete a Membership Review Report, for either NACAB and CAS, and this generally includes a survey which asks users for their impressions of, for example, the accessibility and comfort of the premises and the waiting time. However, due to doubts over whether these reports should be in the public domain, and to simple unavailability, only two bureaux could provide copies of these. The impression given, though, was that clients are generally very satisfied with the advice given, with the most common complaints being about the waiting time involved. The high level of satisfaction with advice given can be illustrated with the results of a recent survey, independent of the Membership Review scheme, conducted by Brighton CAB. In this survey, of 67 clients, 91% indicated the highest level of satisfaction with obtaining what they had entered the bureau for, 99% felt confident that the adviser was able to answer their query, 96% knew what

action to take after leaving the bureau, and 96% felt they would recommend the bureau to anyone with similar problems.

#### **3.4.11 Publicity, promotion and outreach work**

Amongst the case study library authorities, promotion of the community information service is largely restricted to basic publicity leaflets or posters displayed within their libraries. However, a number have held special exhibitions and displays on particular themes (e.g. adult education, health care information, drugs awareness) and have produced press releases and other promotional material for these events.

In the CABx and other agencies, promotional leaflets and posters in public buildings are also to the fore, and many give talks to groups such as community groups, tenants' associations, Women's Institutes and young farmers' groups. A small number have embarked on more sophisticated methods: Belfast and Manchester CABx have regular advice columns in local newspapers, and Manchester CAB also has a regular monthly slot on local radio. Brighton and Peterborough CABx, and the West Somerset Advice Bureau also use local newspapers and radio, although on an ad hoc basis and generally in response to important topical issues. The Turnpike Lane Advice Bureau, along with the other two Haringey Council bureaux at Hornsey and Tottenham, provides an advice column in the Council's online newsletter *Haringey People*.

It is fair to say, though, that publicity for the CABx and the other agencies is regarded as something of a double-edged sword, for it can create a demand that these organisations might not be able to meet. As a result, many are decidedly wary about conducting large-scale publicity campaigns, and instead prefer to concentrate their promotional work on attracting new volunteer advisers.

#### **3.4.12 Links with other organisations and information providers**

Each one of the case study organisations has developed links and contacts with other citizenship information providers and with those groups and organisations (e.g. voluntary, charitable and representative groups) with a major interest in citizenship information needs and provision. At the most basic level, these links and contacts are generally for referral purposes and can be with, for example, local offices of central government departments and agencies, local offices or representatives of national voluntary organisations (e.g. Age Concern and Shelter), local council departments, and organisations dealing specifically with local needs (e.g. Brighton Housing Trust and Somerset Welfare Rights Unit).

A number of the organisations, particularly the CABx and other advice agencies, are members of more formal networks which meet regularly to discuss and develop local citizenship information and advice provision. These networks can cover citizenship information and advice in general; for example, the Manchester CABx Service is a member of the Manchester Advice Network, and the Langsett Centre is a member of the Sheffield Advice Centres Group. Or they can be devoted to particular subject areas: for example, Aberdeen CAB is part of the local Welfare Benefits Take-up Campaign, an offshoot of the Aberdeen Committee for the Elderly designed to increase benefits take-up amongst the Aberdeen elderly; while Somerset Libraries are part of the Somerset Adult Guidance and Information Network, which aims to improve local access to education, training and employment information.

Several of the case studies have established practical service initiatives in partnership with other organisations, and a number of these have already been outlined above. Seven of the library authorities host CABx sessions in one or more of their branch libraries on particular days of the week. Liverpool's community libraries have hosted drop-in sessions held by the local Adult Guidance Unit, the Benefits Agency and the Inland Revenue; Sheffield's Upperthorpe Library plays host to the Langsett Centre's Community Rights advice service; and Birmingham Central Library permanently hosts a National Youth Agency Information Shop for Young People, which provides information and advice to young people aged 14-25. As well as in libraries, many of the case study CABx and other advice agencies hold regular advice sessions in community centres, hospitals and doctors' surgeries; while the Manchester CABx service holds sessions in Strangeways Prison and the Manchester Magistrates' Court. GRAIN hosts fortnightly careers advice sessions for young people with advisers from the local Careers Service.

### **3.4.13 Future developments**

Respondents were asked if there were any plans to change or develop their citizenship information service in the future. In the public libraries, future plans revolve almost entirely around the use of ICTs: systems are to be introduced, expanded or improved, allowing more potential for electronic citizenship information provision; current stand-alone electronic citizenship sources are to be networked, allowing wider public access; Internet access, both for staff and the public, is to be expanded; and most of the authorities currently without a community information database plan to develop one.

For many of the CABx and other agencies, financial restraints mean that the focus is on consolidation and the maintenance of their service at current levels, rather than on expansion and development. As a result, these organisations acknowledge that many of their plans are unlikely to reach fruition, at least in the immediate future.

For two of the CABx and two of the advice agencies, upgrading or extending their accommodation, or finding new premises, is a priority. Indeed, it is fair to say that these particular organisations, and a number of the others visited, are located in rather cramped premises that are not particularly accessible to infirm or disabled people. Staff and staff training is also an important consideration. Virtually all of the organisations would like to attract and retain more volunteer advisers; indeed, the Orrell Park Centre is planning to make a bid for funding from the Opportunities for Volunteers fund, to employ a volunteer coordinator to attract and train volunteer advisers. The Byker Project, meanwhile, hopes to offer National Vocational qualifications in advice work to its advisers. Brighton CAB and the West Somerset Advice Bureau are to apply for Legal Aid Board non-solicitor franchises to provide legal advice and assistance.

Aberdeen CAB would like to undertake more 'preventative' outreach work, perhaps in schools, that might prevent people, say, running into debt in later life. Manchester CABx plan to carry out more outreach work with ethnic minority groups. Both Belfast and Manchester CABx would like to introduce telephone helplines, constantly manned by several volunteer advisers, to deal more efficiently with telephone enquiries.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

### **4.1 USER STUDIES**

#### **4.1.1 Methodology**

It is felt that the demographic analysis of both surveys indicate that the population tested is representative of the United Kingdom population as a whole and the results may, therefore, allow us to generalise about citizen information need and information seeking behaviour at the present time. In total, data was gathered from 2,192 respondents. The samples were complementary in that the first survey reached a greater proportion of respondents in employment, while the second gathered information about a greater proportion of older and unemployed individuals.

The response to the survey by interview was representative in most respects but held a greater proportion of the elderly, the retired, those running a home and the economically inactive than the figures for the UK as a whole. The second survey, therefore, complements the first survey where smaller proportions of those groups were represented. However, high representation amongst those groups that may be deemed to face barriers in the access to information may reveal interesting results.

The focus group approach was limited, due to difficulties in encouraging representatives to attend; while results were interesting, they should not be regarded as truly representative of particular sectors or interest groups.

Twenty-seven case study organisations were visited in a representative sample of public libraries, CABx and other information agencies. Interviews were well responded to and the findings are therefore considered to be valid.

#### **4.1.2 Information need**

The majority of respondents (59.4%) had sought information in order to solve a problem in the past, primarily in relation to education, recreation, health, welfare benefits, the law, employment, transport and travel, finance, welfare benefits, information about their local council and environmental information. A smaller proportion (20.1%) had sought information about the UK government or politics. Almost a half of respondents had sought information for educational reasons (48.8%), while others had done so for work related (35.2%) and family/personal reasons (32.9%). Only 7.7% had sought information for political decision making, suggesting a degree of apathy and a low level of participation.

Information need tended to decrease for those aged 55 and over. Older respondents were less interested in educational and political information. Disabled people tended to be less interested in educational, recreational and general interest information, but this was felt by focus group participants to be a result of poverty.

Greatest dissatisfaction was registered by respondents with the quality of legal and welfare benefits information. General users tended also to be critical of information received from government departments and agencies. Focus group participants agreed that welfare benefits information and information provided by government departments and agencies created

dissatisfaction amongst users. It was felt that a lack of clarity about which agency to approach for information and advice was the prime cause of dissatisfaction.

Over a quarter of respondents had encountered difficulties in accessing information in the past, in particular business information and legal information were highlighted. Similarly 23.8% of respondents had in the past been unable to access information, primarily on the law, education, welfare benefits, health and employment. Some users had found information difficult to obtain or had difficulty in using information systems. A significant 6.2% of respondents indicated that official secrecy or restricted access to information had been the cause of their failure.

Focus group participants supported the view that jargon and difficulties in use of (particularly electronic) information systems were the most significant problems encountered by users. It was felt that efforts to simplify terminology were often counter-productive. They also identified users' difficulties in expressing, or unwillingness to be open about, information need as barriers. Users were frequently bewildered about where to go to obtain information. Language problems, level of material, and physical access were also felt to be barriers. Public libraries were felt to be intimidating for young people. Interestingly, these problems were not highlighted in the two user surveys.

Similar patterns of future information need were predicted by respondents: the most significant finding was a drop in respondents' perception of future need for educational information. Focus group participants were surprised at this drop, given the current emphasis on lifelong learning. There was also a significant predicted increase in the need for European information.

Disabled respondents showed a greater predicted future interest in welfare benefits (+16.5) and equal rights (+7.8), but less of an interest in employment (-14.5) and politics (-10.0). Focus group participants felt that, although benefits, health and equal rights dominated the information needs of disabled respondents, this group required access to the full range of subjects. Other groups, such as the unemployed, were felt to have very specialist requirements. It was also felt that major life stages, such as widowhood, could transform individuals' needs. Focus group participants also felt that changes were taking place in attitudes to particular stages of the life-cycle, such as greater interest amongst the elderly in education.

Northern Ireland dominated respondents' perception of the most significant current issue: this result was affected by the Northern Ireland response, but still came top overall. Otherwise a wide range of issues emerged dominated by education, health, Europe and the economy.

Some interesting results emerged in considering the sources of information on the most frequently rated current affairs issues. The media dominated overall for subjects, but alternative sources were highly significant for education, the environment and health. There is evidence here of very high levels of passive consumption of information from the media on subjects that respondents feel highly significant. There was greater reliance on television amongst lower classes and a greater tendency to use newspapers amongst the higher socio-economic groups.

Most respondents felt well or very well informed on the main issues identified in the second survey: however, over 15% in each case felt poorly informed about the EU/EMU, Northern Ireland, health, law and order, and the environment. Women tended to feel less well informed than men. However, despite feeling well informed, significant proportions (over a



third) felt that they would like to find out more about education, EU/EMU, the environment, health, unemployment, the economy, Northern Ireland and law and order. The better educated tended to want to find out more. This would suggest active interest in these areas rather than the passive consumption of information. It is notable that where such an active interest is recorded, and where the respondent would require to seek information, high proportions would approach public libraries. The public library was seen as the most important resource for education, Northern Ireland, health, EU/EMU, the environment and employment, and as an important resource for law and order. Urban respondents demonstrated a greater tendency to prefer public libraries, while rural residents preferred the media. Interestingly, the less well educated tended to prefer the public library as a further source of information, while the better educated preferred newspapers.

Health, education, the economy, EU/EMU, the environment, unemployment and law and order, were deemed by the majority of respondents to have an impact on their lives, while Northern Ireland, the World Cup and the state of the Labour government were felt to be less central.

In the more detailed investigation of three current issues, the majority of respondents (74.5%) felt that they would like to find out more about the Single European Currency. The public library and the mass media were the most popular sources of information, followed by a government information programme, the Internet and an MP. Such urban respondents were more likely to approach public libraries than rural residents. 80.4% of respondents felt that the government was not doing enough to inform them about this issue.

The majority of respondents (59.2%) felt that they were well informed about BSE. Again the public library and the media were the most popular sources for those that felt that they were not well informed. Doctors formed the major alternative source cited (7.9%). Interestingly, greater proportions of women and of the less well educated would go to doctors for such information. A slight majority (55.2%) felt that the government was not doing enough to inform respondents about BSE. The preferred methods of making their feelings known to the government on this issue amongst respondents were to contact a local MP (38.6%) or to contact a government Minister or Department (10.0%). There was a greater tendency to contact an MP amongst white respondents.

The majority of respondents (63.4%) felt that they were badly informed about local government cutbacks. The most popular sources of additional information were felt to be local council offices (31.1%) local newspapers (11.6%), and public libraries (10.4%). So at the local government level there is therefore a greater tendency to approach government direct than at the national level. 71.6% felt that their local council was not doing enough to inform them on this issue. In making their feelings known on this issue, significant proportions of respondents would contact local councillors (20.3%), their local MP (19.0%) and local council offices (17.5%). Urban respondents were more likely to write to their councillor, while rural residents were more likely to write to their local MP.

In terms of survival information, 15.7% of respondents had encountered an employment problem, usually utilising job centres or newspapers to find information. 13.1% had encountered an education problem, in most instances approaching local education authorities, family and friends and schools/universities for information. 13.6% had encountered housing problems and had approached council housing departments, local councillors and housing associations for help. 15% had encountered welfare benefits problems and had approached the DSS, CABx and council social services departments. In none of these categories had public libraries appeared significantly in responses.

In order to explore the concept of exclusion from information creating disadvantage, respondents were asked to give an example of an occasion when not being able to obtain information had proven a disadvantage: over a quarter of respondents could cite an example. Examples were given that related to welfare benefits, education, employment, financial matters, housing, health, local planning, traffic problems, legal issues, consumer issues, and relationship problems. Interestingly, those from higher social classes and those with the highest level of educational qualification were more likely to be able to cite an example of disadvantage: contrarily this might suggest that these groups are more aware of disadvantage and its causes rather than they suffer greater disadvantage.

The majority of respondents felt well informed about areas relating to citizenship. However, more than a quarter were poorly informed in legal rights, welfare benefits and local politics. Respondents felt best informed about national politics.

#### **4.1.3 Information seeking behaviour**

The great majority (66.7%) had used public libraries to locate information, with a significant proportion using CABx (17.7%), academic libraries (7.7%) and other advice centres (4.2%); small minorities only had used government departments (3.9%) and local authority offices (2.1%). Respondents tended not to use public libraries for legal or welfare benefits information. Disabled respondents tended to use CABx (58.5%) rather than public libraries (-22.6 points compared with able-bodied respondents). The proportion of jobseekers in the CABx (22.5%) and the other advice agencies (21.2%) was effectively twice that in the public libraries (10.9%).

Focus group participants emphasised the importance of: networking in business; family and friends in education and amongst women; community and religious centres for ethnic minorities; home helps and voluntary agencies for the elderly; and MPs for disabled people and the unemployed.

Over three quarters (77.3%) of respondents said they would use public libraries on at least an occasional basis. Between 50% and 75% of respondents would approach Citizens Advice Bureaux, post offices, Government departments and agencies, or their family and friends.

Only 2.4% of respondents indicated a preferred minority language for information provision. It was felt by the ethnic minorities focus group that this low level of need for minority language materials was unrepresentative.

Face to face communications were preferred by the largest number of respondents: however, the traditional book retained its appeal with the second highest number of citations. Other preferred options included browsing in a collection and by telephone. The media, too, were popular, with newspapers being more frequently cited than TV or radio. Only a small proportion of respondents expressed a preference for using a computer to seek information. Focus group participants tended to find the relative placings of radio and television contentious, in particular discussing the merits/demerits of local radio as a source. Leaflets were felt to be heavily used but often disappointing in terms of content. They agreed with the findings on computer use, but felt that the quality of information this obtained was often poor. The government focus group felt that public reliance often on local media was worrying.

The preferred source of government information was the public library sector (43.2%) with only post offices (14.7%) and CABx (12.0%) figuring significantly otherwise. This is a

significant validation of the Stage 1 user study, where although a lower proportion is recorded in the second stage survey, the importance of public libraries is attested. It is worth noting, that demographic factors had little impact on public library preference: only the disabled respondents demonstrated a lesser preference for this agency as a source. For most respondents it was the accessibility of the public library and the fact that they visited it regularly that made libraries their preference. Public libraries were also seen as reputable and having an appropriate atmosphere. Those that preferred MPs and government departments were motivated largely by getting their information directly from the primary source. CABx and medical centres were felt by users to have particularly helpful staff (public libraries did not rate highly here). CABx were felt to be particularly reputable. Computers in public places were rated for their accessibility and the frequency with which respondents visit these places. Council offices were felt to have relevant material. Overall the primary motivating factors appear to be accessibility and frequency of visit.

When respondents were asked whether they would use computers if these were more widely available in public places, ICTs proved more popular. Disabled respondents were less prepared to access computers in public places. Preference for computers decreased markedly for older respondents (those aged 30 and over) and the retired. However, significant proportions of those aged 55 and over indicated a willingness to use computers in public libraries.

There was a clear emphasis on public libraries as an appropriate location for computerised access to information for a significant majority (72.6%) of the general public. However, other public places, such as post offices (37.8%), shopping centres (35.1%) and town halls (29.2%), would attract a significant body and proportion of the general public. Focus group participants felt that health centres, community centres, leisure centres, CABx and Job centres would all prove popular with significant proportions of the populace. There were concerns about a lack of privacy in shopping centres and the need for human mediation and support.

These data suggest that no single mechanism for enabling access to information should be seen as the ultimate solution to the information needs of the citizen. Rather a complementary range of solutions must be offered to the citizen.

#### **4.1.4 Perceived importance of information to citizens and participation**

A highly significant majority (79.2%) of the respondents in the first survey believed that access to accurate and unbiased information is very important for exercising their rights as citizens. One focus group participant felt this figure was too high, but it was supported by the second survey where the vast majority of respondents felt that freedom of information (91.7%) and access to accurate and unbiased information (91.7%) were important in exercising their rights as citizens. Freedom of information was felt to be: a basic democratic right; necessary to ensure politicians' accountability; necessary in the current atmosphere of corruption; and access to personal data was deemed a particularly significant issue. Some respondents felt that there was a danger of being overloaded with information, while others were cynical about the real value of a Freedom of Information Act. Respondents felt that access to accurate and unbiased information was essential to their capacity to make effective decisions or form opinions.

Significantly those aged 19 or under and students felt less certain of the importance of information. Focus groups tended to feel that, as they mature, individuals encounter

situations where information has value. However, it is still an interesting finding, given the emphasis on information skills in recent years in schools.

There were low levels of participation in groups and societies amongst respondents. The highest proportions were for membership of leisure groups (32.4%) and charitable groups (25.2%), with only small minorities members of professional/trade associations (16.6%) and trade unions (13.6%). Fewer were members of political parties (6.7%) than of pressure groups (6.9%).

Respondents tended to overestimate their voting patterns, with national elections predominating over local and European elections. Elderly and disabled respondents demonstrated a greater tendency to vote. Very small numbers in all instances participated in other forms of political activity, such as canvassing (15 respondents) or attendance at political meetings (12 respondents).

Access to computers (39.3%), the Internet (14.6%) and satellite/cable television (26.4%) in the home is presently limited, with higher proportions of students and job seekers having cable/satellite, while higher proportions of the better educated and those in social class I have a computer and access to the Internet. Only 12.6% of the respondents had access to the Internet at work. The majority felt that they would be prepared to use computers to vote (54.7%), to convey opinions to government (53.5%) and to obtain government information (59.8%): a lower proportion would use them to participate in political debate (35.0%).

Around a half of those who would use a computer to vote, provide feedback or debate were concerned about confidentiality. Significantly, older, disabled, lower class and less educated respondents were less willing to use computers in these ways. There were no gender variations.

Most (66.4%) respondents preferred to make their feelings known on an issue by writing to someone. Debate by computer tended to be preferred by those from ethnic groups, while those retired and older respondents would tend not to participate in this manner.

#### **4.1.5 Public library service**

72.5% of respondents were members of public libraries. Of those that were not members, many were not interested in joining or were intending to join soon. Others indicated a variety of reasons for non-membership, the only one of which occurred frequently enough to be significant being that respondents did not have enough free time.

The majority of respondents felt that public libraries were suitable places for finding information on their local council (82%), consumer issues (67.8%), on welfare benefits (65.1%), on jobs and careers (61.4%) and on housing (53.5%), although there was little evidence that many had approached public libraries for such information in the past. Very significant numbers of respondents were unaware that public libraries held official government publications (45.8%), European Union information (61.1%), health information (45.1%) legal rights (44.9%) and educational opportunities (30.2%). There is evidence here of a real need for libraries to promote more effectively their collections and expertise in such areas. Barriers to library use were identified as inconvenient opening hours, the image of libraries and staff shortages. Some respondents felt that libraries should not waste their resources by costly promotional activities: but clearly there is a need for libraries to ensure maximum exploitation of their resources, acting as Ranganathan's 'canvassing agent' on the behalf of their collections. Publicity campaigns, leaflets/posters and mailshots were all

recommended by respondents. Naturally, non-library members tended to emphasise the need for external publicity and mailshots, while library members felt that there should be more promotion of such materials in the library.

Respondents raised a number of interesting additional points. The majority chose to comment on their public library service: many criticised stock in their local libraries or the impact of cutbacks and staff shortages. Some respondents reiterated their feelings that access to information was important to the citizen. Small numbers in each instance were conscious of the 'information rich/information poor debate' or of the concept of information overload. A number stated the importance of access to computerised information in public places, while others questioned the quality of information available on the Internet. 28 respondents took the opportunity to discuss a personal problem that had required citizenship information or an area of current concern upon which they would like more information. It is interesting to note that at the conclusion of a long and detailed interview 174 (19.4%) respondents felt sufficiently interested to make a further point.

## **4.2 CITIZENSHIP INFORMATION SERVICE PROVISION**

### **4.2.1 The services and agencies visited**

Public libraries, CABx and other advice agencies from all 13 regions of the UK were visited to gather data on service provision and issues of concern to providers. In total, 27 organisations were visited.

Specialised local needs identified included: greater need for HIV/AIDS information; financial problems and debts; seasonal unemployment; and, in Belfast, dealing with the effects of bombing or intimidation.

Problems identified included:

- users from other catchment areas utilising the service
- users' requirement for privacy/confidentiality in their approach to the agency, particularly in close-knit communities

From the findings, public libraries (with one exception) concentrate on the facilitation of access to factual information, while CABx and other agencies provide information and advice. CABx and other agencies will also provide representation for clients at tribunals and court appearances.

There is limited availability of home visits to housebound users in public libraries, while most CABx and other agencies will provide this service (even if they do not advertise the fact widely).

### **4.2.2 Staff and training**

CABx and other agencies utilise a mix of paid full-time and part-time and unpaid volunteer staff. This reliance on volunteers creates problems.

Public library services (with one exception) tend not to dedicate staff to community/citizenship information service. Public libraries might benefit from considering the volunteer approach.

All CABx staff and volunteers complete a basic training programme and have available a supplementary and more specialist set of training programmes. It is planned to develop this suite of training into an externally accredited qualification. Other agencies adopt a range of approaches built upon in-house training.

Public libraries tend not to have developed such an in-depth approach. Staff will receive some induction and training, but only as part of more generic training. The Sheffield exemplar of participating freely in other agencies' training on a quid pro quo basis might be drawn upon by other services.

The provision of staff with minority and sign language skills tends to be reactive to demand from, and perceived need in, their respective user communities.

### **4.2.3 Service provision**

There was poor availability of statistical information in public library services. Conversely, CABx had a systematic approach which enabled analysis of enquiries into subject categories. For CABx and other information agencies, welfare benefits and consumer/debt were the most prominent topics dealt with.

Users tended to approach all services primarily by a personal visit, followed in frequency by a telephone call. Telephone approach was more common in CABx and other agencies than in public libraries. There was a feeling amongst staff of CABx and other agencies that telephone approach would become more common. Staff felt that users preferred face-to-face contact, but that a telephone approach was useful where privacy/confidentiality was desirable. Staff also felt that users received a better and more tailored response when a personal visit was made. The significance of the reference interview is supported by these findings.

The CABx network has developed the NACAB Information System, a monthly updated set of 12,000 pages of information, which is supplemented by a range of useful publications. Some of the other information agencies also subscribe to the NACAB system, but otherwise collections were variable in scope and size.

Public libraries were split between those that had collated their community/citizenship collections into a discrete section and those whose materials were dispersed throughout their classified sequence. While some services had collections which included monographs, a significant number relied almost completely on pamphlet literature. Only two libraries held the full version of the NACAB Information System. Some also subscribed to Camden Information Service's Free Leaflet Information System (FLIS). Individual library services had developed special collections on, for example, drugs awareness, HIV/AIDS, and, in four cases, local council information points.

Some of the case study organisations were producing their own citizenship information materials, including directories of relevant services, self-help information packs and pamphlets.

The majority of CABx do not presently access or enable public access to information electronically, although two are developing systems for database access and e-mail enquiry. A remotely accessible electronic version of the NACAB Information System is also being piloted. It is hoped that a bid for funding to support the development of CABnet, linking all bureaux, will in the future prove successful. Similarly, in the other information agencies, apart from isolated projects, there is little evidence of the application of ICTs.

Public libraries tend to have produced local community/citizenship information databases. Only 7 of the authorities visited provided public access to the Internet, but others were planning the introduction of such a service. Again, certain authorities had more highly developed projects underway, such as the Manchester MAGIC TOUCH kiosks and the Cambridge Online City website. Two services were utilising videotelephony to enable access to an adviser.

In libraries, promotion largely takes the form of leaflets, posters and special displays. CABx also utilise leaflets and posters. Staff also give talks, produce columns for local newspapers or host radio slots. There is the usual concern for all under-funded resources that promotion may simply create a demand that cannot be met.

Links between services tend to be developed for referral purposes. CABx are part, of course, of a formal network with a programme of support. Partnerships were also in evidence, as for example with the 7 library authorities that host CABx in branches on a periodical basis.

#### **4.2.4 User studies and user satisfaction**

Only 5 of the case study organisations had conducted recent surveys of user needs including user surveys and analyses of enquiries received. Interestingly, one CAB user survey found that public libraries (47%) closely followed by CABx (38%) would be the most popular locations for public access to ICTs.

Additionally, all CABx analyse evidence forms to identify significant issues and problems amongst clients. This is a particularly proactive function that might be employed to effect in public libraries and other agencies.

Similarly, studies of user satisfaction are rare: only two libraries and none of the other information agencies had carried out surveys or engaged in user forums. On the other hand, NACAB requires that such a study be carried out every three years by all CABx.

#### **4.2.5 Future developments**

In public libraries future developments significantly revolved around ICTs. For CABx the focus tended to be on consolidation and maintenance of the quality of service, or in developing 'preventative' approaches to clients' problems.

### **4.3 LESSONS TO BE LEARNED**

The results of the survey have significance in two broad areas: in government information strategy; and in the future development and role of public libraries.

There is clear evidence that the public encounter situations in which information is required to help solve problems, and that theoretically they feel that access to information and freedom of information are important to them in exercising their rights as citizens. The information profession and representative groups should use this data to reinforce the messages given to government about the value of information. Representative bodies should also seek to widen their scope by seeking to draw within their sphere of influence not just the traditional library and special library sectors, but also the CABx and other information/advice agencies. The long awaited rationalisation of professional bodies into a single entity should give the opportunity for such strategic shifts to take place or be explored.

It has become clear in the course of conducting this research that public libraries can learn from the CABx and vice versa. The fact that CABx and other information agencies frequently have a very focused set of aims and objectives means that they have in some instances developed policies and operational approaches that are particularly effective in providing a reliable and responsive service for their client group. In many ways the CABx and other information agencies have been an under-researched phenomenon, and it is hoped that the present work will successfully highlight some of their achievements.

The government should be made aware that there is presently a relatively high level of dissatisfaction with the quality of official information and with the information received from government departments and agencies. In the wish to embrace new technologies, it should not be forgotten that there are deficiencies in existing provision.

Barriers to information access and use do exist amongst a significant proportion of the population. While the majority felt well informed about the issues chosen in the survey, there were some areas, such as BSE or local government, where it was felt that the government was not doing enough to inform the public. There was also a very heavy reliance on the media as a source of information, and evidence of a very passive approach in consuming rather than seeking information on what had been identified by respondents as the most significant current affairs issues. Contact with MPs and local councillors tended to be the preferred methods of feeding information back to government.

Access to information and communication technologies remains limited and is largely found amongst wealthier and better educated individuals. However, the majority of respondents expressed willingness to use ICTs to access information, vote and provide feedback. Fewer were enthusiastic about voting, and almost a half had concerns about the security of such interactions. Again there is evidence of specific groups likely to be excluded, including older, disabled, lower class and less educated people. Either these groups must be specifically targeted by programmes designed to facilitate and enable interaction via ICTs, or a set of programmes involving use of a variety of media should be put in place: it is important, with the second scenario, that undue emphasis should not be placed on a particular medium of communication. The present researchers would recommend that no single strategy for information and communication between government and the population should be seen as the preferred solution. The citizen must continue to be offered a complementary range of options.



The public library sector can draw much reassurance from the results of this project in that the largest proportion of respondents saw public libraries as their preferred option in seeking citizenship or government information and as appropriate sites for public access computers, although the numbers were naturally higher amongst existing service users. There are, however, still areas of concern in that there is evidence to show that certain groups, such as disabled people and the unemployed, are not being attracted to use public libraries. Clearly, a good deal of promotion is necessary to target such groups directly. There were also suggestions that public libraries may still have an intimidating aura for certain groups. Overall though, public libraries have developed an image of being reputable, accessible and having an appropriate image.

In encouraging wider use of public libraries, the significance of the concept of free time in people's lives should be further investigated. With the pressures and complex demands of present day life, the need to reconsider the potential impact of widening hours of operation on access is very great.

There was also a significant lack of awareness amongst actual and potential users of the full range of resources - electronic, printed and human - available to them in public libraries. Promotional campaigns need to consider their objective in terms of users/non-users in designing effective materials and approaches.

As suggested above, public libraries may be able to learn from CABx in their provision of citizenship/community information. In particular in terms of being aware of the need for privacy/confidentiality, and in the need for extending service beyond enabling access to acting as a form of expert and informed support, in interpreting, contextualising, and advising users. The concept of expert staff might be strengthened by the provision of dedicated staff and seeking to find ways of allowing greater participation in cooperative training ventures. Public libraries have two potentially great advantages in providing a service: the developed network of public library services with enhanced access to remote collections; and a presence and reputation in the community that is not directly related to any specific, and possibly embarrassing for the user, function. It is felt that public libraries could develop a more proactive approach to the identification of issues where information is being or will be required by users.

As ever, there is the concern that promoting the service will simply create a demand that cannot be met in a situation where resources are constantly being reduced. This is, of course, a thorny issue and one for which there is no simple solution. It is not limited to libraries but is encountered in all publicly funded sectors. There are questions of the philosophy of service, but also, more importantly, of developing strategies to demonstrate impact and value in terms that can be understood by funding bodies and where there is demonstrable advantage to supporting the public library service as a resource. In this area of citizenship information provision, the researchers believe that there are such demonstrable advantages in ensuring a well-informed population that can take advantage of educational, vocational, health-related, social and government resources to improve their lives and reduce dependence on alternative forms of government support.

#### **4.4 FUTURE RESEARCH**

This project has covered many areas and has raised several questions that would merit further investigation.

It is believed, for example, that individuals should be explored in terms of the different stages of their lifespans, in order to identify any specific characteristics of information need or patterns of information seeking behaviour occurring at particular points in the life-cycle. Also worthy of further investigation is the apparent lack of certainty of the importance of information amongst young people. There should also be closer examination of the classification of users, and a more detailed exploration of specific areas of information need; it is recommended, however, that such a study should not focus on particular groups, but should look broadly across *all* groups.

It is hoped that the British Library Research and Innovation Centre's continuing programme of research into the value and impact of library and information services will explore many of the issues arising. The researchers, in particular, would recommend in-depth exploration of how access to information may support citizens in participation, maintaining a self-sufficiency, and improving economic standing; and the investigation of the negative impact of a lack of access to information.

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**APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE**

**QUESTIONNAIRE  
CITIZENSHIP INFORMATION**

Many people need information to help them make decisions or solve problems. As part of a project funded by the British Library, the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen is currently investigating the information needs of the British public. It would be appreciated if you could spare a few moments to answer the following questions. All completed questionnaires will be treated as *strictly anonymous*.

**[1]** Please provide some details about yourself:

- (a) Are you: Male  Female
- (b) Are you: Under 15 years of age  45-54   
15-19  55-64   
20-29  65-74   
30-44  75 or over
- (c) Are you: White  Pakistani   
Black Caribbean  Bangladeshi   
Black African  Chinese   
Black Other  Other (*please specify*)   
Indian  \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) Are you: In paid employment  Retired   
Self employed  Running a home   
Seeking work  Student

If in paid employment or self employed, please specify your occupation:-

\_\_\_\_\_

- (e) Would you describe yourself as a disabled person? YES  NO

**[2]** Please give an example of an occasion in which you have been required to look for information to help you make a decision, solve a problem, or understand something a little better. This might have been related to health, education, welfare benefits, legal rights, etc. (*If you cannot think of an example, please go directly to Question 6*)

**[3]** Where did you go to obtain this information? (*Please provide details*)

**[4]** How satisfied were you with the information you obtained? (*Please respond for each of the following*). Was it:

- |                    | YES                      | NO                       |                      | YES                      | NO                       |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Easy to understand | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Comprehensive        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Relevant           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | In a physical form   |                          |                          |
| Accurate           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | that was easy to use | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Up to date         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                      |                          |                          |

[5] Were there any kinds of information which might have helped you, but which you found difficult to obtain?

YES  NO

If YES, please provide details of the kinds of information you found difficult to obtain:

[6] Which of the following subjects have you ever wanted to find out more about in the past, or feel you might want to find out more about in the future? (Please tick all relevant boxes)

	In the past	In the future
Information about politics / the UK Government	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information about your local council	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information about the European Union	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employment / job opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health and Safety at work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health Care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Security Benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family / Personal matters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Taxation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial matters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consumer and Credit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legal information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Equal rights and Discrimination	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Immigration and Nationality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Citizens' rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Crime and Security	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport and Travel	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Technology and Communications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leisure and Recreation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



[7] For what reasons have you wanted this information in the past, and for what reasons do you think you might want this information in the future? (Please tick all relevant boxes)

	In the past	In the future
Educational / study reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work-related reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job-seeking reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business / commercial reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family / personal reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legal reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religious reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recreational reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
For political decision-making	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
For work with a representative / interest group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A general interest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

[8] For the following list of organisations and people, please indicate if you would approach them for information frequently or occasionally. (If you do not tick either of the 'frequently' or 'occasionally' options, it will be assumed that you would never approach these organisations or people for information)

	Frequently	Occasionally
Offices of Government departments and agencies (e.g. Inland Revenue, Benefits Agency)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
MPs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local council offices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Post Offices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public libraries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Academic libraries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Citizens Advice Bureaux	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other information and advice centres	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chambers of Commerce	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Professional / Trade Associations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Professional people (e.g. doctors or social workers)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family and friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

[9] In which language do you prefer to obtain information? (Please tick one box only)

English	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hindi	<input type="checkbox"/>	Turkish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Welsh	<input type="checkbox"/>	Punjabi	<input type="checkbox"/>	Arabic	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scottish Gaelic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Urdu	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	
Bengali	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vietnamese	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Gujarati	<input type="checkbox"/>	Greek	<input type="checkbox"/>		

**[10]** From the following, please indicate your favourite three methods of obtaining information. (In the boxes provided, please write a 1 alongside your favourite method, a 2 alongside your 2nd favourite method, and a 3 alongside your 3rd favourite method)

Listening to the radio		Talking by telephone to someone	
Looking through a collection (e.g. in a library, Citizens Advice Bureau, or other information centre) without help from the staff		Talking face to face with someone	
Reading a book		Using a computer (e.g. sending e-mail, searching the Internet)	
Reading a leaflet / pamphlet		Watching television	
Reading a magazine		Writing a letter	
Reading a newspaper		Other ( <i>please specify</i> )	

**[11]** If public access to computers was made more widely available to the general public, how often would you use these computers to look for information? (If you do not tick either of the 'frequently' or 'occasionally' options it will be assumed that you would not use these computers)

	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>
Computers in public libraries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computers in post offices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computers in shopping centres	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computers in town halls	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computers in other public places ( <i>please specify</i> )	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**[12]** Do you believe that access to accurate and unbiased information is important for exercising your rights as a citizen? (*Please tick one of the following*)

Very Important     Quite Important     Not Important     Don't Know

**[13]** Have you ever been unable to access information which you needed in order to make a decision, solve a problem, or understand something a little better?

YES     NO

**If YES,** please briefly describe the circumstances:

*Thank you very much for your cooperation*

*Please return this form to the issue/enquiry desk*

**APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

**BRITISH LIBRARY PROJECT: CITIZENSHIP INFORMATION NEEDS  
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

TOWN/CITY \_\_\_\_\_ WARD \_\_\_\_\_

STREET \_\_\_\_\_

Hello, I'm \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm carrying out a survey for the British Library and the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen. I'm looking at the kinds of information people need to help make decisions and solve day-to-day problems, and I was wondering if you could spare between 15 and 30 minutes to answer a few questions. All of your answers will be completely anonymous, and you can refuse to answer any particular question if you want to.

**Information about the respondent**

[1] a) **Gender.** (*Observe sex of interviewee*)      Male       Female

Could you start by telling me a little bit about yourself.

b) **Age group.** To which one of the following age groups do you belong?

16-19	<input type="checkbox"/>	55-64	<input type="checkbox"/>
20-29	<input type="checkbox"/>	65-74	<input type="checkbox"/>
30-44	<input type="checkbox"/>	75 or over	<input type="checkbox"/>
45-54	<input type="checkbox"/>		

c) **Ethnic Group.** To which one of the following ethnic groups do you belong?

White	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>
Black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>
Black African	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>
Black Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other ( <i>please specify</i> )	<input type="checkbox"/>
Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____	

d) **Status.** Are you: In paid employment       Retired   
Self employed       Running a home   
Seeking work       Student

(If in paid employment or self employed) Could you please specify your occupation:-

\_\_\_\_\_

e) **Educational attainment.** What was the highest level of education you completed?

School	<input type="checkbox"/>	University undergraduate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Further Education College	<input type="checkbox"/>	University postgraduate	<input type="checkbox"/>

f) Would you describe yourself as a disabled person?    YES     NO

**Current Affairs and 'Survival Information'**

[2] a) What do you think is the single most important issue in current affairs in the UK at the moment?

b) Where do you get most of your information on this subject from?

c) How well informed would you say you are about the subject?

Very well informed       Well informed       Poorly informed       Don't know

d) Would you like to find out more about this subject?    YES  NO

**If YES**, where would you most likely try to get this information from?

e) Would you say that this subject significantly affects your own life?    YES     NO

[3] a) There's a possibility that the public might eventually be asked to vote on whether or not the United Kingdom should join the Single European Currency. Do you feel you would like to find out more about the Single Currency before such a vote took place?

YES       NO

**If YES**, where would you go to try to get further information about the Single Currency?

b) Do you feel that the government is doing enough to inform people about the Single Currency?

YES       NO

[4] a) BSE / Mad Cow Disease is another subject that's being talked about a lot at the moment. Do you feel you're sufficiently well informed about BSE at the moment?

YES  NO

If NO, where would you go to try and obtain further information about BSE?

b) Do you feel that the government is doing enough to inform people about BSE?

YES  NO

c) If you wanted to make your own feelings about BSE known to the Government, how would you go about it?

Not interested

[5] a) Local government cutbacks is another subject that affects a lot of people. Do you feel you're sufficiently well informed about these at the moment?

YES  NO

If NO, where would you go to try and obtain further information about cutbacks?

b) Do you feel that your local council is doing enough to inform people about cutbacks?

YES  NO

c) If you wanted to make your own feelings about local government cutbacks known to the Government or your local council, how would you go about it?

Not interested

[6] A lot of people need information to help them solve problems that occur in their day-to-day lives. Have you ever had a problem with any of the following?

	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Welfare benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**If YES to any:**

a) Could you briefly describe the nature of this problem?

- ***Employment problem:***

- ***Education problem:***

- ***Housing problem:***

- ***Benefits problem:***

b) Where did you get information to help you solve this problem?

- ***Employment problem:***

- ***Education problem:***

- ***Housing problem:***

- ***Benefits problem:***

[7] Can you think of an example of an occasion in which you have been at a disadvantage because you have been unable to obtain information?

YES  NO

If YES, please give brief details.

**Well-informed and Active Citizens**

[8] How well informed would you say you were about the following topics?

	<b>Expert</b>	<b>Well informed</b>	<b>Adequately informed</b>	<b>Poorly informed</b>	<b>Not interested</b>
National politics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local politics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legal rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Welfare benefit entitlements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Equal rights and discrimination	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

[9] Are you a member of any of the following:

	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Political party	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trade union	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pressure group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Charitable group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Professional or trade association	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Club or society (for hobbies & pastimes)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any other groups ( <i>please specify</i> )	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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[10] How regularly do you vote at:

	<b>Always</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Never</b>
National elections	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local council elections	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
European elections	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

[11] Apart from voting, would you say that you actively participate in the political process?

YES  NO

If YES, in what ways do you actively participate?

#### Freedom of Information etc.

[12] The Government is currently considering introducing a Freedom of Information Act, which should make it easier for the public to obtain official Government information. How important would you say Freedom of Information is?

Very Important  Quite Important  Not Important  Don't Know

Could you explain why you have responded like this?

[13] Would you say that having access to accurate and unbiased information is important for exercising your rights as a citizen?

Very Important  Quite Important  Not Important  Don't Know

Could you explain why you have responded like this?

#### Computers etc

[14] Do you have satellite or cable television at home? YES  NO

[15] Do you have a computer at home? YES  NO

[16] Do you have access to the Internet: a) at home YES  NO   
or b) at work YES  NO



[17] There have recently been some experiments where people have been able to vote using a computer. If a computer was available for you to use, either at home, at work, or in a public place such as a library or a shopping centre, would you use it to vote in elections?

YES  NO

[18] There have also been some experiments where people have been able to take part in political debates using a computer. Again, if a computer was available for you to use, would you use it to take part in these debates?

YES  NO

[19] Would you use a computer to let the Government know what you think about particular issues and decisions?

YES  NO

[20] Would you be worried about confidentiality if you were ever to use a computer to vote or to take part in a debate?

YES  NO

[21] The Government is also making more and more of its official information available by computer. Would you use a computer to obtain this information?

YES  NO

[22] From the following list, how would you prefer to make your own feelings known on a subject you feel strongly about? (*Select one answer only*)

- Write to someone, such as the Press or your local MP
- Speak at a public meeting
- Speak on a televised studio debate
- Phone in to a radio or TV debate
- Take part in a debate by computer
- Not interested in making own feelings publicly known

**Public Libraries and Other Information Sources**

[23] a) Government information is currently available from a variety of organisations and people, and the Government is considering making this information available in even more publicly accessible places. Which one of the following organisations or people would you prefer to approach to obtain official Government information? *(Select one answer only)*

- Post Offices
- Public libraries
- Citizens Advice Bureaux
- Offices of Government departments and agencies
- Your local MP
- Local council offices
- Schools
- Banks and building societies
- Community and leisure centres
- Medical centres and doctors' surgeries
- A computer in a public place, such as a shopping centre

b) For what reasons would you prefer to obtain information from there?

[24] Are you a member of a public library? YES  NO

If NO, what might encourage you to become a member?

[25] Would you say that public libraries are suitable places for obtaining information on:

	YES	NO	If NO to any, where would be a suitable place to obtain information on this subject?
Your local council	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Welfare benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Job opportunities and careers information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Consumer advice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

[26] Are you aware that most public libraries have:

	YES	NO
Official government publications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health care information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information on educational opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information on your legal rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information about the European Union	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**If NO to any of these**, how do you think libraries could let you know more about what types of information they hold?

[27] Are there any points that we've not discussed that you would like to raise?

YES  NO

**If YES**, details:

[28] Is there a daytime telephone number where you can be reached so that someone from the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen can confirm that I was here?

**Daytime telephone number (including National Code)** \_\_\_\_\_

That completes the questions. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

## APPENDIX 3 : GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEWERS

### CITIZENSHIP INFORMATION INTERVIEWS

#### GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEWERS

#### 1. Identify Wards

The first stage in the process is to identify the areas in which the interviews will take place. You are to complete 15 interviews in each of 5 different local government electoral wards - a total of 75 interviews. The 5 wards will be chosen according to socio-economic characteristics and population spread.

You have been given some socio-economic and population data from the **1991 Census Small Area Statistics (SAS)** for the town or city in which you are interviewing. These are on the handwritten sheet(s) of lined paper. As you will see, there are 7 columns.

**Column 1** contains the electoral ward names for your particular town or city. **Column 2** contains the population figures for these wards.

The rest of the columns concentrate on the social classes of the households within these wards. **Column 3** contains the number of households in each ward who had an economically active head at the time of the census. At first glance these figures might appear rather low. This is because, with the exception of Northern Ireland, census figures for social classes of households were based on a **10% sample only**.

**Column 4** contains the numbers of these households belonging to **Social Classes I and II** (Professional occupations, and Managerial and Technical occupations). **Column 5** is reserved for the percentage of households in each ward belonging to Social Classes I and II, and is to be filled in by you (i.e. the figures in Column 4 are to be expressed as percentages of the figures in Column 3).

**Column 6** contains the numbers of the households belonging to **Social Classes IV and V** (Partly skilled occupations and Unskilled occupations). **Column 7** is reserved for the percentage of households in each ward belonging to Social Classes IV and V, and again is to be filled in by you (i.e. the figures in Column 6 expressed as percentages of the figures in Column 3).

You should construct a table similar to **Table A** (overleaf), but **including the actual ward names** of the city or town you are covering. For each ward you should note the percentage belonging to Classes IV and V, the percentage belonging to Classes I and II, and the population figure.

<b>Table A: Ward populations and percentage Social Classes I&amp; II and IV &amp; V</b>			
<b>Ward</b>	<b>% Social Class IV &amp; V</b>	<b>% Social Class I &amp; II</b>	<b>Ward Population</b>
Ward A	20.1	24.5	3642
Ward B	9.3	34.5	2593
Ward C	5.8	60.5	6306
Ward D	40.9	6.7	3558
Ward E	28.1	27.1	2569
Ward F	22.5	6.0	4395
Ward G	15.8	28.9	3623
Ward H	6.1	58.6	4515
Ward I	29.7	11.9	3729
Ward J	8.3	44.0	3834
Ward K	28.8	7.7	4083
Ward L	19.3	27.4	6251
Ward M	45.3	14.7	2651
Ward N	29.5	21.9	3416
Ward O	36.6	12.7	3624
Ward P	12.8	33.0	4029
Ward Q	13.6	40.8	4039
Ward R	27.0	11.0	3489
Ward S	30.4	9.8	3815
Ward T	24.4	12.2	3191
Ward U	15.0	27.4	4480
Ward V	17.9	34.4	4121
Ward W	34.4	20.3	2719
Ward X	24.6	13.5	3666
Ward Y	19.1	25.8	3570
Ward Z	29.6	22.2	2513

You should then construct a table, similar to **Table B** (below), which lists the wards **in descending numerical order according to the percentage of their households in Social Classes IV and V**. As you can see, the percentages of Social Classes IV and V in Table B range from 45.3% in 'Ward M', to 5.8% in 'Ward C'. The percentages for Social Classes I and II should also be included in the table, as the Project Team wishes to compare these with the figures for Classes IV and V. In the final column of the table, you should calculate the cumulative population of the city/town you are covering, ward by ward.

<b>Table B: Percentage Social Class IV &amp; V in descending numerical order, plus cumulative population figures</b>				
<b>Ward</b>	<b>% Social Class IV &amp; V</b>	<b>% Social Class I &amp; II</b>	<b>Ward Population</b>	<b>Cumulative Population</b>
<b>1 Ward M</b>	<b>45.3</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>2651</b>	<b>2651</b>
2 Ward D	40.9	6.7	3558	6209
3 Ward O	36.6	12.7	3624	9833
4 Ward W	34.4	20.3	2719	12552
5 Ward S	30.4	9.8	3815	16367
6 Ward I	29.7	11.9	3729	20096
7 Ward Z	29.6	22.2	2513	22609
<b>8 Ward N</b>	<b>29.5</b>	<b>21.9</b>	<b>3416</b>	<b>26025</b>
9 Ward K	28.8	7.7	4083	30108
10 Ward E	28.1	27.1	2569	32677
11 Ward R	27.0	11.0	3489	36166
12 Ward X	24.6	13.5	3666	39832
13 Ward T	24.4	12.2	3191	43023
<b>14 Ward F</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>4395</b>	<b>47418</b>
15 Ward A	20.1	24.5	3642	51060
16 Ward L	19.3	27.4	6251	57311
17 Ward Y	19.1	25.8	3570	60881
18 Ward V	17.9	34.4	4121	65002
19 Ward G	15.8	28.9	3623	68625
<b>20 Ward U</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>27.4</b>	<b>4480</b>	<b>73105</b>
21 Ward Q	13.6	40.8	4039	77144
22 Ward P	12.8	33.0	4029	81173
23 Ward B	9.3	34.5	2593	83766
24 Ward J	8.3	44.0	3834	87600
25 Ward H	6.1	58.6	4515	92115
<b>26 Ward C</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>60.5</b>	<b>6306</b>	<b>98421</b>

You now need to select the five wards in which the interviews will be completed. As a starting point you will select **the ward with the largest percentage of Social Classes IV and V**, and **the ward with the smallest percentage of Social Classes IV and V**. In Table B, these are Ward M and Ward C, respectively.

You now need to identify another 3 wards spread across the cumulative population figures for the town/city. To do this, firstly **divide the total population figure by 4** (in Table B this is  $98421 \div 4 = 24605$ ), and **then multiply the resulting figure by 1, by 2, and also by 3**. (In Table B this results in the three figures 24605, 49210 and 73815).

Then, **identify the three wards in the table where the cumulative population figures are closest to these three figures**. (In Table B these are: 'Ward N', where the cumulative population figure of 26025 is the closest one to 24605; 'Ward F', where the figure of 47418 is the closest one to 49210; and 'Ward U', where the figure of 73105 is the closest one to 73815).

There are **two potential problems** with this method of identifying the wards. Firstly, you may be conducting your interviews in **a small town with only a small number of electoral wards**. If the town you are working in has five electoral wards, you should conduct 15 interviews in each of the five wards. If the town has less than

five wards, you should conduct an approximately even proportion of the 75 interviews in each of the wards. For example, if the town has four electoral wards you should conduct 18 interviews in one ward, and 19 interviews in each of the three other wards - a total of 75 interviews.

The second potential problem is that **some of the wards may have 'disappeared'** (i.e. absorbed into other wards) due to local government reorganisation in the period since the 1991 census. If any one of the five wards no longer exists, you should select the ward either immediately above or below it in the table of descending percentages of Social Classes IV and V (see Table B). If, for example, Ward U from Table B no longer existed, then either Ward G or Ward Q would be selected.

You should now have identified the wards in which the interviews will take place. Copies of your tables and calculations with which you identified these wards should be forwarded to Graeme Baxter at the Robert Gordon University.

## **2. Identify political situation in wards and in local council as a whole**

The Project Team is interested in the political situation in the town/city you are covering, and will be investigating whether or not there is a relationship between the political preferences of the area and the responses from the interviewees. With this in mind, you should identify the political parties to which the councillors of these five wards belong. For example, the situation in the five chosen wards from Table B might be as follows:

Ward M	Labour councillor
Ward N	Labour councillor
Ward F	Liberal Democrat councillor
Ward U	Conservative councillor
Ward C	Conservative councillor

You should also identify the political composition of the local council as a whole. For instance, the political composition of the council in the town represented by Tables A and B might be as follows:

Labour	16 councillors
Conservative	5 councillors
Liberal Democrats	5 councillors

This information should be readily available from your local public library or your local council offices. A copy of this information should also be forwarded to Graeme Baxter at the Robert Gordon University.

### 3. Random sample of households within the five wards - 'Random Walk Sampling'

Having now identified the five wards, the next stage is to identify the households within each ward in which you will be conducting the interviews. Here, you will be using a method of sampling known as **random walk sampling**. For each of the five chosen wards you will need a **ward map**, which outlines the ward boundaries; these should be available from your local public library or local council offices (an example of one of the Aberdeen wards is attached). You should then follow the basic set of rules outlined below.

In each ward, you should select one particular street as a starting point, preferably in a predominantly residential area near the centre of the ward. You should then proceed along the **left-hand side of this street** (as you face it) attempting to obtain an interview at **every 7th house** on this side of the street.. If you are unsuccessful in obtaining an interview at a particular household (e.g. an interview was refused, the house was empty, etc.), you should then try at the **very next house** on that street, and if that is unsuccessful you should try the next house to it, and so on. After an interview has been successfully completed, however, you should then revert to visiting every 7th household.

When you reach a **junction between two streets**, you should **turn left**, keep to the left hand side of this new street, and maintain the systematic approach of visiting every 7th household. **At the next junction** you encounter, however, you should **turn right**, but again keep to the left hand side of this new street. At **subsequent junctions** you should **alternate between left and right turns**, but **always keep to the left hand side of the street** you enter.

If you reach the end of a **cul-de-sac**, or the street you are on reaches the **boundary of the ward**, you should return along this same street, but on its other side (this will still be your left hand side, as you will be facing in the opposite direction). Once you reach the beginning of this street again, though, you should turn out of it the same way as you entered it. For example, if you turned left to enter a cul-de-sac, you should also turn left when you exit it, as this will take you towards 'new' streets and households. After exiting the street, however, you should revert to alternate left and right turns at street junctions.

The 'every 7th house' systematic approach may result in you being faced with a **block of flats**. Each block of flats should be effectively treated as 'another street', where you could potentially conduct an interview in every 7th flat within the block.

With **small blocks containing two flats on each floor**, you should firstly attempt an interview with the occupant of the ground floor flat on the left (as you face the building). **If this attempt is unsuccessful**, you should then try the ground floor right flat of the block of flats, then if necessary the first floor left flat, and so on, until you obtain a successful response. **If this attempt is successful**, you should then move on another seven households and attempt an interview there. (This may mean moving on to an adjacent block of flats, or an adjacent row of individual houses on that side of the street).

With **large blocks of flats containing more than two flats on each floor** (e.g. tower blocks and skyscrapers) you should visit the flats, ground floor first, in a clockwise direction starting from the main lift- or stair-well, until you successfully complete an interview. Again, once you obtain a successful response, you should move on another seven households. (This may be in the same block of flats, an adjacent block of flats, or in an adjacent row of houses).

If you are unable to successfully complete an interview within a block of flats, you should move on to the very next house or block of flats on that side of the street.

If the 'every 7th house' approach results in you being faced with a **shop or other commercial premises**, you should continue moving along until you reach the very next household. The procedures are then those described above.

To summarise, then, the basic rules are that you should attempt an interview at every 7th household, that you should always be on the left hand side of a street, and that you should alternate between left and right turns at junctions. These procedures should be followed until you have completed 15 interviews in that ward. If you have finished interviewing for the day, but have not yet completed the quota of 15 interviews in that ward, you should resume the next day's random walk at the exact location at which the previous day's walk finished.



#### 4. Record of Interview Attempts

When carrying out the random walk sample, you should complete a **Record of Interview Attempts** form (see copy attached) for each of the five wards. This is basically a record of the total number of households you visited, indicating how many visits resulted in a successful interview, and the reasons why no interviews could be made at other households. These forms should be completed using the simple 'five-bar gate' method. The key to the column headings on the form are as follows:

<b>Date</b>	Date on which interviews were attempted
<b>Total Attempts</b>	Total number of households visited in an attempt to obtain interviews
<b>Intervs. Made</b>	Successful interviews
<b>Appoint. Made</b>	Appointment made with interviewee for later time or date
<b>No Adult</b>	No responsible adult available for interview
<b>No one at home</b>	House occupied, but no one currently at home
<b>Vacant</b>	House obviously vacant
<b>Refused</b>	Occupant refused to be interviewed

Once the exercise has been completed, these forms should be forwarded to Graeme Baxter at the Robert Gordon University.

#### 5. Conducting the interviews

You have been given blank copies of the interview schedule. As you will see, it starts with a brief introductory paragraph which you should use to introduce yourself, explain about the project, and ask the household occupant if they would be willing to be interviewed. (You should **remember to carry your student ID card with you at all times** during the random walk survey). The schedule has been tested by the Project Team, and should take between 15 and 30 minutes to complete; this should be pointed out to potential interviewees. You should also emphasise the anonymity of the interviews, and explain that interviewees can refuse to answer particular questions if they wish. The wishes of those household occupants who refuse to be interviewed should be politely respected.

Only individuals aged 16 years or over should be interviewed. If, by some chance, you begin an interview with someone aged under 16, then it should be immediately but politely brought to a halt. (As you will see, the age group of the respondent is basically the first question asked)

You might find that some householders might be willing to be interviewed, but not at the particular time of your visit. 'Appointments' for interviews at a later date or time should be made at your own discretion, bearing in mind how convenient it would be for you to return to that household at the suggested time.

The interview schedule itself is largely self-explanatory, but it will also have been discussed with you question-by-question during the briefing session.

## **6. Returning completed interview schedules**

You will be aware that payment for conducting the interviews is to be made in three equal instalments, each instalment being paid on receipt of a batch of 25 satisfactorily completed interview schedules. You will have received some pre-paid, addressed envelopes in which to return these batches. With the first batch of completed schedules you should also enclose:

- Copies of tables and calculations which indicate how you identified the five wards in which the interviews took place
- Details of the political parties to which these five wards' councillors belong, plus details of the political composition of the council as a whole

With the third and final batch of completed schedules you should also enclose:

- A completed 'Record of Interview Attempts' form for each of the five wards in which the interviews took place

You will see from the final question, Question 28, that the interviewee is asked to provide a daytime telephone number. On receiving a batch of completed questionnaires, a member of the Project Team will ring a random sample of these telephone numbers to confirm that the interviews were conducted satisfactorily.

## **7. Travelling and photocopying expenses**

A limited amount of money is available for interviewers' travelling and photocopying expenses. Should you require to use public transport to reach the chosen wards, or to photocopy ward maps and other material, you should retain all tickets and receipts and claim the amounts due on the expenses forms you have been given. This money will be reimbursed as soon as is possible.

## **8. Contact details**

In the event of you having any questions or problems with conducting the interviews, you should contact one of the Project Team below:

Graeme Baxter  
Research Assistant  
School of Information and Media  
The Robert Gordon University  
352 King Street  
Aberdeen  
AB24 5BN

Tel: 01224-262959  
Fax: 01224-262969  
E-mail: [g.baxter@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:g.baxter@rgu.ac.uk)

Rita Marcella  
Reader/Senior Lecturer  
School of Information and Media  
The Robert Gordon University  
Hilton Place  
Aberdeen  
AB24 4FP

Tel: 01224-283839  
Fax: 01224-492608  
E-mail: [r.marcella@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:r.marcella@rgu.ac.uk)

## **APPENDIX 4: FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE**

Appendix 4 contains the major findings from the first survey presented to participants in the focus group discussions, together with the basic questions asked by the project team during these events. Additional, more specific questions, based on significant demographic variations in the results, were also asked of the individual groups, but these are not presented here.

### **Definition of Citizenship Information**

*Citizenship information is information produced by or about national and local government, government departments and public sector organisations which may be of value to the citizen either as part of everyday life or in the participation by the citizen in government and policy formulation.*

### **Citizenship Information Project First Stage Methodology**

- Questionnaire disseminated in public libraries, CABx and other advice agencies
- Dissemination in all 13 UK regions
- 2,830 distributed from 42 service points in 28 organisations
- Systematic sampling - every 10th user in libraries, every 2nd user elsewhere
- Overall response - 1,294 (i.e. 45.7%)
- Response in libraries (69.4%); CABx (40.5%); others (8.3%)

### **Past need - open question**

- 59.4% had sought information in the past
- 23.8% had experienced difficulties in accessing information. Reasons included:-
  - official secrecy / restricted access
  - inadequate library resources
  - information systems difficult to use
  - jargon
  - information professionals' lack of knowledge

*Does this reflect your own experiences?*

**Satisfaction with Information**  
(i.e. with accuracy, currency, relevance, etc.)

- Most satisfaction with business and financial information
- Most dissatisfaction with legal and welfare benefit information
- Dissatisfaction with information obtained from government departments and agencies
  
- *Would you agree that these types of information cause most satisfaction/dissatisfaction?*
- *Are there any other types of information which users find unsatisfactory?*

**Past and Predicted Future Needs**  
(top six responses)

**Past Needs**

1. Leisure
2. Education
3. Employment
4. Transport
5. Legal
6. Health care

**Future Needs**

1. Leisure
2. Employment
3. Legal
4. Transport
5. Education
6. Health care

*In your experience, what are the topics that users are most interested in?*

**Reasons for Requiring Information**  
(top six responses)

**Past reasons**

1. Educational
2. Work-related
3. General interest
4. Family/personal
5. Recreational
6. Job-seeking

**Future reasons**

1. Educational
2. General interest
3. Work-related
4. Family/personal
5. Job-seeking
6. Recreational

*In your experience, would this reflect users' most common reasons for requiring information?*

### Preferred Sources of Information (top six responses)

#### Open question

1. Public libraries
2. CABx
3. Academic libraries
4. Other advice agencies
5. Govt. depts/agencies
6. Professional people

#### Closed question

1. Public libraries
2. Family & friends
3. Govt. depts/agencies
4. Post offices
5. CABx
6. Professional people

*75% of the completed questionnaires were distributed in public libraries. Do you think this might have had a significant impact on the responses?*

### Preferred Methods of Acquiring Information

- |                            |                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 Face-to-face             | 7 Watching TV       |
| 2 Reading a book           | 8 Reading a leaflet |
| 3 Browsing in a collection | 9 Using a computer  |
| 4 Reading a newspaper      | 10 Reading a mag.   |
| 5 Talking by telephone     | 11 Writing a letter |
| 6 Listening to the radio   |                     |

- *Would you have expected this order of preference?*
- *Have you encountered any other popular methods of acquiring information?*

### Predicted Use of Public Access Computers

- |                       |       |
|-----------------------|-------|
| ■ In public libraries | 72.6% |
| ■ In post offices     | 37.8% |
| ■ In shopping centres | 35.1% |
| ■ In town halls       | 29.2% |

Other locations mentioned included: health centres, schools, bus/rail stations, CABx, colleges and universities.

- *Does this order of preference surprise you?*
- *Are there any other locations you believe would be well-used?*

### **Perceived Importance of Information**

- 79.2% felt access to accurate and unbiased information is very important for exercising their rights as citizens
- Just 0.8% felt it is unimportant
- Those aged 19 or under felt less certain of its importance than other age groups
  
- *Do you have any comments on these results?*
- *Do you feel it's a cause for concern that young people appear not to value information?*
- *What measures could be taken to counteract this?*