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**Citizenship Information
Research at the School of
Information and Media**

Rita Marcella and Graeme Baxter

Today's presentation

- **Results of the Citizenship Information project - with particular reference to Scotland**
- **The forthcoming Impact of Technology project**

Citizenship Information: a Definition

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

British Library Project: Methodology

Two UK-wide surveys over 2 years

- 1) The first by questionnaire distributed in libraries, CABx and other advice agencies; 1,294 completed (143 in Scotland)
- 2) The second by personal doorstep interview, using the random walk method; 898 (75 in Scotland)

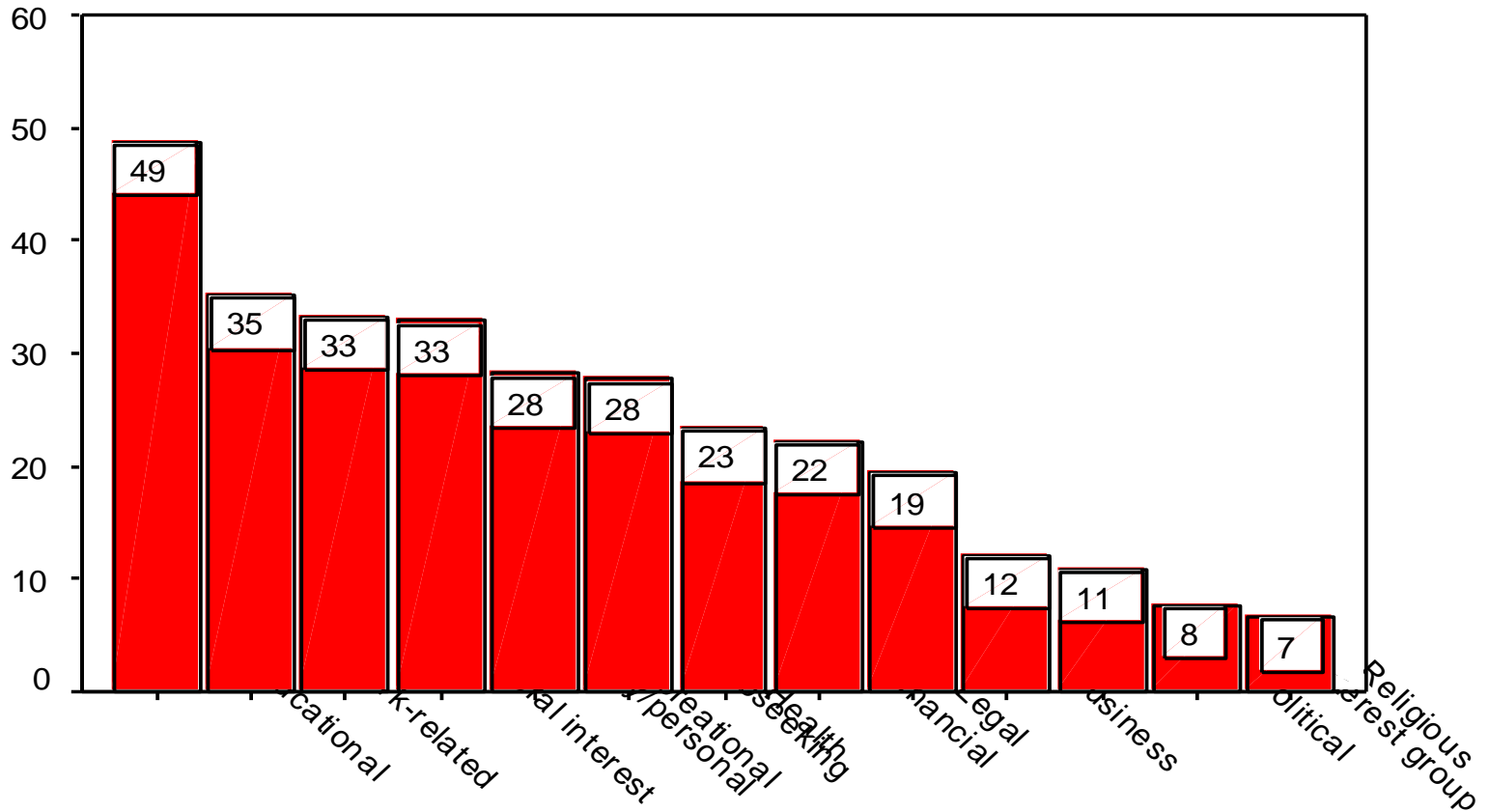
Plus:

- 27 case study visits to information providers
- and 9 focus group discussions

Citizenship Information Need

- 85% of respondents had sought citizenship information in the past
- Most frequently cited topics were:
 - education
 - the law
 - leisure and recreation
 - health care
 - employment
 - welfare benefits
 - transport and travel

Reasons for Requiring Citizenship Information



Reasons for requiring information

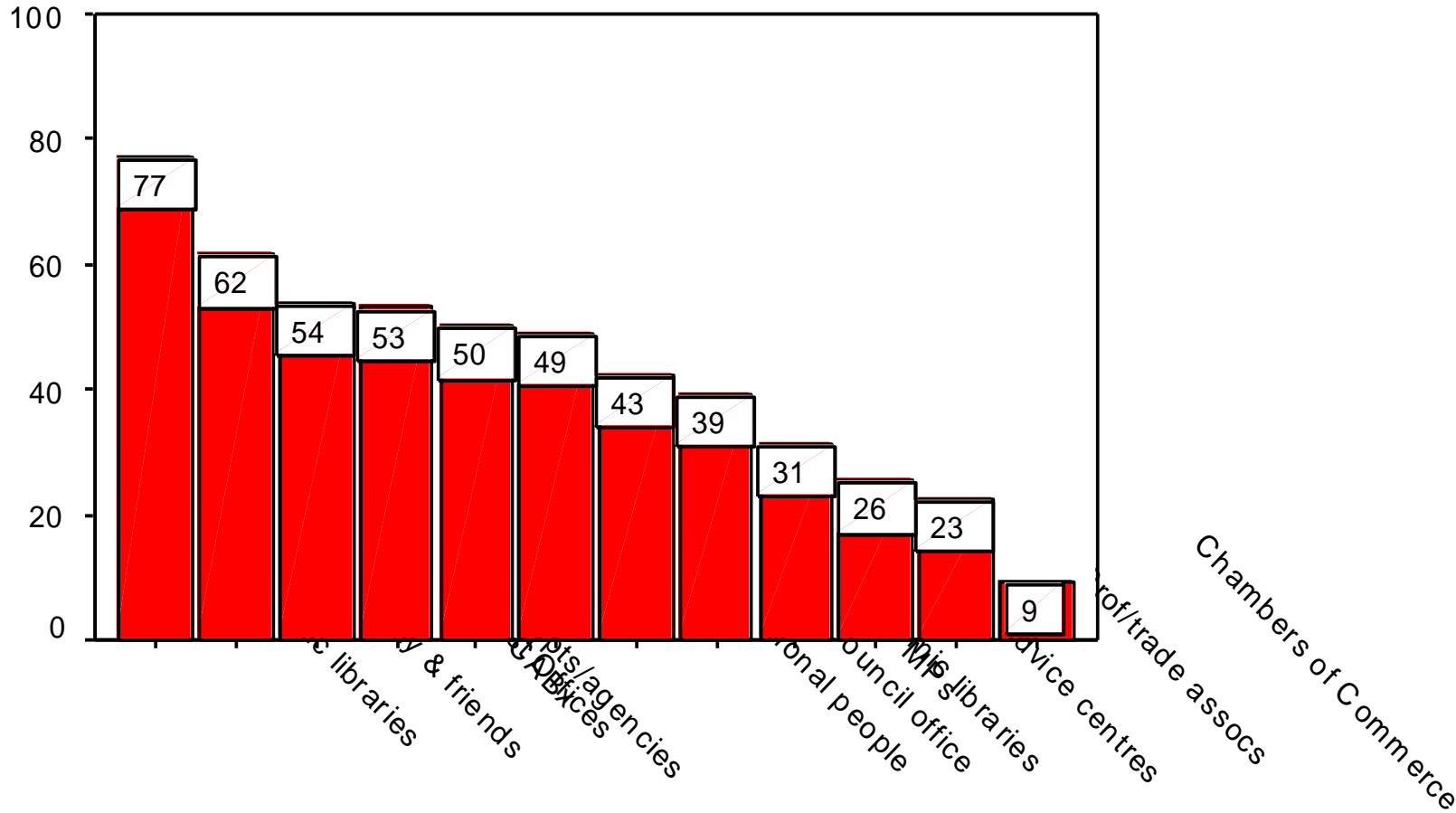
Citizenship Information Need (cont.)

- **25% had encountered difficulties in obtaining information, mainly on the law, education, welfare benefits, health or employment**
- **26% had been disadvantaged through a lack of information (17% in Scotland)**
- **Disadvantage cited more often by higher social classes and the better educated**
- **Northern Ireland perceived as most significant current issue**
- **A heavy reliance on media for information on current issues, regarded as significant by respondents**

Citizenship Information Need (cont.)

- **More information required from central and local government on the Single Currency, BSE and council cutbacks**
- **More than a quarter of respondents felt poorly informed about legal rights, welfare benefits and local politics (Scottish respondents felt even less well-informed about these issues and equal rights and national politics)**

Preferred Sources of Information



Preferred sources of information

Information Seeking Behaviour

- 73% of respondents were public library members (59% in Scotland)
- The majority felt that public libraries were suitable places for obtaining information on:
 - their local council
 - consumer issues
 - welfare benefits
 - jobs/careers
 - housing
- (although Scottish respondents were less certain)
- Significant numbers were unaware that public libraries hold official publications and information on:
 - the European Union
 - educational opportunities
 - legal rights
 - health care

Preferred Methods of Acquiring Information

1 Face to face

2 Reading a book

3 Browsing in a collection

4 Reading a newspaper

5 Talking by telephone

6 Listening to the radio

7 Watching TV

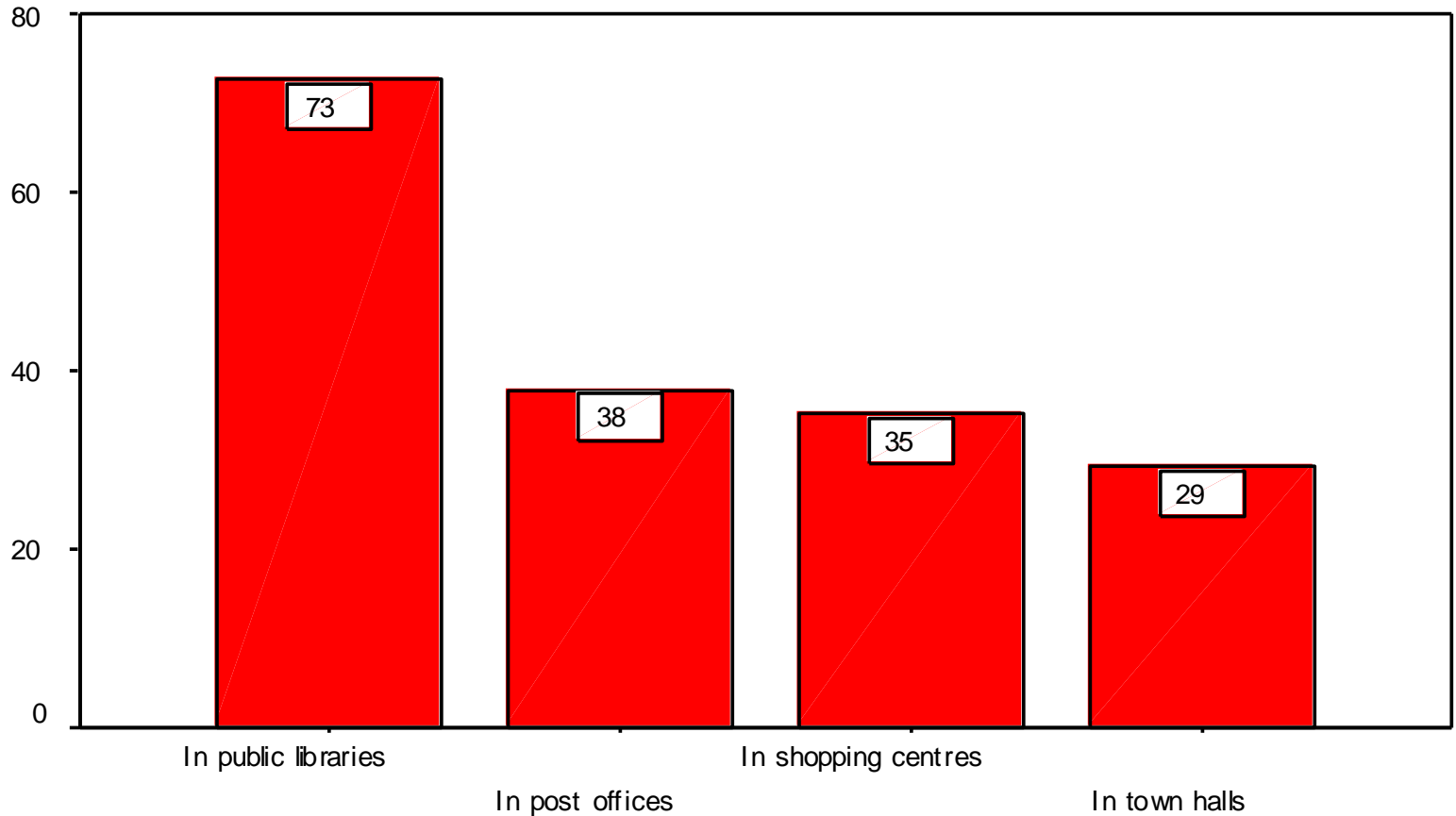
8 Reading a leaflet

9 Using a computer

10 Reading a mag.

11 Writing a letter

Predicted Use of Public Access Computers



Location of public access computers

Predicted Use of Computers for Political Participation

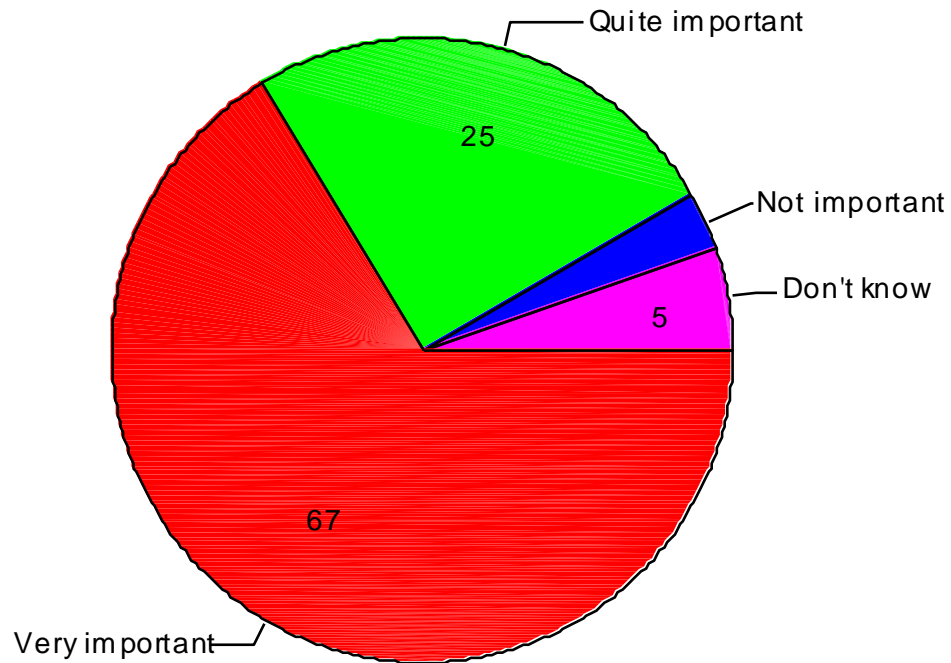
- To obtain government information 60%
- To vote in elections 55%
- To convey opinions to government 54%
- To take part in debates 35%

Although half of the respondents who would use computers for these activities were concerned about confidentiality

Importance of access to information

- **94% felt that access to accurate and unbiased information was very important or quite important for exercising their rights as citizens**
- **Fewer Scottish respondents felt that this was the case**

Perceived Importance of Freedom of Information



What did we learn about Scottish respondents

A negative picture

- fewer required information for educational purposes
- fewer cited an occasion of disadvantage through lack of information
- fewer were likely to approach academic libraries
- fewer were members of a public library
- fewer knew of the citizenship information available in public libraries
- fewer felt that access to information was very important to them
- fewer felt that freedom of access to information was very important

ESRC Project

An investigation of the impact of new technology on the communication of parliamentary information, with particular attention being paid to the three new devolved legislatures in the UK - the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly of Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly

Project objectives are:

- **To compare end-user approaches to parliamentary information in conventional and electronic form**
- **to explore the benefits and drawbacks of technologically supported approaches for certain groups**
- **to develop and evaluate a data collection tool**
- **to develop a model of parliamentary information provision to the public in the UK in the context of a wider understanding of approaches globally**

Timeliness of Project

- Formative period of devolved legislatures
- Freedom of Information - proposed legislation
- Commitment to ‘information age government’ - strategic framework for e-government
- Digital Scotland Task Force ‘technology creates opportunities for more citizens to become more actively involved in public consultation and in the democratic process generally’

ESRC Project Methodology

- **Stage 1: Interviews with representatives of the information services of the UK Parliament and the three devolved legislatures**
- **Stage 2: Pilot ‘roadshow’ with new interactive, electronically assisted interview technique**

Roadshow Events

- **Visits to libraries, shopping centres, community centres, hospitals, etc.**
- **Targeting those thought to be in danger of exclusion and those in a position to make fuller use of ICTs**
- **One-to-one interviews with members of the public**
- **Exploration of parliamentary and public information websites**
- **Use of transaction log analysis and verbal protocol analysis (i.e. ‘think aloud’ techniques)**
- **One week each in England, Scotland, Wales and N.I.**
- **A total of 360 interviews to be conducted**
- **Quota sampling to be used**

A Pilot

- **The project is designed to test the methodological approach and develop hypotheses**
- **Post-execution evaluation is therefore of paramount importance**
- **The result it is hoped will lead to the establishment and refinement of a valid and flexible data collection tool**

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