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Economic Development : Social Inclusion : Information Consultancy : European Affairs

E-enabling the Voluntary and Community Sectors

Final Report – November
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1. Executive Summary

This study was commissioned by the Active Communities Unit, the Department for Education and Skills and the Office of the E-Envoy to help inform policy development on ICT-related matters for the voluntary and community sectors.

Study methodology

The main part of the study involved a telephone survey of 1,400 randomly chosen organisations. This was augmented by: an email survey of 460 'e-enabled organisations'; 24 more in depth telephone interviews; a focus group; desk research and informal discussion with a number of those working on ICT support in the sectors. To the best of our knowledge it is the first large-scale robust survey of ICT use across all sizes of organisations in the community and voluntary sectors.

Key findings

1. The internet and ICT can improve the delivery of services to clients (i.e. effectiveness)

Over **30%** of all the organisations surveyed ascribed **high importance** to the internet in delivery of **services to clients**. For organisations that were already ICT enabled, around **60%** ascribed **high importance** to the internet in assisting with client needs, information for clients, interacting directly with clients, networking and interacting with government.

The internet is also helping a number of organisations develop and ***deliver services in new and more effective ways***, for example; online mutual support groups, video conferencing in rural areas, and new types of learning opportunities. This is particularly so for organisations dealing with particular client groups, such as those with disabilities and job seekers – where the uses of ICT are of **great and immediate benefit**.

Overall, the benefits of ICT in delivering services were claimed by organisations from across the voluntary and community sectors. The survey responses suggest that the more the sector is ICT enabled, the greater will be its capacity to deliver effective services.

This is an important observation, in the light of the government's target to deliver government services online by 2005. Voluntary and community sector organisations are likely to be important partners in delivering e-government services to the hardest to reach groups, as well as delivering their own services.

2. There are also significant benefits in terms of efficiency and networking gains for those organisations that embrace ICT into their operations.

Efficiency gains are claimed by most organisations. This includes the use of basic functions such as word processing, spreadsheets and accounting software to achieve cost savings. Use of email and communication software is already apparent although few organisations are yet making extensive use of functions such as online purchasing, web based donations, recruitment, electronic tendering etc. There are further substantial gains possible in these and related areas.

Networking gains between organisations can also be identified. There is some evidence that organisations are beginning to communicate with each other to develop new ways of working and exchange best practice to an extent that was previously too costly and time consuming.

3. However, overall the level of ICT infrastructure in the sectors is poor and this prevents many of these gains being achieved

Although 82% of organisations have computers and 67% have an internet connection, these computers are often at a level too low to make use of the opportunities of core cost savings, productivity gain and service developments that have been achieved in the public and private sectors. The ratio of computers to employees is also low, for example 60% of organisations employing 25 to 49 people have fewer than 9 computers.

A comparison with the business sector (using a weighting of results by number of employees for comparison purposes) shows that:

- By the end of 2001 78% of Voluntary and Community sector organisations expect to have an internet connection, compared to 94% of businesses.
- By the end of 2001 only 53% of Voluntary and Community sector organisations expect to have a web page, compared to 80% of businesses.
- 64% of all UK businesses have an internet connection faster than a standard telephone line and modem – compared to only 31% of all organisations in the community and voluntary sectors.
- 74% of UK businesses have or plan to have an intranet (internal network) compared to only 28% in the community and voluntary sector.

The poor infrastructure is reflected in the uses to which ICT is put. For example:

- whilst 79% of businesses use the internet for promotion, only 49% of Voluntary and Community sector organisations do so.
- only 35% of Voluntary and Community sector organisations use the internet for recruitment compared with 41% of businesses.

For other activities, 14% of voluntary and community organisations expect to engage in e-commerce, 23% in informal learning and 20% in structured training.

Surprisingly the picture does not change with organisational size, except for the very largest organisations. Previous studies have established that the very largest organisations in the sectors have a high level of ICT infrastructure, although even here this is often under exploited. This study indicates that this does not apply to organisations as large as 50+ employees, which in some ways can be worse off than smaller organisations (e.g. having a lower proportion of computers to staff).

4. Lack of resource is a barrier to greater use of ICT, as are attitudes in the sector and lack of support and training.

The in depth interviews and focus groups indicated that lack of funds to make an initial investment in ICT infrastructure, or to upgrade current equipment, is perceived to be a major reason for organisations not using ICT to its potential. Equally, if not more importantly, lack of funding for the ongoing costs of ICT is a major barrier. There are others, in particular:

- For many organisations, the **potential benefits of ICT are not recognised** by senior management and/or management committees.
- Reliable **support and training are extremely difficult to obtain**, sometimes at any cost.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on these findings *it is clear that the sectors would be able to enhance their ability to deliver services to the community if they received assistance in terms of:*

- A programme of *awareness raising* of the uses, benefits and barriers to ICT in the sector
- A programme of *training and related support* to assist them integrate ICT into their operations and meet their organisational objectives of delivering services to client groups
- A programme of *assistance to secure funding* for equipment, internal networking and fast internet connectivity

Drawing on our consultation with those already providing support for the use of ICT in the sectors, we recommend that:

- any support by the government *be designed and implemented with the characteristics of the sector in mind*. Specifically it should be developed and delivered in consultation with the wide range of sector support and co-ordinating bodies. It should not reinvent the wheel, but instead aim to build on the significant number of organisations that are already providing ICT support to the sectors, in specific areas and for specific types of groups.
- the funding element of any support should only be provided in the context of technology plans for applicant organisations. Such technology plans would be devised with each organisation and would:
 - identify benefits relating to the organisation's purpose
 - identify benefits, costs and savings
 - include plans to finance the ongoing support and upgrade costs after the first year

2. Introduction

This section provides the background and objectives for the study, and sets out the main methodologies used.

Background

Within the overall Government commitments to universal internet access and access to all Government services over the internet by 2005, there are a number of complementary and overlapping themes. Work on central Government's own services, the services of the various government agencies and local government is well underway. Programmes to support business use of the internet have been in existence for some time. Individual access is being tackled by the UK online initiative and other smaller initiatives including the *Wired up Communities* pilots. Ufl/**learn**direct too is a major part of the effort aimed at helping individuals and companies benefit from e-enabled communication and services.

To date there has been no single and coordinated attempt to support the voluntary and community sector in its use of the internet and similar technologies, although many voluntary sector and community organisations are making exemplary use of these technologies and are involved in delivering initiatives such as UK online centres. There are a number of smaller initiatives within the sector, many with national and local government support – for example local developments funded through New Deal for Communities and SRB. There is little evidence however that these are having anything more than local impact in a small number of areas.

At present no single and reliable source of data exists on the use and potential use of the internet by the community and voluntary sectors, particularly in relation to the many smaller organisations. The large voluntary sector organisations are generally thought to be well advanced in their planning and implementation in relation to use of the internet and are actual and potential participants in e-commerce to a significant degree.

Objectives

Against this background, the Office of the E-envoy wished to secure a good enough level of information on which to base policy decisions on ICT related support for the sectors that might improve the delivery of services to citizens. The project objectives were therefore to:

Secure information on:

- the current use of information technology and the internet (across England and by region);
- the ICT needs of the sectors, including training requirements;
- the interest in the sectors of obtaining computing, training and other assistance, including e-commerce planning; and
- the capacity of the sector to maintain its current and anticipated ICT needs.

Make recommendations on:

- where ICT-related funding for the sector might have the greatest impact on internet capabilities and use of computers
- what assistance, if any, might be required to bring as many organisations in the sectors as possible to a minimum level of competency in internet access and the use of e-commerce to enable organisations to improve their productivity
- the sectors' capacity to take on and maintain ICT equipment and training

Methodology

The main element of the work was in the administering of a survey questionnaire, previously designed by the E-envoy's office. We used a telephone survey as the main methodology, with an email survey as a further approach. We also undertook desk research, telephone interviews and a focus group to add more in depth qualitative colour and background to the survey outputs.

As the whole study was completed over a five-week period, the normal time to pilot survey instruments and undertake detailed analysis were not available. We received considerable help from many people in the sectors and without this the study could not have been completed. We therefore thank all those who contributed.

Contacts/survey population

We used a listing supplied by the Yellow Pages as our primary source of contacts for the main telephone survey (and for some email contacts for the email survey).

We assembled a list of email contacts from the Yellow Pages listing. We secured further email addresses by telephoning voluntary and community organisations and using assistance from a number of individuals and mailing lists.

The Yellow Pages contacts data comprised 10,000 organisations drawn from a population of 26,995, being Yellow Pages categories:

- Charitable and Voluntary Organisations
- Clubs and Associations
- Social Services and Welfare Organisations
- Youth and Community Groups

Telephone survey

We selected a random sample of organisations from this list and secured 1,400 interviews. We have corrected for any over or under representation of different sizes of organisations by weighting according to the profile of the data set by organisation size (using 1-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-24, 25-49, 50+ employees as the categories)

This has provided the main base for analysis and gives a set of results, which should give a picture accurate to within better than +/-3% (to a confidence level of 95%) of the survey population (ie the 26,995 organisations in the Yellow Pages). Any bias or inaccuracy should therefore be restricted to the extent to which the survey population can be taken as representative of all voluntary and community organisations. Clearly very small organisations and groups with no telephone and organisations classifying themselves under other headings will not be included.

Email survey

The email survey was distributed to any organisation for which we could obtain an email address. By its nature it is clearly biased towards larger organisations and towards those who already have ICT access. 460 responses are analysed in this report. Due to the nature of the sample it cannot be taken to be accurately representative– rather it provides an indication of the position for more ‘e-enabled’ organisations.

Focus groups and telephone interviews

We had originally planned to undertake focus groups, with around 36 (i.e. 6 groups of 6 or more) people drawn from the telephone survey respondents. The proportion of early respondents indicating willingness to participate in focus groups made this difficult however.

We amended our methodology in order to gather the same qualitative information. We actually undertook:

- a) One focus group with 9 representatives of community-based organisations in Tower Hamlets, London; and
- b) 20-30 minute in-depth interviews with a total of 24 representatives of a broad range of community and voluntary sector organisations across the UK.

Other consultations

In our original methodology we had proposed to undertake limited desk research to capture a little of the previous research and summarise some of the related initiatives underway. In practice we have spoken to a much larger number of people than anticipated. We have also reviewed information and material from a wide range of existing organisations and networks.

3. Previous Findings and Research

Before looking at the new data gathered during this study, it is useful to review previous work by others.

We have not been able to identify a significant amount of research on the levels and usage of ICT in the voluntary and community sectors. There are a significant number of case studies, discussion papers and policy proposals – but these are generally founded on experience in only one part of the voluntary and community sectors.

Such research as does exist appears either to have focused on larger organisations only, or on the situation in a very restricted local area. This latter has often been the precursor to development of some type of local initiative.

This study therefore represents the first attempt to build a picture of the use and effect of ICT technologies in the voluntary and community sectors on a comprehensive basis across England.

Nevertheless, it is appropriate to review existing research in these sectors and to consider whether research undertaken in other sectors may have some applicability – or at least suggest some issues to consider.

We have undertaken a brief review of existing research on this basis, and drawn the key conclusions outlined below. We have also included a review of key data from a recent study of UK business use of the internet which provides a number of useful comparisons.

Uptake amongst larger organisations is high

According to research undertaken in mid 1998 by Burt and Taylor (2000) over 80% of organisations with incomes between £250k and £11m were using some form of electronic networking and a further 5% or so intended to adopt such technologies by 2002. In a study of much smaller organisations by Wilkinson (2000) in 1999 over 60% of the organisations were online and over 20% of the rest intended to move online in the near future. It should be noted however that these smaller organisations were community advice and information agencies where use of ICT might be expected to be at higher levels.

The Future Foundation (2000) undertook a survey of 150 “leading charities” that again indicated high levels of internet access by these organisations.

Broadly it is clear that a lot of the very largest voluntary and community sector organisations do have internet access, and have had for some time. There has been an assumption by many of the researchers looking at larger organisations, and by others, that in smaller organisations the level of internet access would be much lower.

Even in large organisations the real level of ICT use is much lower than it first appears

Burt and Taylor, and the Future Foundation, both found that the apparent high uptake of the internet disguised quite low levels of actual usage of ICT technologies – even in the large organisations they surveyed. For example, internal email was used by just half the organisations. Very few used the internet for business process activities such as online recruitment, purchasing, exchange of information with stakeholders, internal decision making and similar activities.

In other words, although at a simplistic level larger organisations can be seen to be online, in reality their use of ICT to reduce costs and increase productivity is very limited.

There is massive unrealised potential

In a discussion paper aimed at American not-for-profit organisations, Blau (2001) points to the benefits gained by the private sector in the adoption of ICT. A Morino Institute report, “From Access to Outcomes” (2001) takes a similar approach, again primarily addressed at US organisations but with wider applicability.

Both of these reports, along with Burt and Taylor, Wilkinson and the Future Foundation all point to substantial benefits potentially available to the voluntary and community sector, but in general not yet realised. At present it appears that organisations do recognise the benefit of the internet in terms of access to information, improved communication and the potential for increased visibility. Far fewer have recognised, let alone acted on, ICT's potential for transforming service delivery and the internal processes of an organisation. There is a general assertion by all these writers that such benefits could be considerable.

Further uptake of ICT may radically alter the sector

The Future Foundation, Blau and the Morino Institute all point to the potential for major change to the sector if ICT is adopted on a widespread basis. Comparisons to the private sector suggest that major changes in the cost basis of organisations, in the way services are delivered, in the skills required and in organisational form might all result from further adoption of ICT. There is a strong suggestion in Blau, Wilkinson and the Future Foundation's work that there is very little appreciation of these potential changes within the sector at present.

Training, support and attitude change all matter

Wilkinson identified that the main barriers to internet adoption were lack of funding and staff time. The Morino Institute suggests that "in the corporate sector, fundamental change required far more than plunking down a computer in front of every employee" and that "for most projects no more than one third of the funding should go to technology itself". The other reports too suggest the importance of training, support and attitude change – all having cost implications other than the simple funding of capital equipment.

The UK business sector is well connected

A recent DTI (2001) study provides a range of data on the adoption and use of ICT in business. A number of the questions asked during this study are very similar to those in this study, and some provide near direct comparisons (see Chapter 4).

Internet access

94% of UK businesses have access to the Internet. Internet access appears to be reaching saturation point, with growth slowing and more than 90% of businesses having access in most countries. The level of Internet access has continued to grow however, growth rates during the last year have not been as high as in previous years. This is probably because internet access is virtually ubiquitous amongst medium and large businesses (those with 50 or more employees) Micro business access rose to 76% by 2001.

Websites

80% of businesses have a website.

Type of Connectivity

Of businesses with access to the Internet:

- 32% have only standard telephone modem
- 29% use an ISDN connection
- 2% use a cable modem
- 2% use ADSL
- 34% use a leased line
- 1% use each of a wireless connection and broadband/satellite

Intranet

In the UK 58% of businesses have Intranets and 16% of UK businesses were considering the introduction of an Intranet

Uses of ICT

79% of businesses that use ICTs use them to provide information about goods and services.

41% use the internet to aid recruitment.

4. Quantitative Survey Data

This section presents the most significant outputs from the survey questionnaires, along with initial analysis of the key points emerging.

In order to provide a much firmer basis for policy making than existing research gives, we undertook two large-scale surveys of the voluntary and community sector in England.

The methodology for these is described in Chapter 2 of this report, and given in more detail in Annex A and B. In our view:

- The telephone survey (of 1,400 randomly chosen organisations) provides a robust assessment of the sector
- The email survey (of some 460 respondents) should not be taken as representative but does provide a useful insight into 460 of the more ICT aware organisations

Our analysis of the answers to the questions in both surveys is presented as tables with commentaries for both the telephone and email surveys, in Annexes A and B to this report. The full sets of data are presented in a tabular format in an appendix produced as a separate document – this also includes the questionnaires used. Finally, the data from the telephone survey is held in SPSS format and further analysis can be performed on this, on request.

Sector, size and client group

50% of the respondents to the telephone survey classified themselves as in the community sector and 50% from the voluntary sector. Over half of the organisations employed nine or fewer members of staff.

Most organisations involved volunteers, with the numbers of volunteers increasing with the size of organisation, as might be expected. The main client groups identified were:

Unspecified other	25%
Local people in general	17%
Older people	15%
Young people	12%
People with illnesses	10%
Children	9%
Disabled people	8%
Volunteers	5%

The email survey differs significantly with around 25% of respondents being from organisations with 50+ staff, and 75% in the voluntary sector. Because it required email and web access to respond, almost all organisations responding owned computers and had access to the internet.

Variation across size

Although there were changes across the size of organisations, these were generally much less significant than we anticipated. In general organisations of all sizes tended to have similar answers to most of the survey questions.

Computer Ownership

We asked a number of questions relating to computer ownership, but the most revealing replies were contained in a question asking organisations to indicate how many computers they owned, when this was plotted against the size of the organisation, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Numbers of computers owned

	Com.	Vol.	Number of Paid Employees						
			1-3	4-6	7-9	10-24	25-49	50+	Don't Know
1	31%	31%	37%	23%	22%	23%	12%	9%	29%
2	19%	19%	22%	15%	18%	17%	5%	9%	18%
3	10%	10%	10%	11%	9%	9%	10%	7%	6%
4	6%	6%	9%	15%	11%	6%	10%	4%	3%
5	5%	5%	3%	9%	5%	7%	10%	10%	2%
6	3%	3%	2%	3%	2%	3%	8%	5%	1%
7	3%	3%	2%	5%	7%	6%	1%	4%	4%
8	3%	3%	1%	3%	5%	6%	2%	7%	2%
9	2%	1%	1%	1%	3%	2%	2%	4%	0%
10-14	8%	7%	4%	6%	11%	11%	18%	9%	6%
15-20	4%	4%	2%	3%	2%	7%	11%	7%	4%
21-24	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	2%	0%
25-49	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	4%	3%	1%
50+	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%	3%
Don't Know	6%	6%	6%	4%	2%	2%	6%	13%	22%

As would be expected, smaller organisations have smaller numbers of computers. However, amongst larger organisations the level of computer ownership is much lower than might be expected. Some 60% of organisations employing 25-49 people have fewer than nine computers and around 45% have no more than five. On the other hand over 60% of organisations with 1-3 employees have two or more computers.

In part this will be due to the nature of the organisation. For example, a voluntary organisation with many manual workers or front line care staff is unlikely to provide computers for those types of employees. Because the survey did not ask how many staff needed computers we are unable to quantify this. However our telephone discussions suggested that the overall indication

of the figures, i.e. that many larger organisations are undersupplied with computers, is indeed the case.

For those organisations that have no computers at present, over 40% indicate that this is because they believe that computers would be of no benefit to them. Of the remainder, around half would be interested in receiving assistance to purchase computers.

We conclude from this data that there is *some* need to provide computers for the minority of organisations that currently do not have them, but that the main requirement is in providing more computers for the majority of organisations that are drastically under-equipped. We also conclude from our wider experience in the field and the evidence in the in-depth telephone interviews (see later) that the computers possessed by many organisations are old, and of very limited capacity. The numbers of computers indicated in the survey should therefore be seen as an overstatement of the position – a substantial proportion (which we cannot quantify on the basis of this survey) need to be replaced and/or upgraded if they are to be of value.

Internet Connectivity

Whilst the majority of organisations do have internet access, a significant minority of 33% do not. The larger the organisation, the more likely that internet access will exist – although 18% of organisations with over 50 employees have no internet access, and this seems to be a very high proportion for organisations of that size. Of those who do not have email around 50% suggest that they do not need it. This position did not vary across organisations addressing different client groups, to any great extent.

As with computer ownership however, the simple possession of internet access disguises a major technology gap.

Table 2: Type of connectivity – total and small vs large organisations (base – all respondents)

Type of connection	Total	1-3 employees	50+ employees	Email survey
Telephone	70%	73%	53%	41%
ISDN	21%	17%	24%	24%
XDSL	3%	2%	5%	4%
Cable modem	7%	9%	13%	3%
Leased Line	1%	05	3%	11%
Other	2%	1%	4%	17%

In our view one of the most striking results of the whole survey is this illustration of the poor level of internet connectivity. Not only do two thirds of all organisations only have an ordinary dial-up connection – this is true of over 50% of the largest organisations. For those with a faster level of connectivity over half rely on ISDN, which does not provide true broadband connection and is of decreasing relative benefit. Even for the more ICT aware organisations in the email survey, 40% still have only a regular telephone connection and half of the remainder rely on ISDN.

It is clear that the current speed of internet connectivity in the voluntary and community sector is inadequate in most organisations for all functions with the exception of basic email and

occasional use of websites. Furthermore as websites in general become more complex, this situation will worsen unless major changes in technology used are achieved.

ICT Use

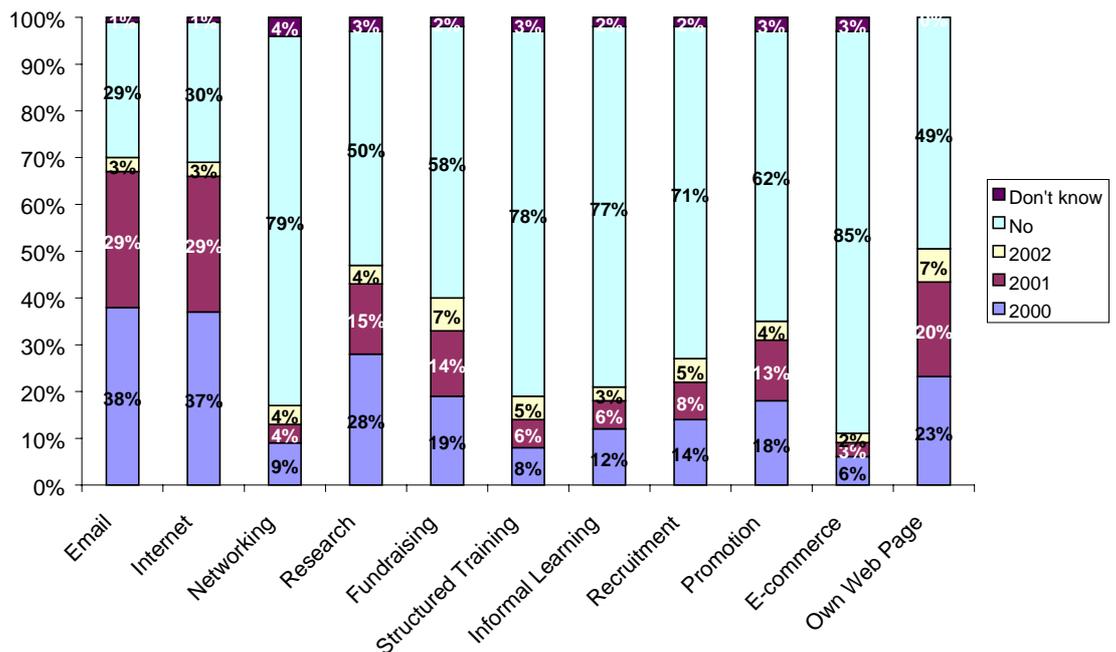
The low level of internet connectivity has practical implications for organisations in the sector and this can be seen in the use they have made of technology for important organisational processes.

Table 3: ICT usage

	Telephone Survey	Email Survey
Have an e-commerce strategy	3%	12%
Have purchased products/services	11%	46%
Used electronic tendering	1%	50%+
Can receive donations	8%	14%
Can accept job applications	13%	34%

The relatively low level of exploitation of ICT can also be seen in the way people responded to questions about existing and future use.

Table 4:
Timing of adoption of types of ICT and internet usage



It is clear that only in use of email and “the internet” do most organisations see a value in ICT. A significant number – but still less than 50% – do or expect to use ICT for research, fundraising, or their own web page (which is a method rather than an actual function of itself). Few do or expect to use ICT for any type of training, recruitment or e-commerce.

Finally, and most strikingly, only 17% of organisations expect to have any type of internal network by the end of 2002. As with other results, this does not change greatly with organisational size.

In the email survey, adoption and use of the technologies is much higher, as might be expected. The biggest contrast is in the commitment to use of an intranet or some form of internal networking which rises to 80% of these organisations by the end of 2002.

In our view the clear message from these responses is that most organisations are a great distance from exploiting ICT to have a major impact on the way in which the organisation works. It is also very clear that most organisations *do not* expect to have some form of internal network – generally reckoned to be a key infrastructure requirement in exploiting ICT fully.

Taken together with the data on internet connectivity, the indication is that, if no intervention is made, most of the community and voluntary sector will be able to make only very limited use of ICT.

The importance of the internet to delivering services

In contrast with the types of technology possessed and anticipated uses, there appear to be substantial numbers of organisations that see that the internet has or could have a high level of importance to meeting their objectives. Further, the value placed on the internet as a tool for delivering services rises dramatically amongst organisations that are more e-enabled.

Table 5: Level of importance of types of internet activities in delivering services (telephone survey)

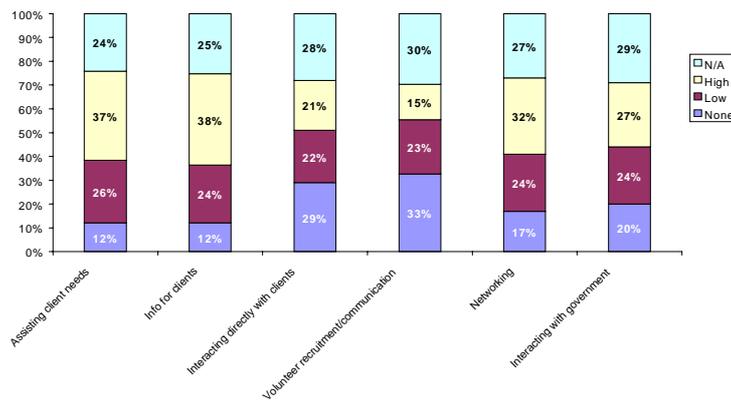
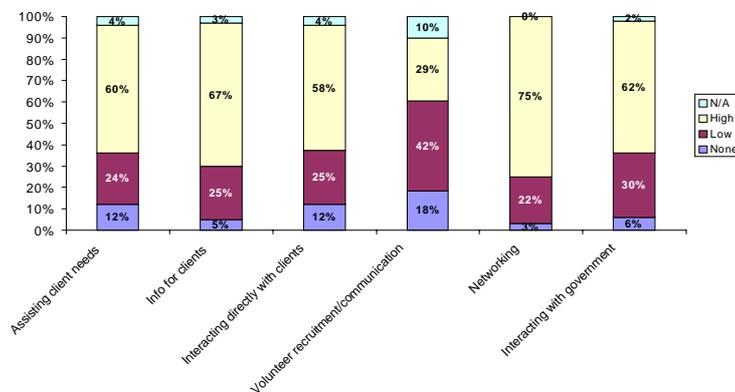


Table 6: Level of importance of types of internet activities in delivering services (email survey)



An initial examination of these results suggests that well over 50% e-enabled organisations place a very high importance on the value of the internet meeting their clients needs.

Further analysis of the telephone survey also supports this contention. When the results for those organisations with internet access from the telephone survey are extracted, the proportions of these placing a high value on the value of the internet rises towards those for the email survey respondents.

Within the limits of the data collected, there appears to be no other factor that determines the attitude towards the value of the internet other than familiarity with it. Uptake of ICT seems to be fairly constant across organisations dealing with a wide range of client groups. It does not appear that client group is important in determining whether or not the internet can aid in the provision of services.

The value of training

Around a quarter to one third of all respondents placed a high value on training for:

- Basic training
- Using ICT to meet the organisation's objectives
- Fundraising
- Website design
- Local content
- Community websites

With only 11% rating it as high priority, e-commerce training reflected the current low level of e-commerce usage.

Amongst the more ICT aware email survey respondents, the proportion of organisations rating training highly was approximately twice that as those in the main survey – with the exception of basic training which was only rated at around the same level.

As with many of the other responses it is clear that organisations that already have a strong commitment to using ICT place a higher value on training, even though it could be argued that they require it less. Contrasting the results of the two surveys throughout suggests that a large proportion of the email survey group are enthusiastic ICT advocates who, although they still have relatively low levels of technology, are maximising their use of ICT within their existing capabilities. This has enabled them to see the further potential of ICT and therefore they are keen to receive training, take on further assistance in terms of purchasing equipment and generally pursue an ICT development path.

Comparisons to previous research

Research in the sectors

These surveys tend to confirm a number of the findings from earlier research, in particular:

- Although the level of computer ownership and internet connection at a basic level is quite high – uptake of powerful technologies that are driving change in the public and private sectors is actually very low
- There is a significant need for a programme to change attitudes towards ICT
- Lack of support and ICT training are as important as lack of resources

This survey adds more detailed flesh to the bones of the conclusions of earlier surveys. It also helps to demonstrate that smaller voluntary and community sector organisations are in need of considerable support.

However, surprisingly, it indicates that medium sized and larger voluntary and community sector organisations are in no better position. Although the very largest organisations are clearly in a different category, organisations with 50 or more staff often appear to have higher staff to computer ratios than smaller organisations (ie more staff sharing each computer).

Overall we conclude that our survey reinforces the outputs of previous surveys but paints a picture of much less uptake in the use of ICT, in these sectors, than has been previously suggested.

Comparisons with research on business

The DTI study results referred to in the previous chapter were all weighted by number of employees whereas the figures in this study have all been presented according to number of organisations, in size bands. This makes most difference at the 50+ employees band where organisations in this study varied from 50 to over 6,000 employees. In order to provide direct comparisons, the figures for Community and Voluntary Sector organisations are given below also weighted by number of employees. These figures generally show higher levels of ICT use than given in the rest of this chapter because they are strongly affected by a small number of very large organisations (such as those referred to in the Future Foundation study).

This comparison with the business sector (using a weighting of results by number of employees for comparison purposes) shows that:

- By the end of 2001 78% of Voluntary and Community sector organisations expect to have an internet connection, compared to 94% of businesses.
- By the end of 2001 only 53% of Voluntary and Community sector organisations expect to have a web page, compared to 80% of businesses.
- 64% of all UK businesses have an internet connection faster than a standard telephone line and modem – compared to only 31% of all organisations in the community and voluntary sectors.
- 74% of UK businesses have or plan to have an intranet (internal network) compared to only 28% in the community and voluntary sector.

The poor infrastructure is reflected in the uses to which ICT is put. For example:

- whilst 79% of businesses use the internet for promotion, only 49% of Voluntary and Community sector organisations do so.
- only 35% of Voluntary and Community sector organisations use the internet for recruitment compared with 41% of businesses.

5. Qualitative data

Building on the quantitative data, the results from more in depth interviews, additional comments and a focus group help to provide further background and detail.

We undertook 24 in-depth telephone interviews with respondents to the original telephone survey. We conducted a focus group with nine representatives of community and voluntary organisations in Tower Hamlets and we also analysed “any other comments” responses from 125 respondents to the email survey.

Summaries of the outputs of each of these are to be found in Annexe C and full responses (anonymised) in the separately produced appendix.

The purpose of this more qualitative element of the research was to build a more complete picture than that given by the simple survey results. In particular we were interested to pursue the actual and potential benefits and barriers to the use of ICT in the sector.

“It’s more like a home office than an organisation”

The telephone interviews in particular tended to confirm the picture emerging from the survey of low levels of ICT functionality.

Many organisations had old computers, some of which had been donated once they were past their useful life within companies. The impression was that there was no time to think and develop an effective ICT strategy, quite apart from lack of money to implement it. It was extremely difficult to secure effective and reliable support unless the organisation was of a sufficient size and had a sufficient budget to pay for a full-time member of staff to undertake this function.

The picture was articulated by one respondent who summarised the overall use of ICT in their organisation by saying:

“It’s more like a home office environment than like working in a real organisation”

There was also much talk of the influence of individuals. In some cases senior managers or management committees were not convinced of the benefits of ICT and were resisting change.

In other cases ICT was being more widely used as the result of the efforts of one or two ICT advocates.

The overwhelming impression was of a sector where the current main benefit of ICT is really restricted to word processing and spreadsheets with some use of databases. Email has intermittent value, although this is very often restricted by insufficient people in any particular network or client group having email. Where people are attempting to use networking technologies between organisations these have to be adjusted to "the lowest common denominator".

Benefits

A variety of benefits were identified, which we found could be usefully classified as one of three general types:

1. Organisational benefits (efficiency)
2. Service delivery benefits (effectiveness)
3. Wider networking, capacity building and social capital

Organisational benefits (efficiency)

- collection, analysis and submission of statistics
- information storage & retrieval
- spread of information flow
- massive savings for mailing, etc
- massive savings for research
- communication between staff at different sites
- cheap transmission of documents
- massively reduced admin staff costs
- collaboration, joint use of resources
- reduced need for time consuming face to face meetings – particularly valuable at national or regional level and during the foot and mouth crisis
- mailings and newsletters to client groups and members
- access to published documents and funding application forms
- fundraising correspondence and research
- marketing
- clearer financial management and stock control

Many organisations were clear that use of ICT was central to their survival, reducing admin costs, substantially. Few had internal networks but many saw this as a key requirement.

Service delivery benefits (effectiveness)

There was a wide range of benefits quoted, often by individual organisations, but with clear general applicability:

- speedy access to client records for each support session
- mutual support groups online
- video conferencing for rural areas
- potential for learning centre
- sharing of evidence based good practice
- email and web sites allow deaf people to access information and to secure employment by demonstrating information processing skills
- research at speed to find solutions for clients
- extensive but low cost contact with members and clients through e-newsletters
- extending consultation processes to smaller organisations and giving all consultees longer to respond and thus make more thoughtful or informed comments
- new knowledge of lesser known funding sources
- fundraising opportunities through increased publicity via websites and news pages
- publicity and marketing
- online donations – where credit security didn't deter donors using the site
- greater access to government publications and news of them
- producing CVs, looking for jobs etc, much faster for clients

Specific target/client groups secure specific benefits from ICT and for some these are extremely valuable. Few organisations have fully explored direct use of ICT with their target groups/clients/members, so these benefits are, as yet, largely unrealised.

Wider networking, capacity building and social capital

Scope for sharing resources with other organisations and thus reducing duplicated effort was frequently quoted. This included sharing:

- good practice
- mailing lists
- documents
- frequently requested information via website rather than telephone

However this sharing is dependent on standardisation of software and hardware used, and some people highlighted problems that made sharing impossible.

Some groups were said to have stayed together only because ICT made their communication and wider work viable. At the other extreme, networking worldwide was now an option and

was valuable for gleaning many of the information and idea sharing benefits. Chat rooms were mentioned by several organisations, as a means of creating a community that didn't require much staff time to moderate.

Barriers and disbenefits

Many people indicated that there were negative aspects to the use of ICT:

- the continuing need for face-to-face contact: email seemed to replace this, to the detriment of the service
- developing backlash to everything being online since so many can't access it
- problems with information/email overload
- many things don't work because different people and organisations have different levels of technology

There were many comments on the barriers to using ICT. The three clearest were:

- cost and funding
- the need for technical support, expertise and training
- lack of a management culture that understands the role of ICT in a strategic context

Costs and access to funding

Over a third of comments were about access to funding, in order of numbers of mentions:

- for core funding for the organisation to ensure the longevity of the ICT provision
- for hardware
- for training
- for internet access and broadband in particular
- for the management and staff infrastructure to run and support the systems
- for software and systems
- for access to an IT training suite

Technical support, expertise and training

There are two key aspects here – that technical support is available (externally or in-house) and that staff and members and partner organisations can use the equipment.

Technical support was hard to find and hard to pay for. One respondent suggested that a network of area-wide designated ICT support workers could fill the needs of a range of organisations at a lower cost. Many organisations also needed **training** – to get started and to upgrade their staff knowledge of ICT use. Access to this was also difficult, on the basis of availability and cost.

Many organisations also cited problems **with people being unable to use ICT or afraid of it**. This is included staff, members, client groups, and partners. Problems included:

- Using computers of different ages.
- Lack of disabled support equipment
- Very slow internet access.
- Middle aged and older people were more reluctant to use ICT.
- Concerns that web sites might be used for partisan community lobbying or criticism.
- A view that it was a diversion from core work of the organisation.

There was a key theme of **networks not being able to use ICT** – to match the potential benefits of networking identified above.

- Some people lacked the culture of sharing documents, information and best practice.
- Some fled discussion groups when a virus was going about and never came back, just in case.
- Many simply couldn't afford to get online when their core funding was at threat.

Both of these issues go back to funding: if the people you work with can't afford high enough specification computers and connectivity to make use of the internet, the potential benefits of using it are lost. One respondent told of a whole network of organisations using Word 2 documents so that the person with the lowest standard of ICT could still participate – thus keeping everyone from realising the full benefits of ICT.

Lack 'management' awareness of the benefits of ICT

"Because employers don't have that much knowledge it's very hard to work and plan strategically. It feels a bit like walking with a blindfold with your hands tied."

One of the strongest messages – voiced in many different ways – was the need for capacity building in terms of understanding what ICT is and how it can support the objectives of voluntary organisations. "Management knows ICT is out there" but there are questions of "Why should we use it – won't the staff waste their time surfing?" to "What do we need to buy and where do we get it?" As a result, funding priorities can be directed elsewhere, and use of existing technology not realised.

There are **practical issues** to be tackled – how to cope with the increased demand for information, popularity of the service and growth of networking. Staff can end up being more stretched rather than helped by poorly managed ICT.

Other responses

A number of other responses emerged:

- There is considerable variety between organisations that does not appear to relate to their size, structure or type of client group.
- As indicated in the survey, large organisations are not necessarily at an advantage.
- Many individuals in organisations with little ICT see it as irrelevant, despite similar organisations using ICT.

- Many voluntary organisations have a local/regional-based structure and their local branches are not necessarily on the same level of ICT use as their central body.
- Many organisations, small and large, now use email and the web as a central part of their activity and cannot conceive of functioning without it.
- The impetus for adoption of ICT may be the recruitment of new staff from elsewhere.
- Although some issues did not feature highly in the survey as concerns, they may be very significant for some organisations whilst being irrelevant to others. For example, security was not a general concern in relation to use of the internet but for a local office of a children's charity it was critical.

Suggested solutions

From the interviews and comments three practical proposals emerged:

1. awareness raising needs to be taken to the "non-techies" – management and key staff
2. focus on the needs of the community and voluntary organisations and building solutions upwards and having core resources (hosting, page building, email lists) to be able to fit their different needs.
3. invest in people at a local level to build strong support networks at the same time as creating a flexible open national network for resources, services and information

The focus group, by its nature went further in proposing a practical solution:

- At grass roots level small organisations are struggling. They probably have outdated equipment with no resources for upgrading, and staff have to learn as they go with little if any support.
- While there is a lot of funding for UK Online centres and other education-related community technology projects, there may be no direct links to other community and voluntary organisations.
- At the same time, the community technology projects will be looking to local organisations to promote their courses and other activities - so there should be scope for mutuality.
- Traditional intermediary organisations like councils for voluntary service, may themselves be under-utilising technology and probably do not have the capability to provide advice to their clients (that is, the local community and voluntary organisations).
- What is needed is a technology support agency working at regional (in the case London-wide) level. This should be able to help with audit and planning, choosing hardware and support, training, problem solving.
- Services would need to be free or low cost because organisations would not have budgets to cover any major consultancy or training costs.

6. Local Initiatives & Resources

This section shows potential for action by providing a very brief summary of some of the organisations already providing support to voluntary and community sector use of ICT.

There are a number of organisations that provide support to voluntary and community sector groups in using ICT. We were already aware of many of these, but came into contact with more during this research. They provide an important starting point for any future action. The list below is far from comprehensive and certainly omits a number of existing regionally and locally based organisations. It is significant in that it provides an indication of the existing base of potential organisations on which any new initiative should be built.

Communities Online <http://www.communities.org.uk>

Communities Online, started in 1996, is a not-for-profit company that 'aims to address issues of sustainability, regeneration, social inclusion and healthier economies by focusing on the use of new communications technologies in communities and neighbourhoods'.

Community Informatics Research and Applications Unit <http://www.cira.org.uk>

CIRA at the University of Teesside provides training and awareness packages for community groups and other organisations, undertakes research, and runs events including the Creative and Connected conference in September 2001. Also developing Tees Valley Communities Online with local groups.

Community Information Systems Centre <http://cisc.uwe.ac.uk/>

CISC at the University of the West of England, Bristol runs a range of practical ICT workshops in partnership with community and voluntary sector organisations and communities of interest, and is involved in evaluation, feasibility studies, consultancy and development work, as well as action research projects.

DirectSupport <http://www.ictcentre.org.uk>

A consortium of organisations funded by the Department for Education and Skills to support small, community-based UK Online Centres. Provides them with a help desk, mentor services, training and a dedicated online network. Partners are National Rural Enterprise Centre, Action

with Communities in Rural England, Community Action Network, Community Development Foundation and Partnerships Online.

ISAware <http://www.isaware.org.uk>

Manchester-based public sector initiative to support small businesses and community enterprises through advice, training, partnerships and networks. Useful 'getting started' pages and extensive indexed links on ecommerce, securing and annoyances, policy and law, and learning.

IT Resource Guide for UK Charities <http://www.itforcharities.co.uk>

This site by consultant Ivan Wainwright maintains it is 'the most comprehensive guide to IT information, products and services for the UK voluntary sector'. Tech advice, hardware and software recommendations, events, training and other resources plus a newsletter.

Knowledgebase <http://www.lasa.org.uk/knowledgebase/index.shtml>

A free online guide to IT issues for the voluntary sector, run by London Advice Services Alliance

London Advice Services Alliance <http://www.lasa.org.uk/>

LASA runs Rightsnet the welfare rights website for advice workers and other services for advisers including training and consultancy. Also publishes Computanews a bi monthly magazine, and Knowledgebase a free online service providing information and advice on IT issues affecting the voluntary sector.

Manchester Community Information Network <http://www.mymanchester.net/>

MCIN provide a range of services networking voluntary and community organisations in Manchester. A project (Circuit), with other local agencies, to support voluntary and community groups with their use of ICT (report at www.mymanchester.net/circuit).

Network Online <http://www.networksonline.org.uk>

Networks Online is a subscription-based 'network of networks' providing and linking intranets and extranets in the voluntary, public and private sectors. Member networks include: RuralNet; Community Action Network; ACRE and the Cornwall Extranet. Run by NREC in collaboration with Community Action Network.

Sussex Community internet Project <http://www.scip.org.uk>

Provides training and support for local community and voluntary sector organisations.

Further resources and national bodies can be found at:

<http://www.makingthenetwork.org/tools/who.htm>

7. Analysis and Conclusions

Drawing together all the data summarised in earlier chapters and presenting our overall analysis.

The internet and ICT can substantially improve the delivery of services to clients

Over **30%** of all the organisations surveyed ascribed **high importance** to the internet in delivery of **services to clients**. For organisations that were already ICT enabled, around **60%** ascribed **high importance** to the internet in assisting with client needs, information for clients, interacting directly with clients, networking and interacting with government.

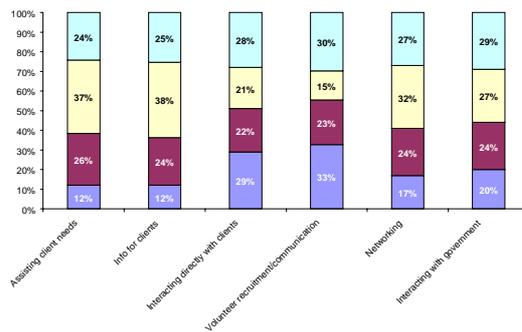


Table 5: Level of importance of types of internet activities in delivering services (*telephone survey*)

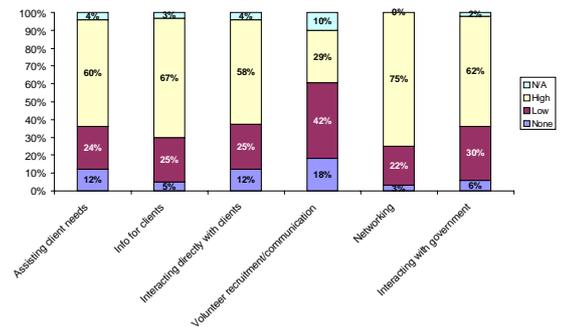


Table 6: Level of importance of types of internet activities in delivering services (*email survey*)

The qualitative data we secured through the telephone interviews and focus group provided more evidence of the value of the internet and ICT for those organisations that had sufficient time, money and creativity to develop ICT use with their clients. Such benefits included:

- For certain groups such as deaf people, the internet offers access to services and communication potential that is simply not available in any other way that does not involve massive cost.
- For other groups such as those with illness, the information available through the internet provides the possibility of acting and taking control of their lives in a way which was not previously open to them.
- For others the use of ICT enables them to, for example access training and employment information, learn basic skills and develop new interests.
- Other benefits included:

- mutual support groups online
- video conferencing for rural areas
- research at speed to find solutions for clients
- extensive but low cost contact with members and clients through e-newsletters
- new knowledge of lesser known funding sources
- fundraising opportunities through increased publicity via websites and news pages
- producing CVs, looking for jobs etc, much faster for clients

In fact, our interviews suggested to us that the benefits to community and voluntary organisations in improving services were analogous to those claimed for small businesses. Overall, the benefits of ICT in delivering services were claimed by organisations from across the voluntary and community sectors. The survey responses suggest that the more the sector is ICT enabled, the greater will be its capacity to deliver effective services.

This is an important observation, in the light of the government's target to deliver government services online by 2005. Voluntary and community sector organisations are likely to be important partners in delivering e-government services to the hardest to reach groups, as well as delivering their own services.

There are also significant benefits in terms of efficiency and networking gains

We have identified benefits of ICT in three ways throughout this study:

Efficiency - Operations that benefit the day-to-day running of the organisations. These might include classic office uses of word processing, databases and spreadsheets, including letters, reports, newsletters, and accounts. Email and use of the web may - or may not - be integrated with these operations and used to extend the information and communication capabilities of the organisation. The degree of online integration is likely to depend on whether the office computers are networked and staff each has desktop email.

Most of the organisations that we surveyed and spoke to were using ICT in some way to benefit their overall efficiency and reduce costs or improve response times. In most cases there were clearly much greater gains possible if the barriers of lack of funding, time, expertise and attitude could be overcome.

Effectiveness – Improvements to service delivery, as discussed above

Networking. Wider network effects, whereby online working with a wide range of clients and/or other interests creates additional benefits. These might arise, for example, where members of a local partnership are working online to be more than the sum of their parts and find they could not do this as well without internet based communication. It may be where online communication catalyses new collaborations, or helps underpin face-to-face and other networking. Exchange of best practice and finding new ways of doing things are often cited as an important benefit.

Within the organisations we spoke to, it often appeared that the networking benefits of ICT were appreciated but not fully realised. It could be that there will be a gradual increase in these benefits over the next few years as more organisations participate in networked discussion and activity.

But there is poor ICT infrastructure, preventing these gains

A clear picture emerges from the quantitative and qualitative data of a sector with, in general, a poor level of ICT infrastructure:

- most organisations have a low proportion of computers to paid staff (which clearly worsens if volunteers are taken into account) for example 60% of organisations employing 25 to 49 people have fewer than 9 computers.
- 33% of organisations have no internet access – of those that do, 70% have connectivity no faster than a phone line/modem (some of which will be much slower than the current modem speed of 56kbs)
- only 17% of organisations will have an internal network by the end of 2002 and the remainder have no plans for one at this time

Although 82% of organisations have computers and 67% have an internet connection, these computers are often at a level too low to make use of the opportunities of core cost savings, productivity gain and service developments that have been achieved in the public and private sectors.

A comparison with the business sector (using a weighting of results by number of employees for comparison purposes) shows that:

- By the end of 2001 78% of Voluntary and Community sector organisations expect to have an internet connection, compared to 94% of businesses.
- By the end of 2001 only 53% of Voluntary and Community sector organisations expect to have a web page, compared to 80% of businesses.
- 64% of all UK businesses have an internet connection faster than a standard telephone line and modem – compared to only 31% of all organisations in the community and voluntary sectors.
- 74% of UK businesses have or plan to have an intranet (internal network) compared to only 28% in the community and voluntary sector.

The poor infrastructure is reflected in the uses to which ICT is put. For example:

- whilst 79% of businesses use the internet for promotion, only 49% of Voluntary and Community sector organisations do so.
- only 35% of Voluntary and Community sector organisations use the internet for recruitment compared with 41% of businesses.

Larger organisations are not in a better position

Our survey results consistently show that the position of larger organisations (50+) is not a great deal better than smaller organisations. Previous studies have shown that the very largest

organisations are in a different position, and we do not challenge this conclusion. However “large” in the context of these previous studies was very much larger than our largest category of 50+ employees.

In some respects larger organisations are worse off. A small local charity with two to three computers, a dial up internet connection and three staff is clearly much more “e-enabled” than an organisation of 50 staff with 10-15 computers and dial up internet connection. Yet larger organisations appear to have a smaller ratio of computers per head and very high levels (over 50%) of dial up connectivity.

Awareness and attitude are key barriers

There is, as identified above, a clear need for financial investment. But many staff, managers, management committees and volunteers do not perceive the potential value of ICT in the sector. Attitude change is an important precursor to any major change. It is clear for example that few organisations expect to increase their use of ICT over and above its current levels.

Nevertheless there are a good number of innovative and effective ICT users

Despite an overall picture of poor ICT use and attitudinal barriers, there is a significant minority of organisations that have adopted ICT enthusiastically, have up to date equipment and use innovative approaches.

The main difference, for example, between the email survey (of ICT enthusiasts) and the overall sector was the commitment to internal networking. Often working with restricted budgets and/or with support provided at low cost by volunteers, these organisations are exploiting ICT as much as they can within restricted resources. There are many examples of creative use of ICT to improve organisational efficiency and to work with clients.

There are a number of barriers to overcome

Barriers within organisations

Senior staff attitudes. If senior managers are not ICT-literate and/or do not see the benefits, it will be difficult to introduce an effective ICT strategy. The usual two-tier structure of management committees and staff may also further complicate decision-making on items that may not be seen as having a high priority. There may be resistance to increasing core budgets.

Computers and connectivity are seen as add-ons, not part of core budgeting or staff and organisational development. Enhancements are often funded through specific project-related applications – which make planning particularly difficult.

Staff resistance. Most staff are hard-pressed and understandably want just-in-time solutions... not another set of tasks. Technology will generally need to be seen as making life easier, not more difficult, to be taken on enthusiastically.

Problems in getting appropriate affordable training. Commercial training may be costly. Training aimed at community and voluntary sector may not be available locally, leading to high time and travel costs.

Culture of make it up as you go - time pressure. It takes time to save time... and it takes time to introduce technology. Most organisations and their staff find it difficult to take 'time out' to do this.

Lack of technical support. There are problems in recruiting technical staff at the salary levels prevalent in the community and voluntary sectors. Technical staff who are working in the sector will be tempted to move to private and public sectors for career development and remuneration. Equally there are problems in securing outsourced technical support for all small organisations – almost at any cost.

Barriers within the sectors

Lack of client-led pressure for change. Commercial organisations ultimately have to respond to the needs of their customers - or find that their competitors will do so. Few community or voluntary sector organisations - while highly committed to serving their clients - face this pressure financially. They are in competition with other organisations - but usually for funding. In that sense the 'clients' who may influence change are as likely to be funders as beneficiaries. Many clients will have little ICT access at present and are unlikely, therefore, to demand its use.

Lack of awareness among funders. There are few sources of funding. Staff within funding organisations are unlikely to be aware of the technology issues facing their 'clients' because their own needs are likely to be met by in-house technical departments.

Few overt champions and models. Those making a success of the use of ICTs do not have much encouragement through awards or other means to tell their story.

Under-appreciation of the benefits of online networking - or lack of critical mass. While most community and voluntary organisation benefit enormously from personal face-to-face networking, newsletter and other communications, this is only now being integrated with online communications. While there is growing use of one-to-one email, and web sites, there seems little appreciation of the potential of email discussion lists, email newsletters and bulletin boards.

Drivers for change

Against these barriers we did identify two powerful drivers for change, over and above Government programmes.

Staff with experience of benefits from college, university, or other employment, may press for change. Organisations may find difficulty in recruiting staff and volunteers unless they can offer an adequate ICT environment.

Requirements of partnership and contract working. Community and voluntary organisations increasingly have to work in partnership with public and private bodies, and deliver services under contract. They may face pressure to meet 'industry standards'.

Support and training are key

Many organisations recounted tales of the difficulty in obtaining good technical support, almost at any price. As organisations became more ICT aware, they saw increasing benefits in a wide range of training.

At present organisations are heavily dependent on voluntary or low priced forms of support. Time and money to establish effective support and training is not available. The role of ICT capable individuals in changing organisations use of ICT was clear. It may be that the pace of change is currently constrained largely by the level and availability of such strategic and technical support and training.

Both strategic and technical training and support are lacking and may be the most important constraint on ICT uptake and application.

Funding is required

The in depth telephone interviews and focus group clearly indicated that There is a clear need for investment in infrastructure and in the ongoing costs of connectivity and technical support. These ongoing costs are significant - it is generally suggested that capital costs should be only one third (or less) of the funding required.

The level of funding required does relate strongly to the quality of support and advice on appropriate systems and costs. Good advice can reduce costs.

The biggest demand for funding is for organisations that already have a low level of ICT equipment and can now see the benefits of acquiring more.

Funding for better connectivity and internal networking is the most important capital need.

Comparisons with earlier research in the sectors

Our findings appear to confirm earlier research – that the widespread use of computers and the internet disguises limited use of the more powerful aspects of the technologies.

Other studies identify the need for both funding and support, as do we. Perhaps the main difference is in our identification that organisational size appears to be much less important than anticipated. We found that there appear to be many smaller organisations making very good use of ICT and many larger organisations that are not. We have not found research that confirms or denies this finding – although many accounts and opinions assume the opposite.

What action is needed

Costs are not the only barrier. While lack of funding may 'present' as the major issue, money alone will not solve the problems. It is necessary but not sufficient. Computers, software, connectivity and training can only be used effectively if an organisation is clear about its goals, how it serves its clients, the potential benefits of ICTs, and the staffing and other organisational implications of making investments.

If an organisation is to use technology successfully, it should:

- Understand the nature of its own operations and how technology can help
- Develop a technology plan covering equipment, access, training, support and content management
- Make the budgeting and deployment of technology mainstream rather than an add-on

This can be very challenging when staff are already hard-pressed with little spare capacity, probably have little in-depth understanding of the technology, and probably no funds to call in specialist advisers.

There is a clear need for extensive support to overcome these gaps and reap the benefits. There is no evidence that this need is restricted to the smallest organisations and the level of need for such support is therefore considerable.

Three linked interventions appear to be required:

A programme of awareness raising of the costs and benefits of ICT in the sector. This would need to provide evidence of the potential benefit to end users and not just the organisational efficiency gains that might be available. It would need to target senior managers and management committees, not just front line workers.

A programme providing access to funding. Given resource constraints this would probably need to be prioritised towards those groups and organisations meeting wider Government aims. In part this might be achieved through existing funding mechanisms such as SRB, New Deal for Communities etc but it seems likely that other funds would be required

A programme providing strategic and technical support and advice in relation to use of ICTs. This would certainly require to have a strong training element, but it is clear that it would also need to provide a considerable amount of hands on support. Some of this could be done remotely but some would require face-to-face contact. Reliable technical support is often not available for small organisations (or businesses) at any price, so methods to put this in place would be required. Such support could best be provided through a network of regionally based organisations that might also act as Application Service Providers.

Our strong impression is that there are a number of existing national and regional networks and organisations that are providing these services within particular areas or for particular types of organisations. We believe that there is a strong case to build any response with these organisations rather than trying to put in place something new.

Sustainability

Capital funding is more likely to be available than is funding for ongoing costs – but such ongoing costs are of great importance. Any funding plan must therefore achieve two objectives:

Firstly to help organisations to overcome the **initial funding hump** or barrier which currently prevents them upgrading their ICT infrastructure

Secondly to help them fund the **ongoing costs** of technical support, equipment upgrade, training and connectivity (i.e. line rental etc)

It is also clear that investment is needed in internal networking and external connectivity. There are severe limitations on what organisations can gain from ICTs without either of these.

This could be achieved by a combination of:

- requiring a technical plan to include an indication of where these ongoing costs will be secured from
- providing funding for such costs directly
- influencing how other existing funding sources support ICT use in the sectors

How to proceed

Having identified the key elements that we believe should be developed, the approach to implementation will be important. The Voluntary and Community Sectors are not passive recipients of funding but active and often pioneering leaders in the field of social welfare and community development. Although the overall pattern of ICT use in the sectors is limited, there are many who are championing and using ICT to its full advantage. The following are therefore suggestions on how to help accelerate change in the sectors by introducing the initiatives proposed in a way appropriate to the sectors' dynamics.

Principles for next steps

Start promoting awareness immediately by publishing this report (or summary).

Commit to **building on what is there already** - don't reinvent the wheel. Undertake an audit of existing technology support organisations (see below for some national bodies).

Acknowledge that best results will be achieved by **involving key stakeholders** in the details of a support strategy. Identify these and make them part of next steps development.

Build capacity. Ensure that the development process enhances the capability of all key interests - funders as well as grass-roots bodies, general intermediary bodies as well as those concerned with community technology.

Look outside, as well as inside, the sector for solutions. Community and voluntary sector organisations and their clients could be a significant market. There may be opportunities for commercial suppliers to tailor mainstream services to their needs. While this will not be sufficient in itself, it could help ensure that there are links between mainstream developments and any specifically tailored to the sector.

Celebrate and encourage innovators in the field. Change will come through the leadership of technology champions at all levels. At present they are often isolated and under appreciated.

Use expertise and lessons from elsewhere. North America offers some models and while these cannot be taken 'off the shelf' there is scope for shared learning.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary, based on these findings, *it is clear that the sectors would be able to enhance their ability to deliver services to the community if they received assistance in terms of:*

- A programme of *awareness raising* of the uses, benefits and barriers to ICT in the sector
- A programme of *training and related support* to assist them integrate ICT into their operations and meet their organisational objectives of delivering services to client groups
- A programme of *assistance to secure funding* for equipment, internal networking and fast internet connectivity

Drawing on our consultation with those already providing support for the use of ICT in the sectors, we recommend that:

- any support by the government *be designed and implemented with the characteristics of the sector in mind*. Specifically it should be developed and delivered in consultation with the wide range of sector support and co-ordinating bodies. It should not reinvent the wheel, but instead aim to build on the significant number of organisations that are already providing ICT support to the sectors, in specific areas and for specific types of groups.
- the funding element of any support should only be provided in the context of technology plans for applicant organisations. Such technology plans would be devised with each organisation and would:
 - identify benefits relating to the organisation's purpose
 - identify benefits, costs and savings
 - include plans to finance the ongoing support and upgrade costs after the first year

ANNEXES



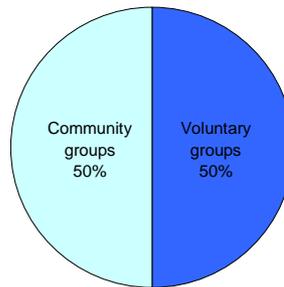
A. Telephone Survey

1,500 structured interviews were completed over the period 29th August to 28th September 2001, using the questionnaire included as an appendix. The analysis that follows assumes that the responses, weighted for size of organisation, can be used to determine the position for the whole survey population of 27,000 community and voluntary sector organisations listed in the Yellow Pages. Responses were drawn from across all 9 English Regions.

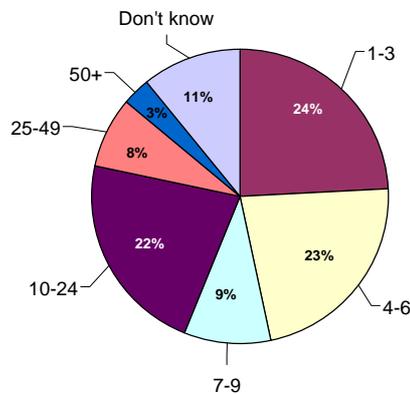
The data presented here is only that which we identified as being most useful in achieving the study objectives. A full set of responses to questions is given as an appendix. The full data set is held on SPSS and can be analysed further on request.

Sector, size and client group

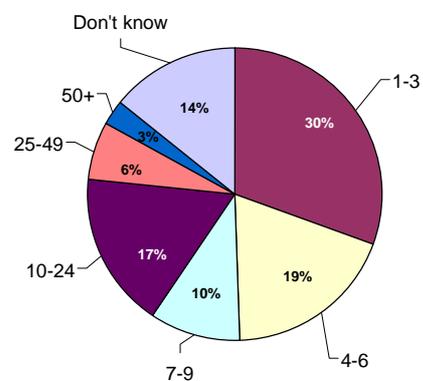
Table A.1:
organisation by
sector and number
of employees



Community groups



Voluntary groups



Respondents self-selected evenly between the “voluntary sector” and “community sector”. Little difference between the sectors and distribution of organisational size can be seen. In much of the following analysis the two are combined as they differ little in most respects – where there are significant differences, these are shown.

The major client groups identified were:

Unspecified other	25%
Local people in general	17%
Older people	15 %
Young people	12%
People with illnesses	10%
Children	9%
Disabled people	8%
Volunteers	5%

All other categories such as lone parents, unemployed people, ethnic minorities, ex-offenders, addicts, etc appeared at very low levels of 0-2%.

Volunteers

Table A.2: Numbers of volunteers

No. of Volunteers	Total	Community Groups	Voluntary Groups
1-3	12%	11%	12%
4-6	12%	11%	12%
7-9	4%	4%	5%
10-24	20%	21%	20%
25-49	6%	5%	7%
50+	12%	8%	17%
Don't Know	34%	41%	26%

The number of volunteers generally increased with the size of organisation, as might be expected.

Annual revenue and ICT budget

Table A.3: Annual Revenue by Sector

Revenue	Total	Community	Voluntary
0-99	6%	5%	7%
100-249	4%	3%	5%
250+	5%	5%	5%
Don't Know	85%	87%	83%

With 85% of respondents indicating they did not know, the results of this question are of limited use. Respondents were asked to give a figure to the nearest £1,000. In the email survey, use of categories in the question achieved a much higher response.

Responses on the annual ICT budget were even lower with 82% claiming no knowledge. Of those that did respond, 78% estimated spend at below £3,000 per year.

Computer ownership/learning and access elsewhere

Table A.4: Computer ownership by number of employees

	Com.	Vol.	Number of Paid Employees							
			0	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-24	25-49	50+	Don't Know
Yes	75%	88%	100%	77%	81%	84%	89%	92%	98%	71%
No	25%	12%		23%	19%	16%	11%	8%	2%	29%

Computer ownership appears to vary with the sector, with Voluntary Organisations more likely to have computers than Community Organisations. The figures for both are high. As might be expected, computer ownership rises close to 100% for larger organisations.

Only 19% of those without computers access them elsewhere. The main sites for such access are:

Community centre	8%
Head office	61%
Home	14%
(UK Online Centre	2%)

Barriers to the ownership of computers

Analysis of the various sizes of organisation shows little variation in identification of barriers, so the following table shows only the totals and percentages for each reason.

Table A.5: Barriers to ownership and use of computers

Reason	None	Low	High	N/A
Set up costs	17%	1%	24%	58%
Software upgrade costs	21%	1%	18%	60%
Hardware upgrade	21%	1%	17%	60%
Employee skills	31%	4%	0%	65%
Employee reluctance	32%	3%	0%	66%
Staff recruitment	32%	2%	1%	65%
Cost of training	23%	2%	16%	59%
Lack of benefits	10%	5%	44%	41%

When asked for other reasons besides the ones given above:

45% said they don't need computers
40% said no other reasons
6% said cost
9% chose 6 other reasons

It is fairly clear from this that the key reason for non-ownership of computers is not cost but lack of any justification for using them. Without further probing it is not possible to determine whether

this is due to lack of appreciation of the benefits or an informed view. Certainly one respondent indicated that:

“There’s no point in putting a computer in the club hall, it’d just get stolen within the day”.

Interest in receiving assistance

Table A.6 – interest in receiving assistance with purchasing computers

Interested?	Total	Community	Voluntary
Yes	18%	15%	25%
No	82%	85%	75%

On the basis of this survey only 18% of organisations without computers would be interested in receiving assistance to obtain them. On average they are seeking 1.75 computers each, giving a total of just over 1,500.

This is compatible with other responses in that it appears that most organisations without computers see no purpose in having them.

Numbers of computers owned

A7: Numbers of computers owned

	Com.	Vol.	Number of Paid Employees						
			1-3	4-6	7-9	10-24	25-49	50+	Don't Know
1	31%	31%	37%	23%	22%	23%	12%	9%	29%
2	19%	19%	22%	15%	18%	17%	5%	9%	18%
3	10%	10%	10%	11%	9%	9%	10%	7%	6%
4	6%	6%	9%	15%	11%	6%	10%	4%	3%
5	5%	5%	3%	9%	5%	7%	10%	10%	2%
6	3%	3%	2%	3%	2%	3%	8%	5%	1%
7	3%	3%	2%	5%	7%	6%	1%	4%	4%
8	3%	3%	1%	3%	5%	6%	2%	7%	2%
9	2%	1%	1%	1%	3%	2%	2%	4%	0%
10-14	8%	7%	4%	6%	11%	11%	18%	9%	6%
15-20	4%	4%	2%	3%	2%	7%	11%	7%	4%
21-24	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	2%	0%
25-49	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	4%	3%	1%
50+	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%	3%
Don't Know	6%	6%	6%	4%	2%	2%	6%	13%	22%

As expected, small organisations have few computers. There is however a much wider range of numbers of computers amongst larger organisations than might be expected. 60% of organisations employing 25-49 people have under nine computers, and around 45% have no more than five. On the other hand over 60% of organisations with 1-3 employees have two or more computers.

In part this will be due to the nature of the organisation. For example a large organisation with many manual workers or front line core staff is unlikely to provide computers for those types of employees. Nevertheless these results suggest that many organisations, including or even especially larger agencies, may be under-supplied with computers.

Employee access to computers and internet

Table A.8: Employee access for organisations with computers

	Up to 10%	10-24%	25-49%	50-74%	75%+	Don't Know
PC	10%	4%	1%	4%	77%	4%
Email	11%	4%	1%	3%	57%	23%
internet	11%	4%	1%	4%	55%	25%

For most organisations with computers, the majority of employees have access to a PC. This suggests that computers are often shared between several staff.

In around 50% of organisations with computers, most employees have internet and email access (which appear at almost the same levels).

Organisational access to the internet and reasons for non-use

Table A.9: Access to the internet by organisation sector and number of

	Com.	Vol.	Number of Paid Employees							Don't Know
			0	1-3	4-6	7-9	10-24	25-49	50+	
Yes	57%	77%	100%	60%	65%	71%	70%	82%	82%	62%
No	43%	23%		40%	35%	29%	30%	18%	18%	38%

Whilst the majority of organisations do have internet access, a significant minority of 33% do not. The larger the organisation, the more likely that internet access will exist – although 18% of organisations with over 50 employees claim no internet access.

Cross tabulation of these results with the client groups indicates that there was little variation of internet access by client group, other than:

- Organisations serving 'local people in general' were less likely than average to have internet access (under 50%)
- Organisations serving 'young people' were more likely than average to have internet access (around 85%)

The reasons for not having internet access echo the reasons for non-ownership of computers. The only significant responses to the options offered (for those without internet access) were:

- Cost (of website development/maintenance) 7%
- Lack of perceived benefit 38%
- Don't need the internet 23%

Connectivity

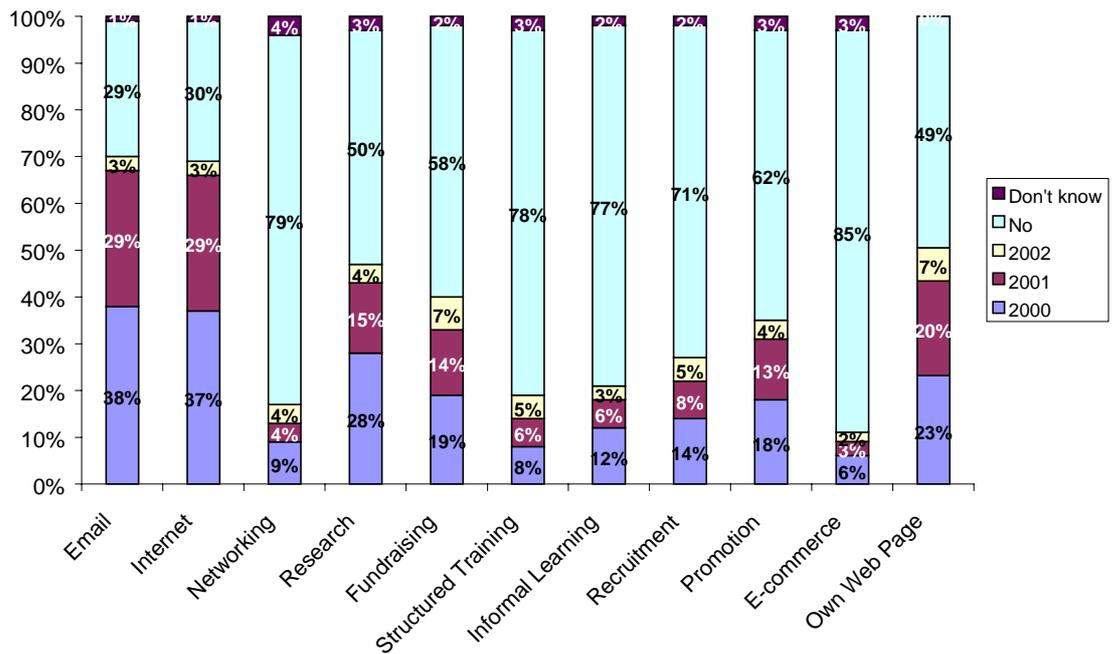
Table A.10: Type of connectivity – total and small vs large organisations (base – all respondents)

Type of connection	Total	1-3 employees	50+ employees
Telephone	70%	73%	53%
ISDN	21%	17%	24%
XDSL	3%	2%	5%
Cable modem	7%	9%	13%
Leased Line	1%		3%
Other	2%	1%	4%

One of the most striking results of the whole survey is this illustration of the poor level of internet connectivity. Not only do 2/3 of all organisations only have an ordinary dialup connection – this is also true even of the largest organisations. There may have been some misunderstanding of the question when respondents did not have a technical background, but this seems unlikely to undermine the result to a great extent.

Timing and uses of ICT

Table A.11: Timing of adoption, and uses of ICT



Two clear trends emerge from analysis of this question (as with most other questions, organisational size does not appear to be a determining factor).

For most organisations their chosen technologies are in place, and often have been from 2000. Few new developments are planned for 2002.

There are then clear trends in actual and intended usage.

Most (70% or so) organisations do or will:

- Use email
- Use the internet

Many (between 35-50%) organisations do and will:

- Use the internet for research
- Use the internet for fundraising
- Use the internet for promotion

Few (between 15-25%) organisations do and will use the internet for:

- Recruitment
- Informal learning
- Structured training
- Use intranet/networking

Only 11% do or expect to engage in commerce and there were no significant other intended uses.

The clear impression is of a sector where ICT is used at a fairly basic level, constrained technically by lack of internal networks or access to broadband connectivity. Further, although larger organisations are more likely to engage in these activities, there is no major small-large organisational split.

Other internet uses

Analysis of further questions demonstrates the low level use of ICT technology in organisational processes. Only...

- 3% have an e-commerce strategy
- 11% have purchased products or services over the internet (and at less than 10% of turnover)
- 1% used electronic tendering
- 8% are able to receive donations over their website (and then at very low levels)
- 13% are able to accept job applications online

In some of these (internet purchasing, acceptance of donations and job applications) larger organisations are greater users. In others, all sizes of organisation appear to be low level participants.

Information gathering

The main types of information sought by organisations suggests a focus on organisational efficiency:

General information	18%
Health and safety	15%
Funding	16%
Social deprivation	7%
Employment and law	4%
Members' needs	5%
Government & legislation	5%

Key information sources are:

Other networks	20%
internet	15%
Libraries	7%
Mail	7%
Government	4%
Councils	4%

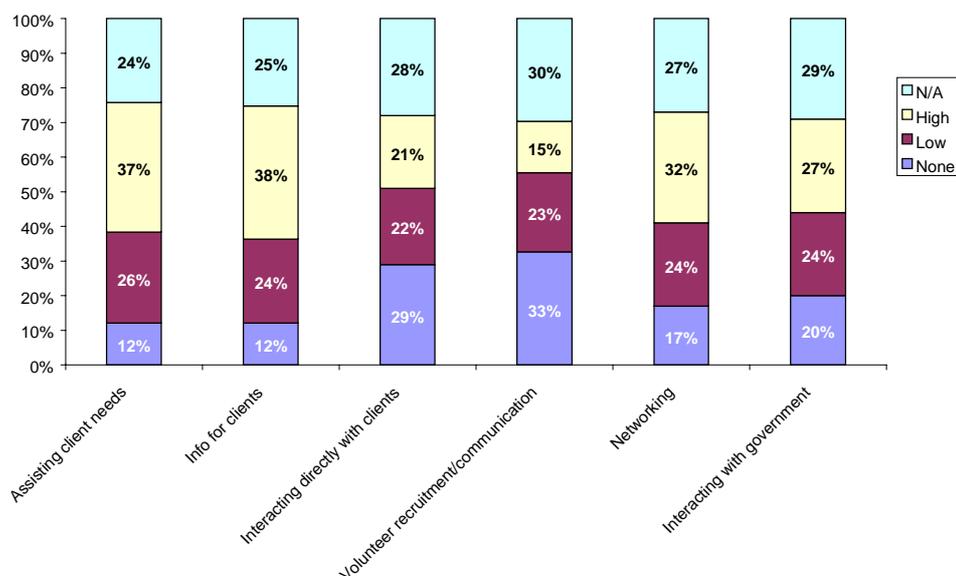
Although internet was seen as the second most important source, 57% of respondents did not know how much information their organisation could satisfy over the internet. Of the remainder there was 25% who thought it could satisfy less than 50% of their information needs and 18% who thought it could provide more than 50% of their information needs.

On this basis the impression gained is of under utilisation of the web as an information source. The large number of "don't knows" may have distorted this impression – on the other hand it could be taken as a reinforcement of this conclusion.

The importance of the internet to delivering services

Some further exploration of the potential value of the internet can be seen in answers to a series of questions in relation to different activities.

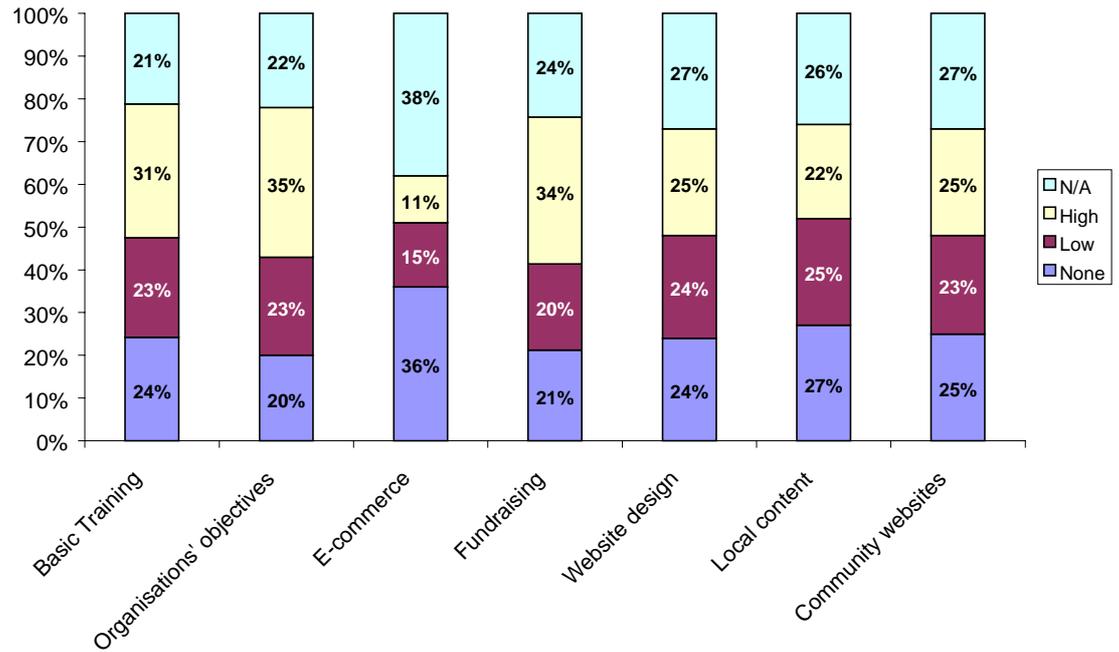
Table A.12: Level of importance of types of internet activities in delivering services



There seems to be a sizeable minority of organisations (from 15-38%, constant across all sizes) that sees potential in using the internet for activities central to their purpose, rather than simply improving 'back office' efficiency. The impression is that many of these are future aspirations rather than current actuality or plans.

The value of training

Table A.13:
Value of types of training



There is clearly a level of interest in training, although perhaps not as high as might be expected. The types of training where interest is highest seem to reflect the types of uses that organisations have for the internet from the previous table. No other types of training were identified as valuable. Very few other comments were made.



B. Email Survey

460 email surveys were completed over the period 10th September to 1st October 2001. We sent the questionnaire out on an email with web site links (where the questionnaire could be completed online) to:

- around 600 email addresses accompanying the Yellow Pages telephone listing (mostly from larger charities)
- around 500 organisations selected at random from the Yellow Pages and called to verify their email address
- via various newsletter and private email lists undertaken on our behalf by national organisations
- by emails to a number of email “listservs” (i.e. email discussion groups)

The respondents are therefore self-selected from an overall population not fully representative of the voluntary and community sector.

The data presented here is only that which we identified as being most useful in achieving the study objectives. A full set of responses is included in the Appendices.

Nature of Respondents

Table B.1:
Paid staff within
organisation

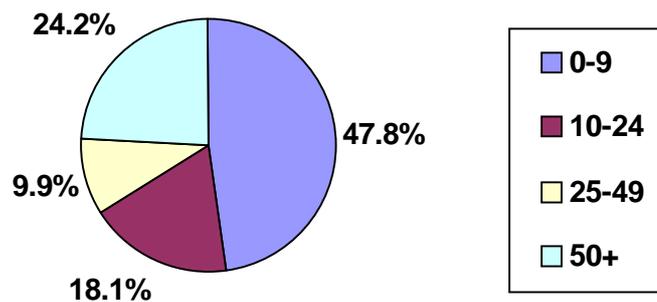


Table B.2:
Ownership/leasing of
computers

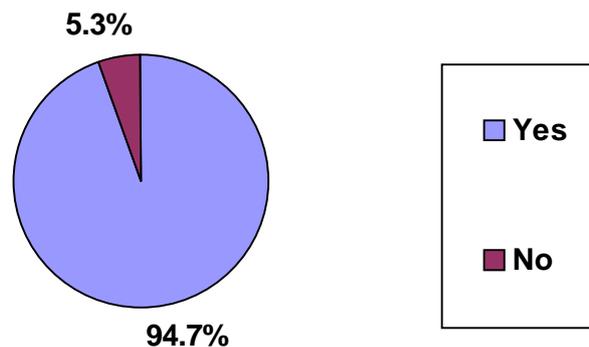
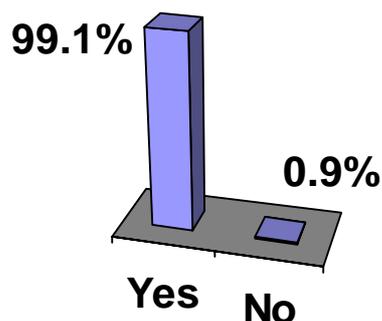


Table B.3: does organisation have access to internet?



In comparison with the main (telephone) survey group, it is clear that:

- the proportion of organisation with 0-9 staff is much lower in this sample, (48%) than the main telephone survey (67%)
- similarly the proportion of larger organisations is much greater at 24% for organisations with 50+ staff as opposed to 3% in the main survey
- the proportion owning or leasing computers at 95% is much higher than the 81% in the main survey
- 99% have access to the internet, compared to 66% in the main survey

Taken together with the method of distribution of the questionnaire the results suggest that this sample represents the situation and views of the relatively “e-enabled” part of the voluntary and community sector. It should not therefore be treated as providing a picture across the sectors. Rather it provides a useful insight into the “early adopters” and “early followers” in use of ICT in the voluntary and community sectors. The remainder of the results are reviewed in this light.

ICT Budget

Table B.4: estimated annual budget for ICT (excluding salaries)

Budget	Total
Less than £1,000	29%
£1,000-£2,999	19.8%
£3,000-£4,999	9.8%
£5,000-£9,999	11.2%
£10,000-£24,999	10.2%
£25,000-£74,999	8.6%
£75,000+	11.4%

60% of respondents spend under £5,000 per year on ICT (excluding salaries), which compares with over 90% in the main survey. It would seem that although spending in this group is higher than for the whole sector, budgets are still low for most organisation.

Access to Computers and Email

Table B.5: Numbers of staff with access to computer

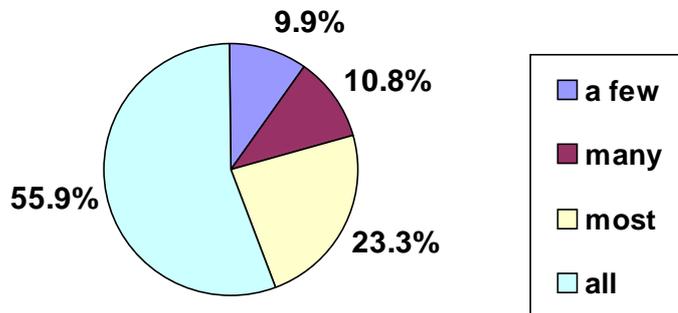
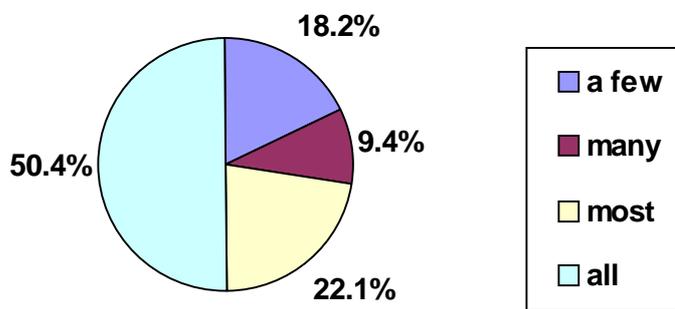


Table B.6: Numbers of staff with access to email at work



In 79% of these organisations all or most staff have access to a computer compared with 74% having all or more than 75% of staff with access in the telephone survey. For email access however the difference is considerable at 72% compared with 55%. There is a suggestion here that it is in the level of connectivity rather than use of computers themselves, that the difference can be seen.

internet Connection

Table B.7: type of internet connection

Type	Total	Telephone Survey
Regular telephone	41.1%	70%
ISDN	24.3%	21%
XDSL	3.6%	3%
Cable modem	2.9%	7%
Leased lines	10.7%	1%
Don't Know	9.5%	
Other	7.9%	

Much greater numbers of these organisations have broadband and ISDN connections, with leased line being the major difference. However this relates largely to the proportion of large organisations. The high levels of regular telephone connectivity are surprising and seem to indicate that there are still many "e-enabled" organisations with poor connectivity.

internet Usage

Table B.8: Has organisation purchased products over the internet?

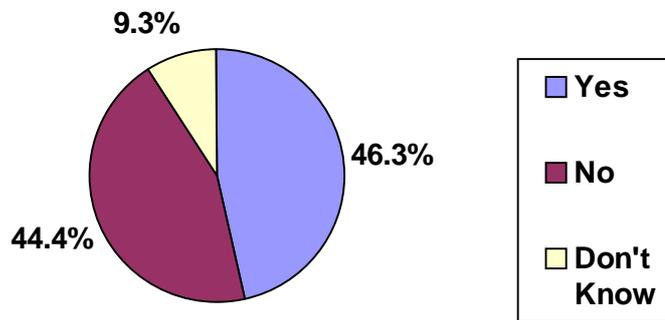


Table B.9: What percentage of purchases did internet purchases represent?

Percentage of Purchases	
Up to 10%	73.2%
10-24%	8.8%
25-49%	2.9%
50-74%	2%
75% or more	0.5%
Don't know	12.7%

Table B.10: Percentage of tenders/proposals received electronically

Percentage of Purchases	
Up to 10%	42.4%
10-24%	10.3%
25-49%	5.7%
50-74%	2%
75% or more	2.3%
Don't know	37.2%

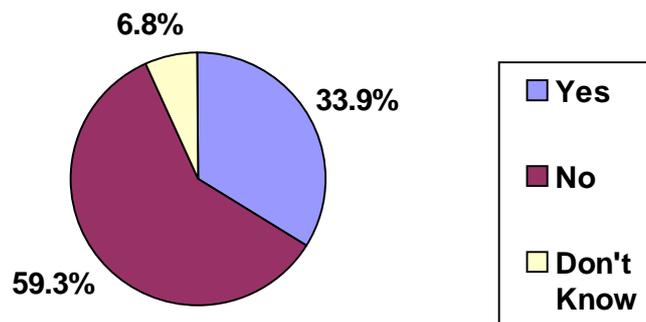
Table B.11: Able to accept donations over internet?

Donations via website	
Yes	13.7%
No, though have a website	60.5%
No, don't have a website	22.1%
Don't know	3.7%

Table B.12: What percentage of donations do online donations represent?

Percentage of Donations	
Up to 10%	64.5%
10-24%	0%
25-49%	0.9%
50-74%	0%
75% or more	0%
Don't know	34.5%

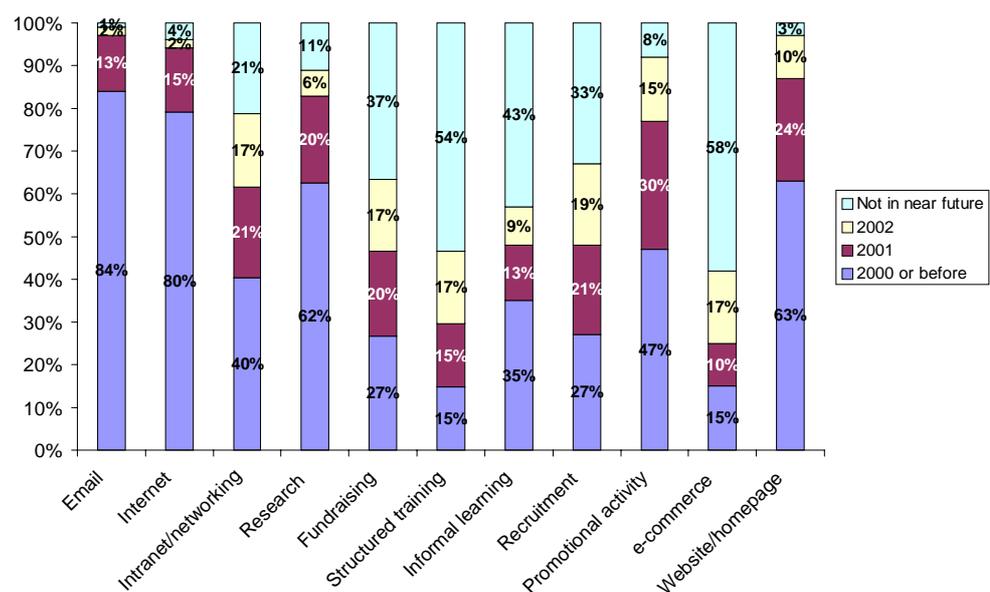
Table B.13: Is organisation able to accept job applications online?



For many of these questions, respondents to the telephone survey recorded a "Do not know". Where comparisons do seem valid, it is clear that a substantially greater proportion of this group are using the internet for "e-commerce" type applications and are generally exploiting the internet to a greater degree.

Timing and uses of ICT

Table B.14: Timing of adoption of and uses of ICT



The difference between this sample and the main telephone sample can be seen most clearly here.

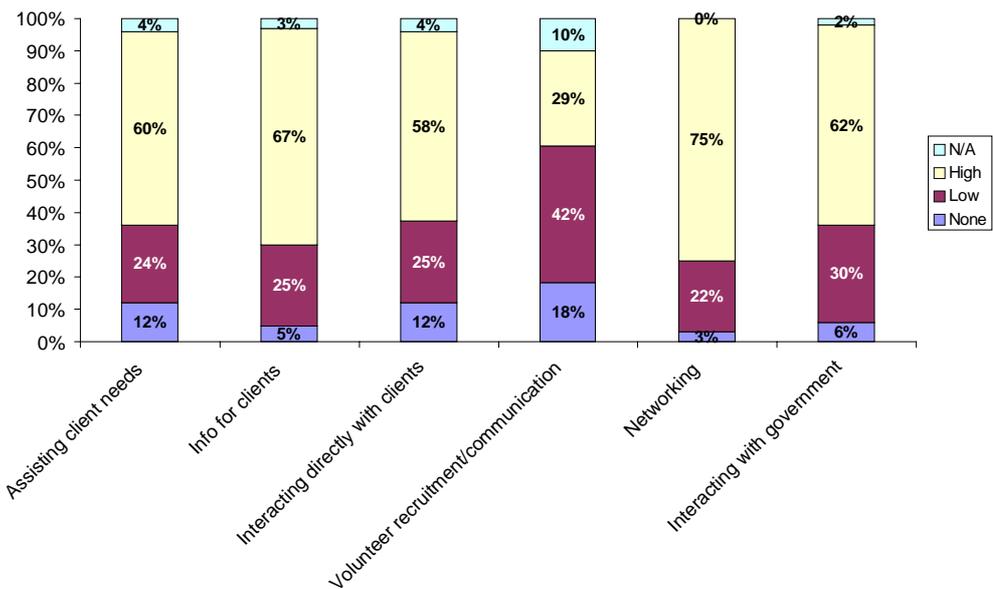
These organisations have generally had internal access and email for some time. Although it has taken rather longer, most will have internal networks established already and over 80% will have done so by the end of next year. They will or do use the internet for a wide range of functions.

Only training and ecommerce are seen as activities that will not be undertaken by over 50% of respondents. These figures are much larger than for the telephone survey. Most notably less than 20% of the telephone survey respondents expect to use an internal network by the end of 2002, compared to less than 20% of this group who do not.

A small but significant 12% claim to have an ecommerce strategy compared to 3% in the main survey.

The importance of the internet to delivering services

Table B.15:
Importance of ICT in helping deliver services to clients



These organisations see high value in using ICT for activities directly related to clients. Almost all (around 90%) see some value in using the internet for most of these activities – the clear exception being volunteer recruitment, which is seen as a face to face activity by most. The implication from the high importance rating give by well over 50% of these organisations is that the internet plays an important role in service delivery – despite the limited ICT capability that even these organisations have.

Training Needs

Table B.16: the value of types of training

Type of training	Value			
	None	Low	High	N/A
Basic training	19%	38%	38%	5%
Organisations' objectives	4%	22%	72%	2%
E-commerce	19%	36%	33%	12%
Fundraising	5%	26%	67%	2%
Website design	11%	28%	55%	6%
Local content	10%	21%	64%	5%
Community websites	12%	5%	60%	24%

As with the value placed on activities, different types of training are prioritised in a similar manner. Again however, the proportion indicating high importance is much higher.

Comments from the e-survey

In addition to the responses to the main survey questions, 125 respondents provided further comments analysed below.

Benefits

Efficiency

The key aspect of efficiency was the scope for sharing resources with other organisations and thus reducing duplicated effort. This included sharing:

- good practice
- mailing lists
- easily edited documents that only feature components relevant for the reader
- frequently requested information via website rather than telephone

However this sharing is dependent on standardisation of software and hardware used, and some people highlighted problems that made sharing impossible.

Other areas of efficiency involved:

- reduced need for time consuming face to face meetings – particularly valuable at national or regional level and during the foot and mouth crisis
- mailings and newsletters to client groups and members
- access to published documents and funding application forms
- fundraising correspondence and research
- marketing

Effectiveness

Under effectiveness, greatly improved communication was the most frequently cited benefit of ICT. Of this, the its **ability to draw people together who were normally dispersed or could not come to meetings** was most often cited – this was also echoed in the social inclusion role well used ICT can play. Other communication related benefits included:

- extensive but low cost contact with members and clients through e-newsletters
- extending consultation processes to smaller organisations and giving all consultees longer to respond and thus make more thoughtful or informed comments
- new knowledge of lesser known funding sources
- fundraising opportunities through increased publicity via websites and news pages
- publicity and marketing

Other effectiveness benefits took the organisation's work to a different level not possible before their use of ICT:

- clearer financial management and stock control
- online donations – where credit security didn't deter donors using the site
- greater access to government publications and news of them
- job search access for clients
- information storage, organisation and access

Networking

The organisation's world and all that it can benefit from through wider contacts is extended through a wider network. When ideas and initiatives move fast, it's important to hear about them quickly and find partners to collaborate with the access opportunities. As the majority of efficiency and effectiveness benefits showed, communicating with others – and a wider range than possible before – is key to voluntary and community groups – along with funding, of course.

Some groups were said to have stayed together only because ICT made their communication and wider work viable. At the other extreme, networking worldwide was now an option and was valuable for gleaning many of the information and idea sharing benefits. Chatrooms were mentioned by several organisations as a means of creating a community that didn't require much staff time to moderate.

Barriers

Not surprising, there were many comments on the barriers to using ICT. The three clearest were:

- cost
- the need for technical support and experience
- lack of a management culture that understands the role of ICT in a strategic context

Costs and access to funding

Over a third of comments were about access to funding, in order of numbers of mentions:

- for core funding for the organisation to ensure the longevity of the ICT provision
- for hardware
- for training
- for internet access and broadband in particular
- for the management and staff infrastructure to run and support the systems
- for software and systems
- for access to an IT training suite

Technical support and experience

There are two key aspects here – that technical support is available (externally or in-house) and that staff and members and partner organisations can use the equipment.

Technical support was hard to find and hard to pay for. One respondent suggested that a network of area-wide designated ICT support workers could fill the needs of a range of organisations at a lower cost. Many organisations also needed **training** – to get started and no upgrade their staff knowledge of ICT use. Access to this was also difficult, on the basis of availability and cost.

Many organisations also cited problems **with people being unable to use ICT or afraid of it**. This is included staff, members, client groups, and partners. Problems included:

- Using computers of different ages.
- Lack of disabled support equipment
- Very slow internet access.
- Middle aged and older people were more reluctant to use ICT.
- Concerns that web sites might be used for partisan community lobbying or criticism.
- A view that it was a diversion from core work of the organisation.

There was a key theme of **networks not being able to use ICT** – to match the potential benefits of networking identified above.

- Some people lacked the culture of sharing documents, information and best practice.
- Some fled discussion groups when a virus was going about and never came back, just in case.
- Many simply couldn't afford to get online when their core funding was at threat.

Both of these issues go back to funding: if the people you work with can't afford high enough spec computers and connectivity to make use of the internet, the potential benefits of your using it are lost. One respondent told of a whole network of organisations using Word 2 documents so that the person with the lowest standard of ICT could still participate – thus keeping everyone from realising the full benefits of ICT.

These issues are also connected to the pervading problem lack of strategic approach.

Lack of a management culture that understands the role of ICT in a strategic context

"Because employers don't have that much knowledge it's very hard to work and plan strategically. It feels a bit like walking with a blindfold with your hands tied."

One of the strongest messages – voiced in many different ways – was the need for capacity building in terms of understanding what ICT is and how it can support the objectives of voluntary organisations. "Management knows ICT is out there" but there are questions of "Why should we use it – won't the staff waste their time surfing?" to "What do we need to buy and where do we get it?" They may not even imagine the question of how it can amplify the effectiveness or efficiency of their organisation. As a result, funding priorities can be directed elsewhere, and use of existing technology not realised.

There are **practical issues** to be tackled – how to cope with the increased demand for information, popularity of the service and growth of networking. All of these things take up staff time and there needs to be a policy and supportive infrastructure to keep resources from becoming too stretched to meet key organisational objectives. It can also have problems such as beneficiaries being untraceable and thus demographic information on them unavailable for funding claims, or confidentiality of self-help groups being at threat if they are published on a website.

Suggested solutions

From the comments made, a core of solutions for government support was laid out:

1. awareness raising needs to be taken to the "non-techies" – management and key staff
2. focus on the needs of the community and voluntary organisations and building solutions upwards and having core resources (hosting, page building, email lists) to be able to fit their different needs.
3. invest in people at a local level to build strong support networks at the same time as creating a flexible open national network for resources, services and information

C. Telephone interviews and focus group

Telephone Interviews - summary

We undertook 24 in depth telephone interviews, with respondents to the telephone survey. We attempted to contact every person from the first four weeks of the telephone survey who indicated that they would be willing to talk further with us.

The thumbnail sketches and quotes below give a flavour of the discussions. These should be taken as indicative rather than representative of the overall sample.

A number of key themes emerged:

- There is considerable variety between organisations that does not appear to relate to their size, structure or type of client group.
- As indicated in the survey, large organisations are not necessarily at an advantage.
- Many individuals in organisations with little ICT see it as irrelevant, despite similar organisations using ICT.
- Many voluntary organisations have a local/regional-based structure and their local branches are not necessarily on the same level of ICT use as their central body.
- Many organisations, small and large, now use email and the web as a central part of their activity and cannot conceive of functioning without it.
- The impetus for adoption of ICT may be the recruitment of new staff from elsewhere.
- Although some issues did not feature highly in the survey as concerns, they may be very significant for some organisations whilst being irrelevant to others, for example, security was not a general concern in relation to use of the internet but for a local office of a children's charity it was critical.

Organisational benefits (efficiency)

- collection, analysis and submission of statistics
- information storage
- spread of information flow
- massive savings for mailing, etc
- massive savings for research
- communication between staff at different sites
- cheap transmission of documents
- massively reduces admin staff costs
- collaboration, joint use of resources

Many organisations were clear that use of ICT was central to their survival, reducing admin costs, substantially. Few had internal networks but many saw this as a key requirement.

Client benefits (effectiveness)

- speedy access to client records for each support session
- mutual support groups online
- video conferencing for rural areas
- potential for learning centre
- sharing of evidence based good practice
- producing CV's, looking for jobs etc, much faster for clients
- email and web sites allow deaf people to access information and to secure employment by demonstrating information processing skills
- research at speed to find solutions for clients

Specific target/client groups secure specific benefits from ICT and for some these are extremely valuable. Overall, however, the impression is that few organisations have fully explored direct use of ICT with their target groups/clients/members.

Wider networking, capacity building and social capital

In general, comments were anticipated rather than based on current experience. Networking was seen as potentially of considerable benefit but difficult because of connectivity, and because compatibility of systems was still not high enough.

Barriers and disbenefits

Many people indicated that there were negative aspects to the use of ICT:

- the continuing need for face-to-face contact: email seemed to replace this, to the detriment of the service
- developing backlash to everything being online since so many can't access it
- problems with information/email overload
- many things don't work because different people and organisations have different levels of technology

Others identified a range of barriers to effective use of ICT:

- lack of funding for high speed access
- lack of quality, low priced technical support
- massive amount of staff time needed for training and it's not available
- funding and support for an intranet not available
- security for sensitive information (but only for some organisations)
- experience of training has been poor
- funding for more computers and peripherals
- incompatibilities between older and newer equipment

Telephone Interviews - detail

Interviewees from ICT enabled organisations gave specific examples of the uses and benefits of ICT they had experienced so far.

Organisational Benefits

Collection, analysis and submission of statistics

- One small rural initiative found that 'at least five hours a day can be spent on the keyboard on email, drafting development plans and making funding bids'.
- A Trust involved in co-ordinating volunteers utilised computers 'widely' for 'data collection and all financial administration'.
- A local branch of a national charity involved with mental health issues utilised the system for logging calls taken, and responses made, on an Excel worksheet. This was necessary as only four staff dealt with an area population of 500,000. This allowed continuous monitoring and easily accessible records of calls made.

Information storage

- A very small charity of two employees involved with *Sure Start* found that this capability of the PC was an immense timesaver; 'I only work 30 hours a week, so I have to be efficient. The computer means I can store and retrieve information far more quickly'.

- A large hospice had stored 'patient and donor databases on computerised systems'. This was a relatively large organisation with considerably better-developed ICT capability than other participants

Spread of information flow

- A County support agency to boys clubs found that their website was something 'they would like to improve upon'.
- A retreat house created its own website with pictures and links to staff email addresses.
- A organisation for deaf people found that the information on the website and the discussion facility were extremely useful for their client group

Massive savings for mailing, etc

- A regional arm of a national fundraising and grant making organisation found considerable cost and time savings from the ability to email newsletters; 'There are massive benefits in doing mailings and other admin work that used to be handled manually by volunteers'.
- Another regional charity found that email was faster and more personal than faxes and text phones.

Massive savings for research

- A member of a small independent charity felt that serious time\cost efficiencies were realised from the ability to perform research on his PC; 'If I have a query I can often deal with it through a search engine. It used to mean a hike down to the library'.
- An international organisation with well-integrated ICT systems saw that they 'can get information from projects, their activities and five year plans'.
- Another dealing with illnesses had come across an unusual variant unknown to local staff. 'The web, however, provided a range of information on the condition that was of great use to the outreach team'.

Communication between staff at different sites

- A national umbrella organisation employing three full and three part time employees has a substantially larger budget (£5000) than most of those in the e-survey. This is reflected in its ICT set-up where there is a shared contracts database of 6,000 people. Internal users can access these and other documents. Print is retained as a form of contact but email is a useful way of administering 'time sensitive issues'. In the future it is hoped to provide greater connectivity for staff from remote servers.
- Another organisation found that staff could email and update records 'in parallel'

Cheap transmission of documents

- A larger organisation found that printing documents saved some money, smaller organisations realised much larger savings from emailing rather than print and post.
- Another saw possibility of developing e-commerce by selling training documents over the web. It is possible that these could be downloaded.

- Other forms of document transfer included the submission of funding bids, which allowed for the saving of time as well as cost.

Massively reduces admin staff costs

- A very small social club described possibility of a computer as a 'Godsend'. The organisation is paper based and could possibly continue to do so. However, to realise efficiency and enable greater quality of work, the participant described potential easy access to a PC as a 'lifesaver and would result in a better quality of work'.
- A day-care centre for people with acquired brain injuries described the 'widespread benefits in terms of time-saving in using the computers for office administration'.
- A small local centre for homeless people with various issues manages to survive without an administration worker and the associated costs, enabled by the use of PCs for basic tasks

Collaboration, joint use of resources

- An international charity, which matches volunteers with charities, felt that 'it is difficult for funders and governments to see who is doing what...there is scope for sharing and innovation in the use of technology in the voluntary sector'.
- Others working in partnerships felt that '(as) we are working with professionals in the public and private sectors; we have to work to the same standards. Technology helps us to do that'

Services to Clients (effectiveness)

Speedy access to client records for each support session

- Ranging from the ability to receive partner organisations statements and work for submitting bids to accessing patient databases.
- Logging calls to a database or retaining patients details on a database (as in the hospice above) achieve twin goals of efficiency and effectiveness

Mutual support groups online

- The regional organisation for deaf people was an example of how a non-spatially concentrated disadvantaged group can form an e-community which offers support and services.
- Support groups, like Diaspora websites, create communities that enable people to give and receive support.
- Specialist organisations, like the mental health organisation, which searched for the unusual variant of a disease, can reach like-minded individuals with similar experiences. Being online broadens the old fashioned sociological tool of familiarity circles and thus increases the chances of meeting someone facing similar issues.
- Mutual support groups online offer people who face less common barriers (like deafness, brain injuries, etc) to meet others in similar situations and build a sustaining community

Video conferencing for rural areas

- A Hospice found huge success with a web camera that allowed children in the hospice to chat with children in other hospices. They felt that technology could reduce the physical isolation felt by the centre.

Potential for learning centres

- A Wirral community centre provided a cyber café, which allowed 'web access for young people and a range of computing classes for different groups provided'. The centre was pursuing an expansion of this project and cited training and support as necessary to facilitate this expansion.
- Another organisation involved in youth club support 'would like to provide computer training to the children. Not just internet access but training in productivity software like word processors, spreadsheets and basic programming'.
- A hospice felt 'that day care patients could benefit if we could establish a learning centre...and could be a real benefit for some of the younger people'.
- A centre for homeless people pointed to the broader implications of people being in contact and learning about ICTs; 'Getting some income will help people out of the benefits trap...using computers will help develop confidence and new skills'

Sharing of evidence based on good practice

- One of the better-connected organisations in the survey felt that 'the accessing of professional information\best practice through web based resources has been very useful in providing an improved service to clients'.

Producing CVs, looking for jobs etc, much faster for clients

- The organisation for deaf people maintains a 'national list about employment opportunities for deaf people'.
- A centre for homeless people has received two PCs, which it hopes to use in helping clients 'to produce CVs and start looking for courses and jobs'.
- A Trust involved in conservation saw ICT's main role as 'allowing people to sign up for courses and residential projects online'.

Email and web sites allow deaf people to access information and to secure employment by demonstrating information processing skills

- An organisation for deaf people found that the internet was groundbreaking in what it could offer their clients; 'the internet is revolutionary for deaf people. It provides employment opportunities because employers can see that deaf people can handle information easily, when they might be concerned about the use of the phone'.

Wider networking, capacity building and social capital

- A local office of a national children's charity believed that empowerment through ICT could only be facilitated by organisational slack. Aside from this caveat, networking was seen as an extremely valuable tool, which ICT could facilitate.
- A community centre on the Wirral was working towards placing service links and details and the local community website.
- A national umbrella organisation was linked into a range of peer organisations and to the various government websites.
- A local arm of a national day-care organisation also utilised the government websites for downloading guidance documents.
- Another organisation used training guidance available online. The depth of networking and its richness was dependent on the organisation.
- One of the hospices surveyed wished not only to exchange information but also to 'pick each others brains'.
- A Trust dealing with partnerships pointed out that the 'face to face concept' is still very much a requirement of building partnership but after the initial contact, better turnaround times were achieved when drafts of plans and bids were processed electronically.
- A tenant's federation found that more and more strong use of email was being made between partner operations.
- Members of Boys clubs were maintaining contact with exchange students in Poland.
- Other centres saw huge scope for allowing local access and learning in a bid to reduce social inclusion, especially local and community orientated groups i.e. centres for homeless, social clubs, hospices and associations for people facing less common forms of social exclusion(deaf, disabled etc)

Thumbnail sketches of organisations surveyed

UK Based Organisations with International Reach

Both of these organisations use ICT centrally and could not operate at current levels and costs without it. One uses external technical support and encounters problems, the other uses internal support and manages well.

Thumbnail 1

A small international organisation based in England, that helps people with disabilities in eight countries. Computers and the Net are an integral part of their work in communicating internationally and internally.

Organisations working internationally are likely to find email essential... but also find it important for internal office use.

Newsletters and donor information for fundraising are best handled using the computers. "I have to send information to 2,000 to 4,000 people several times a year – it would be a nightmare without the technology."

Thumbnail 2

A small charity, whose staff work from three different locations, helps make 250,000 volunteering placements a year worldwide. The heart of their business is specialist matchmaking software, and the staff work together by using the Net. They need to upgrade their internal systems for group working, and move their CD-based system online.

A small person charity can make a contribution internationally using new technologies.

Although their main business is tech-related, they have problems with support and development. "It is terribly difficult to identify someone reasonable priced who can come when we need it."

There is scope for sharing ideas on tech development - but it needs leadership. "It is difficult for funders and government to see who is doing what, which means there may be duplication of funding and reinvention of wheels. There is scope for sharing and innovation in the use of technology in the voluntary sector... although there is jealousy and competition too. It would need some strong central initiative to get the benefits."

Branches or local versions of National Bodies

These organisations have varying levels of ICT, but for the most part their ICT use and set-up is quite limited. Often the central organisation has good ICT but the local position can be quite different. Most of the usage is for the "Branch Office" for efficiency functions.

Thumbnail 3

The regional office of a national fundraising grant-making organisation has access to central sophisticated software which underpins their work - but has to use "home grown" databases because of the lack of funding for training.

Central investment in systems may not bear fruit unless there is enough training and support for all users

Staff may have to use personal equipment because of lack of office computers

Getting equipment, training and support can mean taking time out to fundraise.

For the future... "just being able to use what we have properly would be a dream"

Admin benefits are high... and networking benefits could be too. However, that depends on other organisations and companies getting up to speed.

Thumbnail 4

The local office of a national charity dealing with children at risk has five fully networked computers, which are connected both to the Net and the organisation's intranet. Staff can access the latest policy and practice information, join discussion groups with colleagues nationally, and call upon central technical support. "We have information at our finger tips"

However, staff find it difficult to take time out to train and keep up with new developments. People have different levels of skills and confidence, and communication with other organisations is 'hit and miss'. This lack of common standards reduces efficiency. "You can't yet be sure the technology will work because people are at different levels."

There are concerns about security. "If someone breaks into a cupboard you know it has happened. It is difficult when confidential information is out there on the internet"

National organisation provides the infrastructure, training and support for local offices.

Consequently the main issues are human and organisation: time, motivation.

Security of confidential information a concern.

Lack of common levels of skills and use reduces the scope for inter-organisation and community use.

Thumbnail 5

The manager of a mental health day centre has to do all his own admin - and can clearly see the benefits of a good computer system and Net access. However, he does not have the time, skills or funds to invest in achieving those benefits. As yet the regional organisation of which he is a part is unable to provide that support. A new director may bring some changes.

It takes time (and money) to save time (and money). Voluntary organisations need help to invest to save.

Local centres which are part of larger organisations may still find they are 'on their own'. "If I go to a class I have to pay to be replaced."

Investment in ICTs may be held back by lack of awareness among top staff - even though front-line staff may see the benefits.

Benefits of more effective service delivery and networking cannot be achieved until basic systems and support are in place.

Thumbnail 6

A national organisation which has a charitable and trading element. The Trust organises local conservation projects and co-ordinates the work of local volunteers. The trading part of the organisation is involved in training projects through New Deal. ICT is used widely across the organisation although most offices operate on a stand-alone basis.

Website is well developed as an information exchange and for merchandise and equipment sales online.

Increasing use of ICT in data collection and communication;

Web to be used to disseminate good practice quickly;

Psychological barrier amongst many conservationists who feel ICT development distracts from traditional hands-on work;

'Some would rather plant one tree rather than spend time improving networking and disseminating good practice which may result in 100 trees being planted'.

Thumbnail 7

A local branch of a national charity which covers a diverse population across both urban and rural areas. It makes relatively good use of ICT, particularly the internet for gathering information and connecting with national networks. Further expansion of use is limited by staff and financial resources and the limited ICT capabilities of much of the client base (elderly carers).

All incoming calls and responses logged on a computerised spreadsheet;

One volunteer acts as an archivist/ librarian gathering and logging information gained from the web.

"Nobody had ever heard of Korsokoff's Syndrome until we searched on the web!"

Most potential for further networking is upwards rather than down-wards.

Thumbnail 8

A regional office of a national organisation which operates two daycare centres for people with acquired brain injuries. Various activities are co-ordinated including painting, photography and communication, and respite care is provided for carers. The charity was established with a lottery grant and ongoing funding comes mainly through social services. Specific money for ICT development has to be raised separately.

ICT is relatively well used although there is only limited access to the internet. Good use is made of the internet to access Government policy, guidance and training information for carers, however this is often done by staff and committee members from their own homes.

Both centres have computers, although there is only one in each with internet access;

Computers are important in the work with those with brain injuries and use is made of drawing, painting and word processing packages;

Second hand computers have been provided by CVS enabling each client to have a computer in their home if they wish it;

IT training for staff is being provided by local colleges.

Residential Homes

These three hospices are similar in providing residential accommodation, albeit to different groups. Their use of ICT varies widely with one only using ICT with clients, one only using ICT in the "Back Office" functions and the third with a mix. The larger of the three is clearly at an advantage in terms of resources. However overall the contrasts tend to suggest that the use of ICT is much more related to individual staff attitudes and circumstances than to the potential value of ICT in the situation.

Thumbnail 9

A residential home for adults with learning difficulties has an old stand-alone PC with no internet access which they use for word processing. Their parent organisation handles finance and other admin. They see no benefits for themselves or residents in upgrading.

The benefits of ICTs depend substantially on the situation

If there are potential benefits to be presented, they will have to be clearly very relevant.

Perception of benefits may depend on staff experience (compare with the hospice where the member of staff had worked elsewhere with good ICT and saws her new place as '20 years behind). It may also depend on how far there is a peer network.

Thumbnail 10

A hospice in a rural area has state of the art computers and webcams for the children in its care... but has to do all its record keeping and other administration manually.

"When our nursing director has to submit statistics it has to be done on paper... but with a database it could be done at the touch of a button."

The hospice cannot access the NHSnet online services available to other professionals, or join online support groups.

"A proper system would provide big savings in time and better care - but it is difficult to persuade funders of this... they want to see money going to the front line."

Lack of adequate ICT systems may make it difficult for the hospice to recruit staff. "It is like being being in a home office not an organisation".

Organisations which are not part of a national network may struggle to get funding and support.

Funders may not appreciate the benefits of investing in technology - and smaller organisations don't have the time and resources to overcome this.

There is no perceived technical support for nonprofits. "An unbiased organisation to help us would be worth its weight in gold"

The hospice is excluded from the main national online medical system NHSnet – so cannot realise its full potential.

Thumbnail 11

A registered Charity which provides hospice services across a County. It has a main centre and two satellite daycare centres and a distribution centre in outlying locations. ICT is relatively well developed with internet access for the majority of PCs and an internal network in place. The hospice has its own website and makes use of other related web-based networks. Staff have been encouraged to take-up Government learning accounts to further develop ICT skills.

For further ICT development, a full time post for IT support is required, as it is currently only 16 hours per week;

Good use is made of professional web networks including the palliative care network and hospiceuk online;

There is currently an audit of staff ICT knowledge/ skills being undertaken;

IT training for staff is all currently undertaken in-house.

National and Regional Networking Organisations

Thumbnail 12

A national umbrella network covering urban regeneration has three full time and three part time workers using networked computers. It uses a mix of print, web site and email to communicate with members and other agencies and "couldn't survive" without the internet. The next stage is enabling staff to access their data remotely

Networks thrive using the internet particularly if the 'hub' has an IT-enabled core staff

A shared database is invaluable, and the organisation "couldn't survive" without the internet, which links them to other regeneration bodies and Government websites.

Costs were "surprisingly little" to set up a website and run an organisation using the internet extensively.

internet access has not caused them to broaden their horizons to get best practice from Europe or elsewhere but this is more a cultural than a technology issue.

The administrator "would like to phase out paper – it would make things easier for everybody" but many clients still require print.

Thumbnail 13

An umbrella body with a membership of around 220 educational organisations has 12 full-time staff and three to five volunteers (plus consultants as required) and 13 computers, all in one office.

Would like to see core funding for ICT rather than having it incorporated in project funds.

Would like to find a source for discounted computers and training.

It has had some trouble being a Mac-only organisation finding suppliers and software.

Thumbnail 14

A rural volunteer bureau with paid staff and volunteers uses its three computers for office applications, a volunteering database and email.

Though it has no in-house ICT expertise the organisation can draw on several local voluntary organisations for help – chiefly a "friendly organization" across the road.

Nearest city is 55 miles away and costs £30+ to get to by rail so they prefer to find training and support locally.

"We don't have many future plans for computer use as we only have 9 months left of funding. Most of our effort at the moment is in fundraising – we don't make plans that involve spending money as we don't have any."

An organisation with simple needs can get the ICT help it needs even in rural areas if it is well networked.

Thumbnail 15

A federation of tenants and residents groups has seven staff serving over 40 organisations plus individuals. They work closely with the council developing innovative forms of consultation and service delivery. They have enough computers for staff, but most are older models which are not compatible with current hardware. While the federation uses email to work with partners, the council has its own system which is not accessible. Other groups have training and support needs and are discussing a borough-wide collaborative initiative. The problem is find time to develop the plan.

Upgrades are crucial to ensure continuing compatibility.

Local government electronic networks may not be accessible to voluntary bodies.

Voluntary groups are looking towards cooperative action to meet training needs - but lack time to develop plans. Regional tech support and training might be an answer.

"If the Government is really pushing delivery of services online, I can see a lot of people being left out... there will be a big gap between Government and grassroots."

Thumbnail 16

A county-based organisation provides support to nearly 100 youth clubs of all kinds, ranging from boxing clubs to scout troops. The full-time staff equivalent of 4.5 people use five very old PCs in the organisation's headquarters for administration, newsletters and email. The member groups vary in their capabilities and connectivity. Headquarters want to upgrade their equipment, train and equipment members, and create an online network to share information, organising events, courses, and generally work together more effectively.

A county-side intermediate voluntary organisation sees great potential for supporting their members more effectively using the Net.

In order to create an effective online network all members would need to reach an adequate standard of online working. This would mean funding training and support.

Many of the member groups are run by volunteers, so arrangements would need to be flexible.

Headquarters staff would need help in developing and implementing this strategy.

Local Regeneration Projects

These projects targeting disadvantaged people in a variety of locations, have fairly reasonable access to ICT. They use it in the "Back Office" and with their users. It may be that projects working in the regeneration field find it easier to access ICT.

Thumbnail 17

A local centre working with homeless people with drug, alcohol and mental health problems uses computers and the Net extensively for administration, communication, research and purchasing online. Clients will also soon have computer access.

Computers and the Net are an essential part of day to day working

Homeless people with drug, alcohol and other problems benefit directly and will be able to use computers for learning and job search. "Getting some income will help people out the benefits trap... using computers will help develop confidence and new skills."

Online working is becoming the norm among voluntary organisations, although staff have problems with training, support and systems.

Thumbnail 18

The eight staff of a rural project working on conservation, community development and the local economy are networked together and on the Net. They manage without external technical support, using office applications, desktop publishing, email and geographical information systems. All dealings with 50 partners and 10 funding agencies are by email, allowing funding

bids and project plans to be turned around fast. "There's no way we could survive without the technology. While relationships have to be built face-to-face, back in the office most of the working day can be on the keyboard".

"Without email we couldn't meet European funding deadlines involving partner organisations. I can ask for responses within 24 hours instead of a couple of weeks by post"

Increasing demands for partnership working mean community and voluntary organisations must be as wired and competent as public and private sector partners.

A highly motivated and competent team can manage its own systems and use relatively sophisticated software.

DIY tech support saves money - but is risky. "If anything goes wrong you are stuffed. If you don't have robust back up you are in real difficulty."

Email doesn't substitute for face-to-face and paper - but is a "must have". "You still have to do eye-ball to eye-ball, get around the table and shake hands, to build relationships and networks. But having done that I don't have to put drafts out to half a dozen organisations, then wait two weeks. I can ask for turn around in 24 hours by email"

Government should recognise how big a contribution community and voluntary sector makes to public services, and provide support as it does to small business.

Thumbnail 19

A local community centre which is managed by a voluntary committee in Partnership with the local Council. The centre is run by a voluntary management committee, after having been saved from demolition through fund-raising by the local community. The centre is a registered charity and operates on a not for profit basis. It provides a range of facilities and classes for local community groups of all ages and has special provision for people with special needs. Classes include after school care, martial arts, music and beginners computing.

The centre makes relatively good use of ICT, and has a cyber café for local young people. Plans have been initiated for further expansion of ICT services in a building that is not currently in use. This would provide a computer suite/ media centre and enable more advanced internet based training and education courses.

Cyber café has been successful in getting young people off the streets;

Opportunities to link into local community website;

Space available for major expansion of ICT services, but constrained by staff time and resources.

Small Organisations

These organisations have one, two or no computers – often with individual volunteers or staff using their own home computers. There is a variation in levels of usage – apparently related to the views of those running the organisation rather than any functionality.

Thumbnail 20

A small independent charity provides support to people at local level using paid staff and volunteers. It is a partner in Sure Start, and finding that a very positive experience. Computers and the Net mean that it can play an effective part in the partnerships... but it could do more with more resources, and if others were as effective.

A small organisation can improve its admin, fundraising and communication through computers and the Net

Effective use of technology helps recruit volunteers who see the potential it has for them

Technology also allows the organisation to work with bigger partners... and is essential to making the Sure Start partnership operate.

Some traditional intermediary bodies are failing keep up with front-line organisations in their use of technology.

Technology does not substitute for good face to face relationships with clients - but helps create the circumstances in which these can be more effective.

Thumbnail 21

A faith-based residential youth centre runs retreats for teens where they explore their spirituality through drama and the arts. They have two old computers and other equipment donated by a local friend who assembled and maintains them. Staff use the computers for classic office applications (and have internet access) but do not see them as relevant to their client activities or to outreach. They would like to upgrade, but not expand use beyond providing disabled access.

Small organisations may be satisfied with current equipment and usage, apart from modest upgrades.

Culture of the organisation may determine how far there is any need or aspiration to explore more innovative use.

Young people may not be a spur to wider use of computers and the Net if the organisation's regime does not offer them access.... and computer and Net use may or may not be appropriate depending on the setting (in this case residential retreats).

Thumbnail 22

A junior chamber of commerce provides 'life skills' training and social events for 18-40 age group. Its operates solely through volunteers with an annual budget of "a few hundred pounds". There are no computers in the office but five of the members have them at home.

They are happy to rely on referring clients seeking computer training to local people who help people from home using their own computers.

They are not aware of any local voluntary agency or government body offering computer training.

Wouldn't be interested in a computer or training even if it were available.

Thumbnail 23

An organisation running a hall and meeting place used by a number of largely social clubs has two part-time employees and around 25 volunteers - but not even a typewriter.

A computer would be "a godsend". Accounts and letters are still done by hand and "since the clubs we work with know we can't provide computer support they tend to do that work themselves." A local education college nearby provides computer training and internet access for those in the area who need it.

Some small organizations can clearly still run without computers (or relying on borrowed machines). A computer would certainly be welcome but without intervention it seems likely the organization would continue to function for years without one.

Unless prompted, the user wouldn't consider using the computer for anything more advanced than simple office management functions. Some kind of "small organisations ICT pack" to expand their horizons might be called for?

National Organisations

This major national organisation makes extensive use of ICT in its "Back Office" function, and with its clients and in networking. At this level no real barriers seem to apply.

Thumbnail 24

A national organisation for the deaf has completely integrated computers and the Net into its internal and external communication. The internet offers enormous advantages for deaf people in accessing information and communicating... it is a medium where their disability is no disadvantage.

The Net provides new personal and employment opportunities for a group with disabilities

Deaf people may be using more sophisticated email methods than others because they see the benefit. They could be in a position to champion the benefits to others.

The national organisation serving deaf people has taken full advantage of the Net both for its own efficient working and the benefit it offers to its client group

There are barriers to use because of the lack of appropriate training, and also lack of access for those without sufficient resources.

Quotes

"It is a bit hit and miss dealing with other agencies... many are behind us. For example, I sent a suggested job/person spec to another agency's email address, but it just seemed to get lost or diverted. We ended up having to deal with it by fax."

"The previous director did not see the full potential of the technology. We have someone new in post now, and I hope things will change."

"When our nursing director has to submit statistics it has to be done on paper... but with a database it could be done at the touch of a button."

"We really couldn't do without it."

"One of the main problems for deaf people is getting information. Phone services with touch tone prompts are no use to them. Web sites are wonderful."

"We really need one computer each – I have to bring my personal laptop in."

"We could do with some technical support – we just have to feel our way and make it up as we go along."

"If I have a query I can often deal with it through a search engine. It used to mean a hike down to the library."

"My biggest problem is paying wages... computer upgrades have a lower priority."

"I think that it is essential for community and voluntary organisations to be online if they are to contribute and to survive."

"Technology is at the core of the business... but none of us are really technically competent. You can see how a shortcut might be implemented but can't always work out how to do it."

"It is terribly difficult to identify someone reasonable priced who can come when we need it."

"For example one client suffered from a rare condition called Korsakoff's Syndrome which was unknown to the local staff. The web, however, provided a range of information on the condition which was of great use to the outreach team"

"One of the principal barriers apart from cost, is an unwillingness of some people to recognise the benefits of investing in improved ICT. This is becoming less of an issue with new employees and graduates who are more familiar with ICT and its potential benefits."

"Most daily communication is undertaken through email"

"We're still a bit in the dark ages here, I suppose"

"More easy access to a computer would be a lifesaver and result in a better quality of work."

"If the clubs were networked together, event coordination would be greatly simplified"

Focus group

Summary

A focus group from East London organisations used two almost-real scenarios (a youth group and a council for voluntary service) to explore use of ICTs, the barriers and benefits.

- Participants were readily able to relate ICT solutions to the needs and problems of the organisations, and develop a rough technology plan.
- While funding for equipment was a problem, training and support were at least as important.
- Hard-pressed staff had little time to plan technology developments and lacked any central source of information to help them to specify requirements or negotiate purchases with suppliers.
- Integrating technology into community and voluntary organisations will raise a host of non-tech issues about information management, acceptable use of the Net, security, staff responsibilities.
- Current Government programmes for bridging the digital divide, including online centres, may not directly benefit community and voluntary organisations who serve many of those targeted. Supporting community and voluntary organisations could increase effectiveness of these programmes, as well as their day-to-day operations.
- A regional (London-wide) technology support agency was needed because traditional intermediary bodies could not provide advice.

Purpose of the focus group

A group of nine community and voluntary sector workers from East London attended a focus group for three hours on September 24. They represented women's groups; youth groups; the local community and voluntary sector forum, community centres and community ICT projects. The purpose of the group was to gain further understanding of:

- The day-to-day working of community and voluntary organisations
- The extent to which they were using ICT
- Barriers and benefits of using ICT
- How far practitioners could - with some prompting - put together a technology strategy for an organisation.

In order to do this we worked with the group to develop some generic situations that enabled them to think and plan together, while drawing upon individual experience.

The Process

The main part of the session consisted of the development of two scenarios loosely based on local organisations. Working in two groups, participants first sketched out the activities of the organisations, their staffing and other resources, and the issues/problems they were tackling.

The groups then exchanged scenarios and took on the task of developing appropriate ICT strategies. The initial scenarios developed were:

- **A council for voluntary service (CVS)** whose role is to support community and voluntary organisations.
- **A youth club** for both boys and girls aged eleven plus. Separate sessions, and outings.

Framework for discussion

In order to develop technology strategies, the focus group participants first (in two groups) had a general discussion about options, and were then offered sets of cards with ideas about access, training, technical support, applications, content. Each card had:

- A title and brief description
- A cartoon to aid distinguishing the cards from each other
- A resource implication... what staff, skills, funding would be needed to carry out the project
- A resource number (from 1-3) broadly indicating "cost" of the project.

The group were given a budget of 12 points and asked to select the cards most relevant to the organisation they were considering, and to add other ideas on Post-it notes.

The groups were also given planning sheets that had two aspects:

- A 3x3 matrix that enabled the groups to profile their organisation on three dimensions: internal efficiency; effectiveness in working with clients; external networking. These were rated high, medium or low.
- A prioritising framework for the cards, so that they could be placed along a timeline of short, medium or long-term implementation, and rated of high, medium or low priority.

Developing a technology plan

After some initial discussion, the two groups used the cards to develop technology plans for the youth group and CVS. In general:

- Participants had no difficulty in relating ideas on the cards to the scenarios, and were able to add in their own ideas (perhaps because some of those present had community tech experience)
- All the card ideas were accepted as relevant, and as offering a comprehensive spread.

- The three main additional ICT ideas were for database use, recycled computers, and creating a knowledge management plan to define what information the organization needs and to whom it needs to communicate.
- The groups were able within half an hour to sequence and prioritise the cards to create a draft technology plan (several participants said the ideas generated would be directly relevant to their work.)

The Big Idea

Discussion around the two scenarios, and the associated technology plans, led to the following analysis and proposal.

- At grass roots level small organisations are struggling. They probably have outdated equipment with no resources for upgrading, and staff have to learn as they go with little if any support.
- While there is a lot of funding for UK Online centres and other education-related community technology projects, there may be no direct links to other community and voluntary organisations. At the same time, the community tech projects will be looking to local organisations to promote their courses and other activities - so there should be scope for mutuality.
- Traditional intermediary organisations like councils for voluntary service, may themselves be under-utilising technology and probably do not have the capability to provide advice to their clients (that is, the local community and voluntary organisations).
- What is needed is a technology support agency working at regional (in the case London-wide) level. This should be able to help with audit and planning, choosing hardware and support, training, problem solving.
- Services would need to be free or low cost because organisations would not have budgets to cover any major consultancy or training costs.

Concluding discussion on barriers and benefits

After the above scenario planning exercise, we reviewed barriers, benefits and other issues with the group. These notes reflect that discussion, and other points from the scenario group work

- There is **scope for more shared learning** among small organisations... but this may be difficult to organise in practice, not least because...
- **Organisations are frequently in competition** for funding, and that may make them wary of sharing useful information and skills.

- While community access is important, we should **also consider promoting home use of computers**. "Children in families with computers are light years ahead of those without". Providing low-income families with free computers could reach as many individuals as putting them in an online centre, particularly if the target family was large and was in close touch with their extended family.
- **Money may not be the main problem**. While acquiring and upgrading equipment is important, training and support are often more so.
- **However, even raising small sums may be difficult**. "The paper work to raise just £1000 for equipment can be daunting. There are few easy routes, and no programmes we know of specifically meeting community and voluntary sector needs."
- **Using a website for fundraising (or even having a website at all)** were seen by some as luxuries compared to more immediate concerns like training.
- The organisations attending **weren't aware of the benefits of networking using the internet with similar groups** outside their region or the UK.
- **Technology doesn't substitute for other methods**. We should seek to upgrade technology capabilities - but not expect organisations necessarily to use this medium. Information should be available in print, over the phone, on CD. Similarly, staff in councils and other agencies may not all have email. Email and newsletters are becoming an important means of communication of news within the voluntary sector but it is not possible to guarantee that all of the people an organisation needs to reach are on email. (This might be overcome by including PDFs for local printing and circulation when distributing email newsletters)
- **Intermediary organisations should enhance their database capabilities** in order to answer queries (by whatever medium) on contacts, funding etc.
- **Intermediary organisations want to connect to councils** – not just by email but if possible to their internal systems as well.
- **Training of all kinds was viewed as of key importance** – all training-related cards were in the short term/high importance quadrant in the scenarios exercise. This is not just in PC and internet use but in office skills and procedures. Learning how to set up meetings in Outlook and avoid Repetitive Strain Injury and providing an acceptable internet use policy are just as important as word processing and other skills.
- **Sharing skills within the organisation and training clients were seen as critical**, rather than merely bringing in trainers from outside.
- **Information policies are needed**. "The internet is useful for information gathering, but there needs to be a policy in place to define what information is relevant to the organisation and its clients."

- **Equity is important.** Similar organisations in an area should have similar access to ICT resources – otherwise suspicions of favouritism can arise.
- **Impact on organisations should be considered.** Improved information sharing through the deployment of ICT can produce tensions organisations where information has traditionally been controlled by the higher echelons. This and other non-tech issues should be considered in any development plan.
- **Staff turnover can be a problem.** Because small organisations rely on informal support among staff - rather than dedicated posts - problems arise if the technically capable person leaves. Their replacement may not have the same skills.
- **Funding regimes and criteria may be inflexible.** Frustration was expressed that worthwhile ICT projects were bypassed because they didn't fit into "boxes". One organisation wanted to provide computer-based training but didn't wish to become a UK Online centre because of the perceived heavy cost of remaining online permanently. They felt they could accomplish all they needed using CD-ROM applications instead of online tools.

D. References, Appendices and Acknowledgements

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Appendices

Appendices have been produced separately. These contain:

1. The full set of data from the telephone survey, analysed by each question and split for sector and organisation size. (The raw data is also held in SPSS by Hall Aitken and can be further analysed on request.)
2. The full set of data from the email survey, analysed by question. (The raw data is also available for further analysis, which would require a little more work.)
3. A full print out of all free text responses to the email survey.
4. A full report on the focus group.
5. A more detailed, anonymised write up of the telephone interviews.

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- Community Development Foundation (www.cdf.org.uk)
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