

ictconsortiumNI

ictsurvey06

The ICT Consortium NI is a collective of representatives from organisations within the voluntary and community sector who aim to support and promote the strategic use of ICT across the sector in Northern Ireland.

The consortium has begun the planning process to develop an ICT strategy in response to government's *Positive Steps* document. The process aims to engage people both online and face-to-face in order to address the digital divide within voluntary and community organisations.

Effective use of ICT has the potential to transform the way voluntary and community organisations deliver their services to the public.

The online survey is a key piece of work towards developing the strategy. The research attempted to paint a detailed picture of:

- How organisations in the sector are using ICT.
- How funders view ICT.
- The availability of ICT advice and support for organisations.
- How organisations actually use their computers.

This report is a summation of the responses given by 192 organisations which responded to the online survey during November and December 2006. Organisations were also given the opportunity to respond using a hard copy version of the survey.

Throughout this report some of the analysis describes differences between small, medium and large organisations. Small organisations which make up 35.6% of the overall responses are organisations with an income of less than £100,000. Medium organisations (36.2%) have an income between £100,000 and £500,000 whereas large organisations (28.2%) have an income of over £500,000.

Connections

It perhaps comes as no surprise that the overwhelming majority of organisations which responded to this survey have access to a computer. Of the 97% of organisations which have access to computers, 56% are spread across more than one location. This of course carries with it all the

incumbent problems of connecting different sites. To this end, the survey also asked respondents about how connected their computers were.

Of those 108 organisations which have computers at different sites, just over half have a full network,

whereas 22% have some of their computers networked.

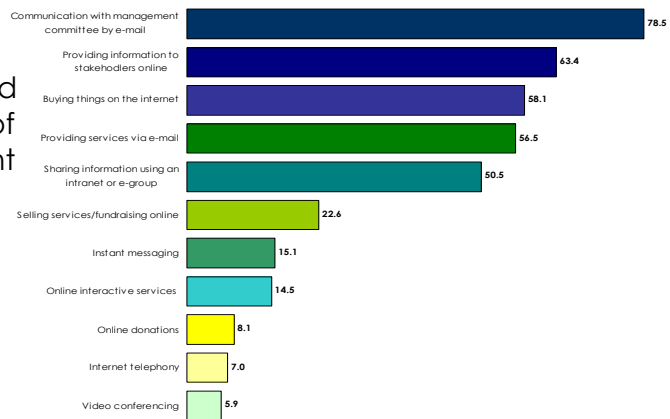
In relation to how connected staff are inside and outside of the workplace, approximately one in three respondents have the infrastructure in place that allows staff to access networks or emails from home. This increases to eight out of ten organisations when asked about access to networks and emails within the workplace. Only 3% of respondents stated that most or all of their staff who have access to computers were not on a network or have access to emails.

When how connected organisations are with the outside world was examined in this survey almost three quarters had their own website. A further 5% had information about the activities of the organisation on a parent organisation's website or

community website. One in seven organisations didn't have a website but were planning develop one in the near future.

Of course having a degree of connectedness is one thing but how that is utilised by the organisations is another. As is demonstrated in Figure 1, the majority of organisations use emails and the internet as a method by which to communicate information to stakeholders. The more interactive or reciprocal elements, such as selling publications or products or video conferencing, of being connected online have yet to fully be grasped by organisations.

Fig 1: Use of email and the internet



Financing ICT

Four out of ten organisations stated they had a specific budget for ICT or the internet. Looking at the economic size of the organisations, it paints a different picture. Just under half of all the organisations which have a specific ICT budget have an income of over £500,000. This figure

falls to just 14.7% for organisations with an income of less than £100,000. As perhaps would be expected the larger the organisation, in financial terms, the greater the likelihood there is a specific budget for ICT development and maintenance.

The next set of questions examined what, if anything, organisations were

spending their money on in terms of ICT development and maintenance.

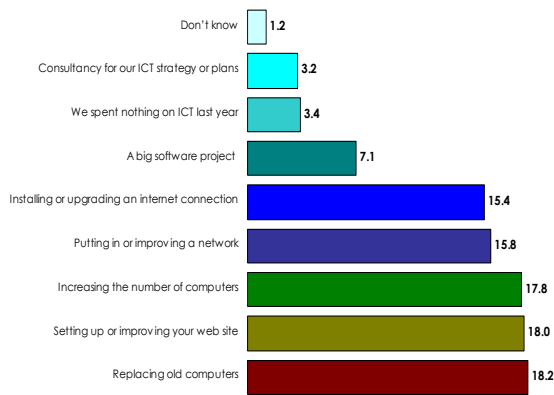


Fig 2: Areas of expenditure on ICT

Figure 2 above demonstrates the various areas where organisations have spent money on ICT over the last 12 months.

As can be seen in Figure 2 the majority of organisations expenditure goes towards replacing old computers (18.2%), setting up or improving a website (18.0%) or increasing the number of computers (17.9%). Significantly the bulk of expenditure is on improving the organisation's ICT infrastructure whilst the more strategic aspects of ICT expenditure (big software projects or use of a consultant for strategic planning) are less prevalent.

Taking into account the economic size of the respondents to this survey a more detailed picture of expenditure can be developed. In small organisations (income less than £100,000) only 7.5% and 3.0% of respondents have undertaken a big software project or used a consultant to develop an ICT strategy respectively. These figures

increase to 30.2% and 13.2% for big software projects and for consultants to develop ICT strategies respectively in large organisations.

When the prevalence of setting up new websites was examined six out of ten large organisations were doing so at the time of this survey. Whereas, only three out of every ten small organisations were setting up websites.

Finally, respondents were asked to give an account of their relationship with funders in relation to funding for ICT. One in five organisations felt that most of their main funders were happy to accept ICT capital and running costs (19.5%). At the other end of the scale 15.5% of respondent's experiences of funders were characterised by a reluctance to give any funding towards ICT costs. A further 16.1% of respondents received funding for capital costs but nothing for running costs. From the findings of this survey there appears to be a lack of consistency across funders in relation to including ICT costs, or not as the case may be, in funding awards.

Planning for the future

As mentioned above very little money goes towards large strategic projects (outside the normal maintenance of ICT systems). This section of the report examines how strategy is decided upon within organisations and how are the future skills needs within organisations in relation to ICT assessed.

First, in relation to policy 51% of organisations have a policy on the

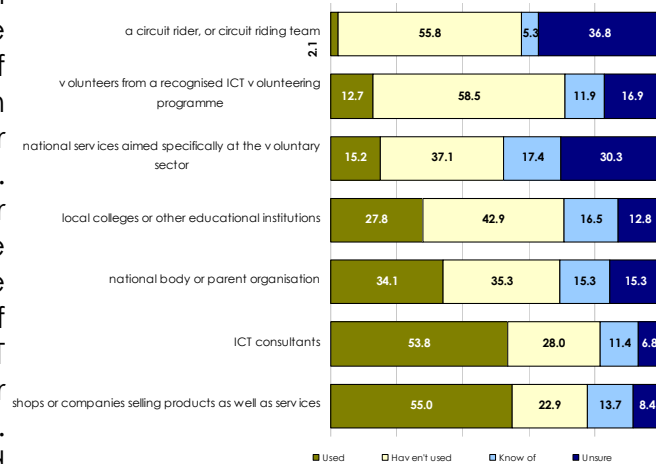
acceptable use by staff of ICT, e-mail and internet facilities. However, only 27% and 22% of respondents have policies on ICT security policy and/or security procedures and on an ICT strategy or ICT component of the organisation's business plan, respectively. Almost six out of every ten organisations with an ICT strategy have an income of over £500,000.

Respondents were also asked to give an indication of what internal sources of strategic ICT knowledge the organisation has. One third of respondents have an ICT expert on the staff who advises the senior management team and/or board. This is closely followed by a senior management team which has one or more members with ICT expertise (30.1%). Just over a quarter of respondents rely upon an unpaid ICT expert who advises the senior management team and/or board. As perhaps would be expected small organisations (income less than £100,000) are more reliant on an unpaid ICT expert (32% of organisations). This compares to just 7.5% of large organisations relying on this unpaid expertise. On the other side of the coin 37.7% of large organisations have an ICT expert on the staff. Whereas, only 13.4% of small organisations can claim to have access to a similar resource.

Figure 3 demonstrates the various external sources organisations have used, or are aware of, in terms of ICT strategic development. The most widely used external sources are shops or companies selling products as well as services (55.0%), ICT consultants (53.8%) and a national body or parent organisation (34.1%).

At the other end of the scale circuit riders are used by only 2.1% of respondents. Indeed only 5.3% of respondents had heard of the concept of circuit riders. Overall there appears to be a willingness to pay for services which is perhaps understandable given the relatively low number of ICT experts employed in organisations.

Fig 3: External sources of ICT strategic knowledge



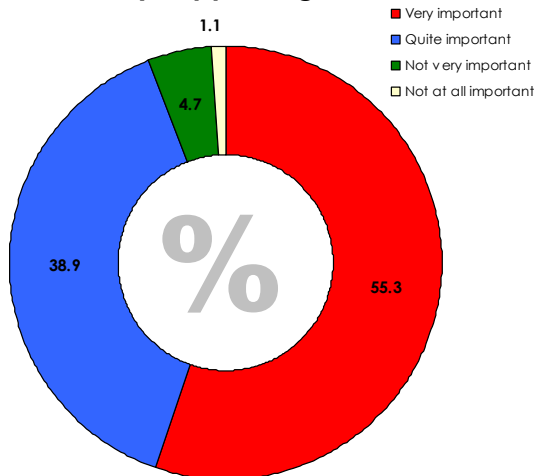
Following on from how strategic decisions are made, the consequences of these decisions were also examined. A total 68.7% of respondents felt they were completely or partly satisfied with the way ICT decisions are taken within their organisation. Perhaps more significantly, almost three quarters of respondents were confident or very confident in relation to personally making decisions about ICT (such as what to buy or whether to accept the advice you are getting). For both questions only a small but nevertheless significant percentage of respondents were not happy about how decisions were being made (6.1%) and how uncertain

they were in making decisions (22.0%).

When problems arise this survey found that the majority of organisations (31.8%) will use an external person or organisation on an annual contract or other regular arrangement to sort the problem out. This is followed by the use of the most ICT-literate member of staff to sort problems out (21.5%). Both these responses account just over 50% of all the responses to how organisations normally deal with problems. The use of external sources or an ICT-literate member of staff are dependent upon either having a budget or having a suitable qualified member of staff.

Organisations were asked to compare other areas where they may need advice (such as fundraising or legal problems) and how important is it for voluntary and community sector support agencies to provide advice on ICT? As demonstrated in Figure 4 it is very evident that respondents believe the voluntary and community sector support agencies should be providing this type of advice.

Fig 4: Advice from voluntary and community support agencies



Finally, respondents were asked to give an indication of their organisation's approach towards the development of ICT skills amongst staff. The results from this question paint a rather ad hoc approach towards ICT training. For instance, 31.4% of respondents stated that they will look at what training is available and decide whether to send anyone. However, 33.3% of organisations stated they were able to prioritise ICT training. On the other hand however 19.8% of organisations carry out a regular training needs analysis and ensure it is acted on.

Only 9.0% of small organisations carry out a training needs analysis, while 47.8% are unable to prioritise ICT training. For larger organisations the situation is reversed. One in three large organisations undertake a training needs analysis in relation to ICT, while only 18.9% do not prioritise ICT training.

Conclusions

The current use of ICT in the voluntary and community sector is growing, with high adoption levels. The focus should no longer be on how to get organisations online but how to ensure that ICT is being used effectively.

This survey has clearly shown there are issues around the planning and managing of ICT – particularly for the smaller organisations around support and training. It is also clear that organisations see a role for the voluntary sector in taking on these issues.

It is to be hoped that the ICT Strategy based on these findings will address the key issues of lack of support, ad hoc training and funding inconsistency to ensure that organisations can use their current resources more effectively.