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6.4 European Union information in public libraries in the United Kingdom

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Report of a BLRIC-funded project which investigated the provision of European Union information in UK public libraries – and in particular the implementation of a particular service, the Public Information Relay. We present here highly selective extracts from questionnaire surveys of public library authorities and library users. The full report – which runs to 180 pages – contains much more information on both surveys, as well as reports on eight case studies and a project seminar, and final conclusions and recommendations.

Marcella, Rita, and others. *European Union information in public libraries in the United Kingdom*. 1996. BLRIC report 19. Available from the British Thesis Service, BLDSC.

Introduction

At the outset of this project, in July 1995, 154 of the then 167 UK library authorities had joined the Public Information Relay (PIR) – a co-ordinated relay which brings European Union information closer to the man and woman in the street. Participating public libraries are entitled to receive:

free copies of basic texts on the European Union; a 50% discount on items produced by the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities (EUR-OP); a 50% discount on access to certain EU databases, a stock of hand-out material produced by the EC; a list of suggested basic publications; training in the use and maintenance of a European collection.

The main objectives of the project are:

- to provide a review of the types of European information services in public libraries
- to identify the extent of actual and potential need for European information amongst users
- to identify best practice for the provision of European information in public libraries
- to develop a method of investigating users' perceptions of and response to European information.

Methodology

The first stage of the project comprised a questionnaire-based survey of all 154 public library authorities in the UK participating in the PIR. The main aim of this survey was to elicit information on the levels of European information provision (both prior to and since joining the Relay), the manner in

which the PIR service was being implemented, and any potential problems and solutions.

In the second stage of the project, further information was drawn from a series of case study visits to PIR members. In all, eight visits were made - five to English library authorities and three to Scottish authorities.

A survey of the European information needs of the public was also carried out. Three public library services - Aberdeen, Glasgow and Moray - distributed a total of 450 questionnaires to library users. At the time of the exercise, both Glasgow and Moray had made the Relay service available to the public, but Aberdeen was still considering possible launch dates. Some of the user findings were compared with those of Gallup polls conducted previously.

The final major element of the Project was a seminar, held at the Representation of the European Commission in London on Tuesday, 25th June 1996.

The Public Information Relay survey results

The overall response rate for the survey was 76% or 117 authorities. Almost all the respondents had joined the Public Information Relay (PIR) between May 1994 and December 1995.

Sources of European information held

One question in this section sought to investigate the extent of collections by comparison with a sample of the core texts taken from the list of suggested basic European information sources from the Federation of Local Authority Chief Librarians (FOLACL). Findings are shown in [Table 6.4.1](#).

6.4.1 Please indicate if the library holds any of the following key hardcopy sources of European information, as published by EUR-OP.

Key sources	Authorities holding title	% of total respondents
Directory of Community Legislation in Force	77	66
General Report on the Activities of the European Communities	70	60
Treaties	69	59
Bulletin of the European Union	47	40
Official Journal of the EC 'L' series	46	39
Official Journal of the EC 'C' series	43	37
Official Journal of the EC 'S' series	34	29
COM Documents	21	18
Annex to the Official Journal	16	14

6.4.2 In your European collection, is the stock you hold on the following subject areas adequate for meeting your users' needs?

Subject area	Completely adequate %	Adequate %	Inadequate %	Completely inadequate %	No resp. %
General information on the EU's activities	31	61	3	-	5
Customs tariffs and regulations	8	51	25	5	11
Employment and labour	7	74	12	-	7
Education	9	69	14	1	7
Legislation/Implementation	14	55	20	3	8
Social issues/policy	8	71	14	-	7
Citizens' rights	8	77	8	-	7
Transport	5	67	20	-	8
Energy	5	66	20	2	7
Environmental issues	7	71	14	1	7
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	4	71	15	-	10
Economic and financial issues	6	71	15	-	8
Business opportunities	7	48	34	1	10
Market and company information	7	47	34	3	9
Grants and loans	13	60	19	-	8
Scientific and technical research	4	44	34	7	11
Patents and standards	8	33	40	8	11
Statistics	10	65	15	1	9

Note: %'s within each subject area

The next question sought from respondents a qualitative evaluation of their European collection. The question focused on a broad range of categories of European information extending beyond those actual sources identified by FOLACL (see Table 6.4.2).

Electronic sources of European information

The survey sought to investigate the electronic sources of European information available to respondents and the perceived value of such sources (see Table 6.4.3).

Authorities were asked to rank the top three on-line hosts used to access European information. Using a simple scoring system of 3 points for being ranked first, 2 points for being ranked second, and 1 point for being ranked third, the following list of the hosts most frequently used to access European information was obtained (see Table 6.4.4).

6.4.3 Please indicate if the library has access to any of the following online hosts

Online host	Authorities with access	% of total resp.
DIALOG	49	42
DataStar	40	34
FT Profile	35	30
ECHO	21	18
Context	9	8
Eurobases	9	8
Consultancy Europe Associates	1	1
CPC Technologies (formerly BRS)	1	1
Eurokom	1	1
Butterworths Telepublishing	-	-
Mead Data Central	-	-
NOMOS Legal Information Service	-	-
WEFA	-	-

6.4.4 Ranking of on-line hosts by use

1.	DIALOG	59 pts
2.	DataStar	39
3.	FT Profile	18
4.	ECHO	14
5.	Eurobases	12
6.	Context	9
7.	ESA-IRS	6
8.	Kompass Online	5
9.	European Patent Office	3
10.	London Research Centre	3

These findings are unexpected in that DIALOG (which scores highly) is *not* a rich source of European information. Datastar has several European Union databases, such as CELEX and Spearhead. It is likely that DIALOG's strong showing reflects a lack of awareness of appropriate sources. Interestingly, Context is ranked particularly highly by those who use it, and is indeed a relevant and useful source.

A growing number of relevant CD ROM titles are available. Respondents were asked to identify titles held (see Table 6.4.5).

6.4.5 From the following, please indicate which CD-ROM titles containing European information the library has in stock

CD-ROM title	Authorities with title	% of total resp.
Eurolaw	12	10
EC Infodisk	11	9
Justis Single Market	11	9
EUROCAT	9	8
CORDIS	8	7
Justis CELEX	8	7
OJ CD	7	6
Justis European References	6	5
Justis Parliament	5	4
Justis Official Journal C Series	3	3
SCAD+ CD	2	2
Eurostat-CD	1	1
COMEXT on CD-ROM	-	-
Justis Official Press Releases	-	-

The total number of authorities indicating that they held CD-ROMs containing European information was 46 (39% of total respondents). Increasingly, European information is becoming available on the Internet. The European Commission hosts a number of servers such as *Europa*, *ISPO*, and *I'M Europe* and seven of the Representation offices now have their own sites. All the European supported databases are now available on the Internet and can be reached via *Europa.eu.int*. A small but

significant proportion of respondents are at present accessing European information via the Internet (see Table 6.4.6).

6.4.6 Does the library access European information on the Internet?

	No.	%
Yes	22	19
No	93	79
No response	2	2

Enquiries for European information

The majority of respondents said that European enquiries had increased - but this finding is likely to be based upon impressionistic rather than real data (see Table 6.4.7).

6.4.7 Has the service noted an increase in the number of European enquiries received over the last five years?

	No.	%
Yes	73	62
No	14	12
Don't know	27	23
No response	3	3

Respondents were asked about the impact on enquiries of joining the Public Information Relay (see Table 6.4.8). At first glance this response looks disappointing, in that only 27% of respondents had observed any impact upon demand in the aftermath of joining the Relay. However, not all authorities had launched their service at the time when the questionnaire was completed, and so:

Of the 27 authorities who had launched their service up to and including June 1995:

13 (48%) had noted an increase in enquiries (more encouraging)

9 (33%) had not noted an increase.

6.4.8 Has the service noted an increase in the number of European enquiries received since joining the Public Information Relay?

	No.	%
Yes	32	27
No	52	45
Don't know	27	23
No response	6	5

6.4.9 Prior to joining the Public Information Relay, did the following user groups make significant use of your European collection?

User Group	Very significant %	Significant %	Insignificant %	Don't know %	No resp. %
Businessmen/businesswomen	6	41	29	21	3
Primary producers (i.e. farmers, fishermen, etc.)	1	3	51	35	10
Further/higher education students	21	45	16	15	3
The general public	4	37	39	16	4
Local government officers	5	31	40	20	4
Job seekers	3	25	44	24	4
Schoolchildren	8	50	25	14	3

(NB 3 authorities (3%) failed to answer any part of this question.)
Note: %'s within each user group

Respondents were also asked about use of EU information *before* their libraries joined the Public Information Relay (see Table 6.4.9). These responses would support prior anecdotal evidence as to the high frequency of use of European Union information by young people and for educational purposes. They also demonstrate the very significant use made of public libraries in the UK by the business community.

Table 6.4.10 shows the interesting finding that three user groups which are not specifically targeted by the Relay initiative have to a greater extent become more frequent users, in the aftermath of the Public Information Relay, than have the targeted group, the general public. This is a highly significant finding and calls into question the ethos of targeting user groups by the establishment of separate Relays.

Table 6.4.11 depicts the frequency with which different types of information were requested *before*

the PIR. The overall ranking is produced by giving four points to 'daily' requests, three to 'weekly', two to 'monthly' and one to 'occasional'.

6.4.10 User groups becoming more frequent users since joining PIR

User Groups	No of authorities reporting more frequent use
Further/higher education students	25
Schoolchildren	17
Local government officers	11
The general public	9
Businessmen/businesswomen	8
Job seekers	2
Primary producers (i.e. farmers, fishermen, etc)	-

(In addition, 4 of the 38 authorities felt there had been a general increase in use by all groups.)

6.4.11 Please indicate the frequency with which information on the following topics was requested prior to your library service joining the Public Information Relay

Subject	Daily %	Weekly %	Mthly %	Occas. %	Never %	Don't know %	No resp. %	Overall ranking
Statistics	18	21	19	28	3	10	1	201
General info on the EU's activities	11	28	14	34	2	10	1	190
Market & company information	18	20	15	27	6	10	4	189
Grants & loans	10	22	20	34	3	10	1	180
Legislation/ Implementation	9	21	21	31	6	10	2	172
Business opportunities	8	23	18	29	9	10	3	166
Economic and financial issues	6	15	21	39	6	10	3	150
Employment and labour	3	18	21	41	5	10	2	149
Social issues/policy	3	19	17	43	7	10	1	146
Education	4	14	24	38	7	10	3	144
Environmental issues	4	15	19	43	7	10	2	142
Citizens' rights	2	15	15	47	8	10	3	130
Custom tariffs and regulations	2	11	14	46	13	10	4	115
Patents & standards	7	10	8	34	26	10	5	108
Energy	1	8	12	53	13	10	3	105
Transport	2	5	13	48	18	10	4	97
Agriculture, forestry & fisheries	1	6	13	47	20	10	3	95
Scientific & technical research	2	2	6	40	35	10	5	66

Note: %'s within each subject group

Table 6.4.12 shows the popularity of the same topics *after* PIR. (In addition, three of the 31 authorities felt that *all* of these topics had become more popular.)

6.4.12 Topics becoming more popular since joining PIR

Subject	No. of authorities
General information on the EU's activities	14
Grants and loans	12
Legislation/Implementation	10
Social issues/policy	10
Statistics	8
Citizens' rights	7
Employment and labour	7
Business opportunities	4
Environmental issues	4
Agriculture, forestry & fisheries	2
Education	2
Market & company information	2
Transport	2
Customs tariffs and regulations	1
Economic and financial issues	1
Energy	1
Patents and standards	1
Scientific & technical research	1

User survey

In total 372 user questionnaires were completed, by users of the public libraries in Aberdeen, Glasgow and Moray; in comparison the Gallup poll of 1995 surveyed 1,024 members of the general public.

The first question sought broad information on actual prior need for European information by respondents (*see Table 6.4.13*).

6.4.13 Have you ever tried to obtain information about the European Union?

	Number	%
Yes	103	28
No	269	72

A minority of respondents (28%) had actively sought European information in the past. This figure is, however, higher than that found in three years of Gallup polls: 15% (1993), 15% (1994) and 18% (1995). This might suggest that public library users are more active users of information than the general public.

Table 6.4.14 shows where respondents went to obtain information.

6.4.14 If YES, where did you go to obtain this information?

	No. of responses
Public library	74
University/college/school library	26
European Documentation Centre	7
Internet	5
EC Representations in the UK	3
European Information Centre	3
Books and other literature	2
Business information centre/shop	2
European Commission, Brussels	2
MEP	2
Other	9

(Note: 103 respondents)

Table 6.4.15 depicts the kinds of information sought.

6.4.15 If YES, what kind of information did you try to obtain from a public library?

	No. of responses
Employment/job opportunities	12
Market and company information	8
Business opportunities	7
Grants and loans	6
Economic and financial issues	5
Legislation	5
Citizens' rights	4
Travel information	4
Patent information	3
Political information	3
Statistics	3
Environmental issues	2
General information on EU's activities	2
Social policy	2
Other	9

(Note: 74 respondents)

Table 6.4.16 relates to respondents' present and future needs for EU information.

6.4.16 Which of the following subjects do you feel you might want to find out more about, either at the present or in the future?

	No.	%
1. Employment/job opportunities in the EU	161	43
2. Citizens' rights in the EU	141	38
3. Education in the EU	105	28
4. General information on the EU's activities	105	28
5. EU grants and loans	100	27
6. EU legislation	95	26
7. Business opportunities in the EU	92	25
8. EU environmental issues	90	24
9. EU social policy/issues	84	23
10. EU economic and financial issues	83	22
11. Customs (duty free) regulations in the EU	62	17
12. Scientific and technical research in the EU	55	15
13. Transport in the EU	55	15
14. EU statistics	53	14
15. Farming, forestry and fishing in the EU	51	14
16. EU market and company information	48	13
17. European patents and standards	35	9
18. Energy in the EU	27	7

When asked to predict future information needs in relation to Europe, respondents again displayed a wide range of interests, as well as a much higher expectation of need than had been apparent from past usage. The figures, although high, are still

less than those gathered as part of the Gallup poll (1995) - where users predicted a future need for information on Europe and their region (73%), employment opportunities (72%), the environment (69%), working conditions (69%), equal opportunities (68%) and education (66%). Interestingly, the response to the present survey also contrasts with the impressions of libraries as to use - as detailed in Table 6.4.11. Library respondents had reported a high level of use of statistical and business related information. The response by users would suggest that to a far greater extent, employment information, citizens' rights, educational and general information would be sought. The emphasis is much more on the individual and the private citizen, rather than on the professional or commercial need - as one would expect from a survey of members of the general public.

Finally, Table 6.4.17 explores the reasons for seeking EU information.

6.4.17 For what reasons might you want this information?

	No. of respondents	%
Educational/study reasons	168	49
A general interest	147	43
Work reasons	139	41
Job-seeking reasons	113	33
Recreational reasons	55	16

(Note: respondents are the 341 users who said they wanted to find out more about particular topics.)