

## Section 1: Introduction

The project was carried out by the University of Strathclyde, Department of Information Science, Glasgow, and the Library Information Technology Centre (LITC), South Bank University, London. It was funded by the British Library Research and Innovation Centre (BLRIC) as part of its Digital Library Research programme, and ran from August 1997 until November 1998 inclusive.

### 1.1 Project aims

The original aims of the project were:

1. To identify the types of internet resource that are found useful by Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs). As well as identifying individual sources, to include analysis of the type of source and the information need that is being addressed.
2. As part of the above analysis, to identify reasons why the sources were judged useful.
3. To put the use of internet resources in the context of use of all types of external information, and discover whether internet resources affect the balance of use, in terms of:
  - medium (electronic, print, personal contact);
  - extent of substitution (e.g. internet used instead of print);
  - frequency of use, volume of use (is more information being gathered overall, or the same amount, from a different range of media?)
4. To gather information on resource implications and feasibility of creating a 'virtual SME library' through support and advice from a trained intermediary, mostly remote from the user site.

These aims were addressed by working with two groups of SMEs: based around Glasgow and London. This provided both a Scottish and an English perspective in metropolitan settings, enabling comparison of the two groups, and sharing of resources used to support the groups.

Once the project was underway, it became obvious quite quickly that the companies participating in the project were making insufficient use of the internet to enable aims one and two to be addressed in detail. Therefore two further aims were added:

- To investigate the barriers to use of the internet by SMEs.
- To try to identify levels, and indicators, of internet engagement.

### 1.2 Project operation

Work began in Glasgow in August 1997 with a full-time project officer, Sue Allcock. In London the project began in October with the employment of a part-time project officer, Annette Plenty, working two days a week. The overall project manager was Sheila Webber, Lecturer at the University of Strathclyde, Department of Information Science. Robin Yeates, Centre Manager of LITC, had responsibility for the London side of the project and also contributed to it. Most of the communication between the London and Glasgow project teams took place via email, post and telephone.

The project analyst at BLRIC was initially Graham Jefcoate, with Adrienne Muir taking over, following Graham Jefcoate's move to another part of the British Library.

The project web site (<http://business.dis.strath.ac.uk/>) was hosted on the existing web server of the University of Strathclyde, Department of Information Science. The web pages were designed by a research assistant in the Department, Colm McCartan, and the web site was supported by the Department's Systems Manager, Duncan Sinclair. Most of the pages on the site were created and maintained by Sue Allcock, with contributions from Sheila Webber and Annette Plenty.

There were two Advisory Groups for the project, one based in London and the other in Glasgow. Membership of the groups is given in Appendix 2. All group members were subscribed to two email discus-

sion lists hosted by Mailbase. The first (*businfo-project*) was a closed list for advisory group and project team members, used to disseminate information and ask for comments about the project. The second (*businfo-discuss*) was a discussion list intended for the companies participating in the project. Other documents, such as the project reports, were circulated by post.

There was a meeting of the London Advisory Group at the start of the project. This meeting was used to identify priorities, to make suggestions about contacts and related research, and to give feedback on specific issues, e.g. the questions to be used in the first questionnaire.

The Glasgow Advisory Group met mid-way through the project, following the circulation of a draft interim report. The Group commented on the report, suggested priorities, highlighted key issues, and helped to identify key questions for the focus groups.

An interim report was produced in print form, including an analysis of the first questionnaire, sample case studies, and suggested issues for further investigation. Selected interim results were also posted to the web site. A summary report, highlighting, in particular, key points from the focus groups, was produced for, and circulated to, all participating companies, when the project finished.

This report will be available on demand from the British Library Document Supply Centre. A version of the final results will also be available on the project web site at <http://business.dis.strath.ac.uk/>