

Section 19: Impact of the Research Project and Dissemination of Results

19.1 Impact and value

19.1.1 Impact on, and value to, project participants

The responses to the final questionnaire show that the project made a positive impact on the project participants.

22 out of 24 respondents said that they had found the project helpful. Many of them added comments, as listed in section 9.19 e.g.

“It got me started using the web as a business tool”, “Breaking down my trepidation with regard to using the internet”.

A variety of benefits were seen to have come from the project, including: help with navigating and searching; networking (personal, rather than technical); diminishing anxiety about the technology; help with specific internet-related problems.

19 out of the 24 respondents had used the project website, and 17 respondents felt it would be useful if the site continued beyond the life of the project. The numerous positive comments (e.g. “*it has been very helpful and useful*”) are listed in section 9.17. These include a response from someone who answered ‘no’ to this last question, but qualified this by saying “*The project website got me started*”.

As a group, the participants were using more internet sources when the project closed (see section 10). In some cases, we could link changes in behaviour to advice we had given, but it is difficult to identify exactly which changes were a direct result of the project.

A short report summarising some key results from the project was distributed to all the project companies once the final questionnaire had been analysed.

19.1.2 Impact on the wider community

During the course of the project, information was disseminated to local business communities (see below). It is possible that experience from the project, and the project website had an impact. For example, the latter was praised several times by one consultant in charge of a local public-funded internet initiative (awarding grants to businesses to start up web sites), who invited Sue Allcock along to a preliminary specification-setting evening, to which she was able to contribute advice on design and organisation of a site.

The business website links, as described in section 5.2, have been used by an increasing number of people, locally and internationally. Glasgow Chamber of Commerce offered to take over maintenance of this part of the project website (which was not a project deliverable). It has become part of the Chamber’s site (at <http://www.glasgowchamber.org/>), and will continue the impact of the project in this area, once the original website links section is removed from the University of Strathclyde server (when the links become too out-of-date to be useful).

The site has been rated positively by others, e.g.

“Another superb resource, loads of good links” (hyperlinked posting from the Hemmington Scott bulletin board)

“This UK based site is an excellent introduction for anyone using the web to locate company information in Scotland or the rest of the UK. Includes a search facility, links and useful tips.” (annotation to hyperlink from Napier University careers service site)

Links to the site include one from the selective BBC Education website directory, and one from the NISS company resources page.

Many informal talks (e.g. via email and on the phone) were held with a variety of people working in libraries, Business Links/Shops, management consultancies etc. during the course of the project.

19.2 Dissemination

There are a number of audiences for the project results, for example: the local business communities, information professionals, others researching use of the internet. This section firstly describes the dissemination to the business community, then to information professionals, general dissemination including via the web site, and finally future plans.

19.2.1 Business community

There were direct mailshots to companies inviting them to participate, and this in itself will have raised some awareness.

Glasgow business community. In the early stages of the project there were two short pieces in the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce *Journal* (1997), and an article appeared in the *Glasgow technologist* (1998), a magazine focusing on technology and business which is distributed free by Scottish Enterprise. Sue Allcock visited a large number of business support and advice agencies, telling them about the project, and in some cases distributing leaflets to businesspeople via these agencies.

During the course of the project we were also approached by consultants etc. who were involved in initiatives concerning small business and the internet. We were able to share our experience with them, and a number showed interest in learning the results of the project.

When the project was near completion, a reception was held in Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, which was attended by a number of people from business support agencies, as well as project participants. A short report summarising some key points and reproducing comments from the focus groups was given to participants.

London business community. Although there was not as much cooperation from the local Business Link as had originally been promised, there was some activity: e.g. the project was highlighted at a Business Link meeting.

The releases to local press resulted in a piece in the *South London Business Press*. (1998). There was contact with a consultant who was setting up a database of internet business resources for Business Link London.

19.2.2 Information professionals

During the duration of the project, the emphasis was on achieving more widespread coverage, rather than publishing scholarly articles. There were two articles in *Information world review*, one at the start of the project (Webber, 1997) and one at the close (Webber, 1998b), highlighting key points.

Sue Allcock wrote an article for *Scottish libraries* (the journal of the Scottish Library Association (Allcock, 1998) after the interim results had been produced. An article in *Online and CD Rom notes* (Webber, 1999b) describes usage of the web site.

A presentation on the project was given at the *LibTech* exhibition in September 1997, and some results were presented in a paper to the *Internet Librarian International* conference in March 1999 (Webber 1999a): this paper has also been placed on the project website.

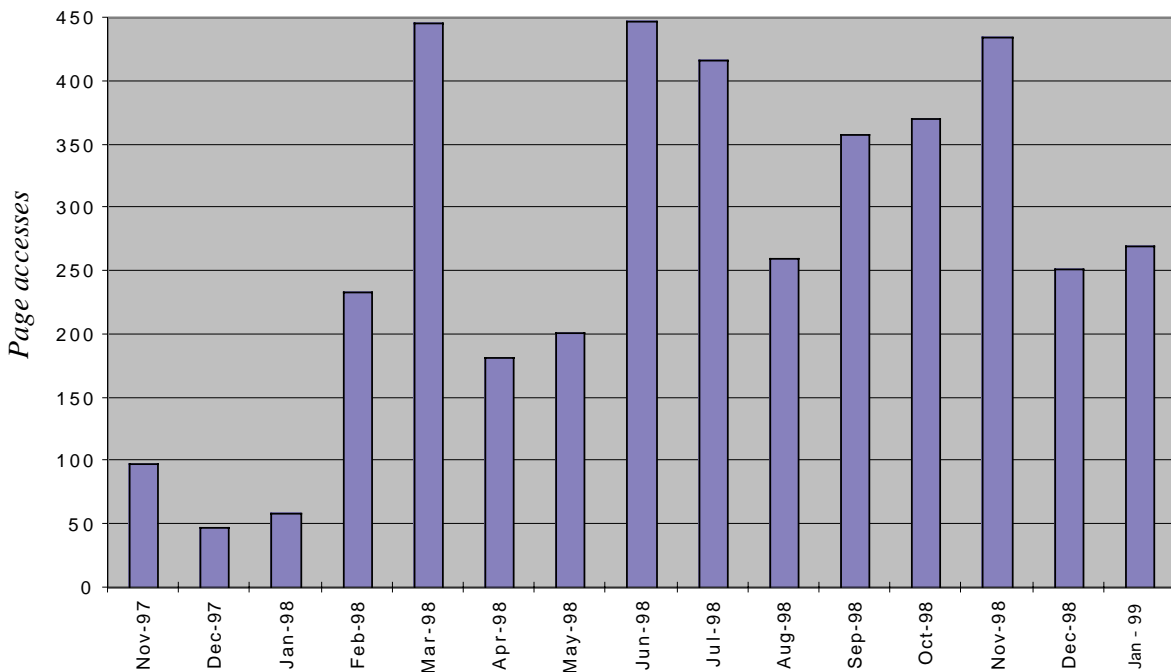
The project was mentioned in a paragraph following an article in the high-circulation email newsletter *Free pint* in June 1998 (Webber, 1998a). It was also highlighted in various seminars given by Sheila Webber on business information sources on the internet (e.g. those run by the British Library Science Reference and Information Service) and is a link from the home page of her *Business information sources* website. A talk on the project is scheduled for a seminar on business use of the internet organised by UKOLUG in September 1999.

Robin Yeates wrote a feature article on the project in the April issue of *Library Technology*, which goes to all Library Association members (Yeates, 1999) and is also available on the publication's website.

19.2.3 General dissemination

As is described in section 4.1, three leaflets were produced (one each aimed at businesspeople in Scotland and London, and one giving more general information about the project) and press releases were sent out at key stages of the project.

Table 19.1: Use of 'Project' part of website, by month

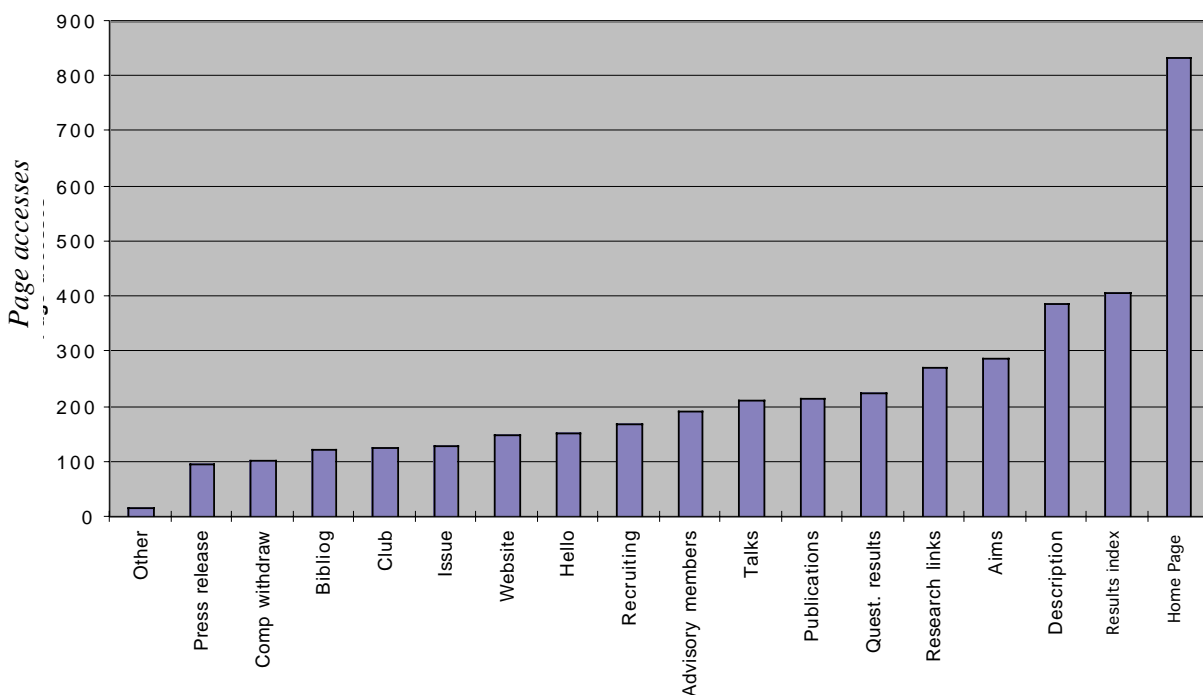


The chief means of disseminating information about the project has been the project website. Statistics about the web site as a whole are given in section 5.2. More detailed information about month on month usage of the project part of the site is given in table 19.1, for November 1997 to January 1999 inclusive.

This excludes all use by Strathclyde and South Bank universities, and represents page accesses (not 'files retrieved', a larger number which includes the graphics files).

As is shown in table 5.2, the part of the web site actually about the project was the third most heavily used section of the site. In part this reflects the fact that it has about four times as many pages than any of the other sections. Until March 1998, there were only five (Home page; Description of the project; Aims of the project; List of Advisory Group members; and the "Hello" page which introduced the project to prospective participants). The other pages were added in March 1998, and corresponded to sections in the interim project report.

Table 19.2: Page accesses by specific page Nov 97 - Jan 99



As can be seen in Table 19.1, use varied from month to month. In March, the interim results were mounted on the site (more than doubling the number of pages in the section) and in June (as described in 5.2) there was publicity about the project results, in particular because of the Nua newsletter item.

Table 19.2 shows use by specific page. As can be seen, most interest was shown in the key interim results, basic information about the project, and related links.

The “Other” category represents incorrect filenames typed in by searchers (e.g. /project/website - without the .html): in other words, these will not have retrieved pages by themselves, though the Department of Information Science site has an ‘intelligent’ feature which often suggests near matches to surfers.

19.3 Future impact/dissemination

- This report is being published ‘on demand’ at the British Library Document Supply Centre, thus making it widely available at reasonable cost.
- The final report will be available free on the project web site, partly in HTML and partly in a pdf version.
- As mentioned above, the business website links will be maintained on the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce site
- A number of further articles and presentations describing the project are planned, and will be listed on the project website.
- An executive summary is being mailed to selected press and business contacts.