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# BUSINESS INFORMATION RESOURCES LANDSCAPE & FEASIBILITY STUDY

# FINAL REPORT

**Acknowledgements.**
The British Library would like to thank all the consultees for their invaluable contributions. We would also like to thank all members of the Project Board, particularly Roger Dalby of De Montfort University and Heather Wilkinson from Striding Out. We would like to give special thanks JISC BCE Programme Manager Simon Whittemore for his support and guidance. A full list of consultees is provided at Appendix A.

## Contents

# 1. Executive summary

**Purpose and methodology**

- The purpose of the study was to produce a picture of business information provision in the UK to support innovation and entrepreneurship and to identify the future service developments which would most greatly enhance the usage of information. Given the predominant role of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in entrepreneurial activity and the challenges faced by such companies in finding and using information, the focus of much of the study was on companies with fewer than 250 employees. However it was recognised that many of the service developments identified would have value for larger companies. Although the study explored the full range of information-related services, there was a specific focus on the potential of higher and further-education institutions to deliver such services.
- The scope of the study was challenging as it extended beyond the definition of business information, as recognised by library and information professionals, to include business support and knowledge transfer activities. Given this breadth of scope, the stakeholder groups identified included: higher education business and community engagement activities; higher education libraries; public libraries; business support services; businesses; publishers and vendors; and, funding and policy-making bodies.
- We adopted a methodology based around stakeholder consultation which involved the collection of primary data through one-to-one interviews and workshops. In all, we carried out eighty interviews and twelve workshops across all nine English regions, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. To increase the input from SMEs, many of whom were not able to commit the time to attend workshops and interviews, we also conducted an online survey.
- In addition to the consultation exercise, we sought to identify and profile examples of good practice both in the UK and overseas. Potential examples were identified by desk research, with names emerging as a result of interviews and workshops.
- As the study was conducted at a time of rapid economic change and considerable uncertainty as to the future of the UK economy (fieldwork took place in the Summer of 2009), the responses received provide an interesting insight into the prevailing mood of small businesses and service providers across a range of sectors.

**Findings from the consultation exercise**

Our initial questioning addressed stakeholder behaviours in accessing information and their perceptions as to the strengths and weaknesses of existing information provision. This was followed up by an exploration of how they wished to see services developing in future. The key findings follow:

**Current service provision**

- Many obstacles exist to prevent businesses from finding and using business information such as: the price of information; the lack of information on niche markets; a confusing array of services and service providers; a lack of understanding as to how to find, and assess, information; and, a shortage of time to spend finding information. A lack of understanding of business needs by staff providing services was also cited frequently as a problem.
- Given the obstacles listed above, it was no surprise that Web search engines were the information sources most heavily used by SMEs. However, trade associations and professional organisations were viewed as important and trusted sources. Overall, the usage of libraries by SMEs was highly variable. Of those using libraries, success in finding information from public libraries was generally higher than from higher education libraries.
- Whilst SMEs generally expressed a preference for accessing information and data at their desktops, many expressed a desire to meet face-to-face with business advisors and potential partners. This desire for opportunities for one-to-one meetings and networking provides a useful counterbalance to any conclusion that all future service delivery should be web-based.
-

- Amongst the categories of business information, market information was viewed as the most valuable by both service providers and SMEs. Although price was cited as an obstacle to accessing information, a high proportion of SMEs expressed a willingness to pay an appropriate price for information as long as it was up-to-date and relevant to their specific business needs.

**Future service provision**

- Given the difficult economic situation which provided the back-drop to this study, it was encouraging to see evidence of a strong desire from SMEs to grow their businesses, particularly within domestic markets, and a belief that businesses being created in this period would provide the engine for the economic recovery. There was a strong consensus that the next three years would see an increase in: numbers of business start-ups; graduate entrepreneurship; ethical business models; web-based businesses and businesses operating in niche markets. However, it was recognised that pressure on public finances would see a decline in the funding available for business support services.
- In spite of an overall sense of optimism on the part of SMEs, there was an acknowledgement that many faced a number of major challenges. The most frequently cited of these were: managing finances; making informed decisions about new product/service developments, and; effectively marketing services.
- The developments in information service provision needed to address these challenges were identified as; more quality information available through desktops; more information on niche markets; a greater variety of formats; more legal information; more practical guides to good business practice, and; better signposting to services.
- The future developments which would have the most positive impact on service providers ability to deliver were seen as being:
  - a central portal providing searchable links to UK-wide sources of information for business;
  - greater integration of services providing business support and information;
  - more flexible publisher licences for subscription-based electronic resources;
  - online access to more free data and more information available through open access platforms;
  - business support and mentoring services delivered on a more personalised basis to help improve signposting to relevant sources of information, and;
  - better marketing of information services to increase the visibility of these services.
- From a service provider perspective, the key issues which will impact on their ability to offer services in the future were believed to be; adequate funding; closer collaboration with related services and the need to recruit and retain skilled and competent staff.

**The perspective of publishers/ vendors.**

- Eight publishers/vendors were interviewed. As a significant number of these wished to remain anonymous, none have been named in the report. Their responses provided an interesting perspective on how commercial information providers viewed many of the challenges and issues raised by SMEs and other service providers.
- Although all recognised the value of their content to SME markets, only one of the information providers sought to sell information directly to SMEs. The remainder attempted to access this market indirectly through channels such as public libraries.
- The desire from businesses for remote desktop access to their content was acknowledged by the majority of publishers/vendors who were broadly in favour of some form of remote access. However they all expressed apprehension about the risk of losing control of their data, should this be made available.
- There was a consistent level of awareness of the need to generate more data on niche and local markets.

**Good practice examples**

The consultation exercise identified many examples of good service provision. The majority of these are listed, and a selection of them are profiled in the report. The services profiled were selected as exemplifying specific features and qualities which could be adopted by other service providers. Although information provision was central to the offering of many of these services, others have been selected on the basis of their ability to connect businesses to services. The UK-based services profiled were:

Business Link In the East of England; Enterprise Europe; National Library of Scotland SCOTBIS; Interface; Innovation vouchers; British Library Business & IP Centre; University of Brighton CUPP HelpDesk, and; Insight East.

In addition to the UK service providers, some examples of good practice overseas are also profiled in the report. In the U.S.A. a number of examples of good practice in business support involving higher education institutions were identified and the following of these have been highlighted: The Small Business Development Center Network; The Disney Entrepreneur Center, and the Women's Business Center at Florida Institute of Technology. From Continental Europe, the Syntens network in the Netherlands has been selected.

**Conclusions**

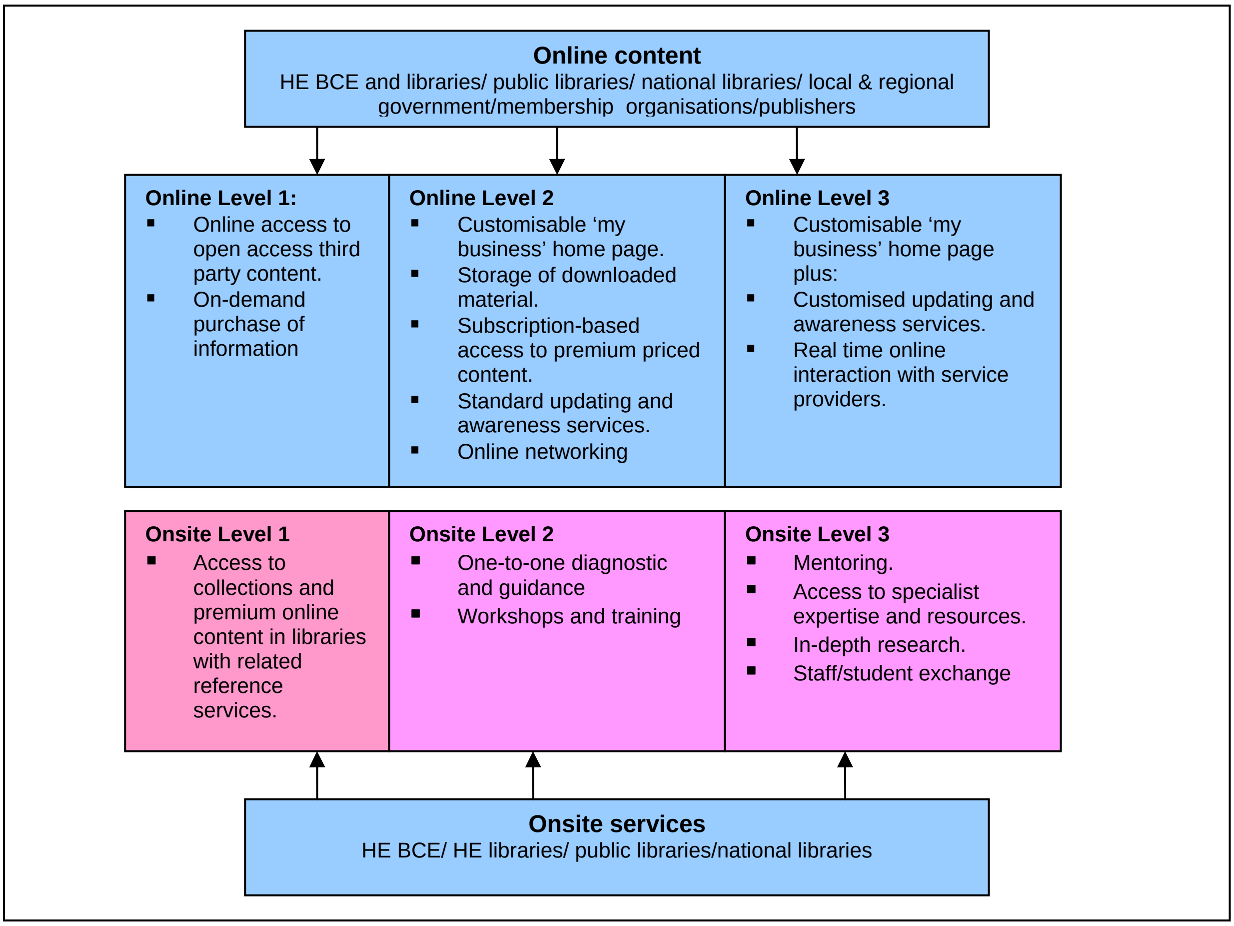
A number of key themes emerged from the consultation exercise. The breadth of issues which are encompassed by these conclusions is a reflection of the scope of the study. Where possible, we have attempted to address some of these issues directly within our list of recommendations. The resolution of others lies substantially outside the scope of the study but they are included here to provide context and as they may inform the development of policy in the provision of business support. The key conclusions from the research are:

- the rapid rate of economic change has placed greater emphasis on the currency of information and the need for quicker, more responsive, information-based services;
- however, the business information service landscape is fragmented and difficult to navigate;
- the existing definitions of business information are limited in scope and do not reflect the perspective of businesses for whom information and advice essentially perform the same function;
- to meet the needs and preferences of businesses, any wider service model must incorporate both remote access to information and the ability to receive one-to-one advice and guidance;
- a substantial body of valuable information is generated by local and regional government, specialist organisations and trade bodies, but difficulty in finding this information means that it is under-utilised;.
- one observation made by a number of the participants was that the recession is leading to an increased number of people looking to start a business, in particular graduate entrepreneurs and/or people from the professions and the financial services sectors looking to start a business. This will place greater demands on the provision of information and advice;
- Business Link has a key referral and diagnostic role to play within the business support framework identified by 'Solutions for Business' and this must be recognised within the development of an information service delivery model;
- higher education institutions have a key role to play in utilising specialist information and expertise to support businesses and are most effective in providing more in-depth services based around developing close relationships with businesses, and;
- the public library network has a key role to play in providing an initial point of contact for businesses seeking information due to the accessibility and the breadth of their remit in serving the community.
- in providing a national network of business support services which utilises the knowledge and facilities of higher education institutions, we believe that lessons can be learned from the American Small Business Development Centre network.

**Recommendations for the future**

Based on these conclusions, we are recommending the creation of a national integrated service model for information provision. The model incorporates remote online access to information and the delivery of onsite services.

- The basis for this model is the identification of three levels of service through which businesses and service providers interact. These range from services which involve minimal interaction between a service provider and a business, to services which involve a highly customised online experience or the development of a close mentoring or partnership relationship. The model is outlined below.




- The model identifies clear roles for higher education business and community engagement services, together with higher education libraries and public libraries in the delivery of online and onsite services and content at each of the three levels of interaction.
- Central to the online model is a one-stop-shop portal, which will provide access to free and priced information. The portal will provide opportunities for customising content and for businesses to search for, and purchase, packages of data from priced sources. This will present publishers with the opportunity to sell direct to businesses but will require them to package their content into more manageable and user-friendly packages
- Onsite services in the model include: access to information in library collections; reference services; one-to-one diagnostic help and guidance; workshops and training; mentoring; direct access to specialists and specialist resources; priced research and staff exchange schemes.
- To develop and manage the portal, businesses and service providers will need to work co-operatively at a local and regional level to supply content and to co-ordinate

service provision. We recommend the establishment of a national co-ordinating body to set standards, architecture and address licences and related issues.

- The model does not incorporate business advice as a core information service but it identifies the role played by other service providers in referring businesses to information services, thereby providing a link to business support service models identified in 'Solutions For Business'.
- To facilitate this integrated service model, will require a number of elements including; common indexing standards for open access data and service descriptions; standard licence agreements for priced content, and; a national innovation voucher scheme which incorporates information services.
- The report proposes the initiation of specified projects to establish the building blocks for the integrated service model, and which have intrinsic value as stand-alone projects. These are:
    - the development of a regional business information service portal;
    - a dialogue with publishers and information providers to explore potential models through which content could be made accessible through a business information portal;
    - a survey of data and information being generated by local and regional government and membership organisations;
    - a review of the feasibility of extending the innovation voucher scheme to incorporate information services;
    - the creation of a national programme of training in information literacy for business support organisations and professional services companies;.
    - further research into trends in graduate entrepreneurship and the needs and behaviours of graduate entrepreneurs, and;.
    - the initiation of dialogue and knowledge exchange between UK BCE practitioners and the Association of Small Business Development Centers in the U.S.A.

## 2. Background and aims of the study

The aim of this project was to build a picture of the current state of access to business information in the UK and to produce practical recommendations for the development of service models. The study pays special attention to the role of higher education institutions in facilitating access to business information and the potential for such institutions to support small business development and entrepreneurship through provision of access to business information and related services.

The objectives the project were to:

- build a comprehensive picture of existing business information provision in the UK, including an assessment of what works well at present, where there are current gaps in such provision and what should happen in future. This picture incorporates the perspectives of a broad range of stakeholders, including those planning and delivering services, as well as potential users of those services;
- assess the potential for HEIs and FECs to play a central role in the provision of business information services;
- identify examples of best practice in business information provision in the UK and overseas; and
- produce a series of recommendations for potential service models which might be utilised in Phase 3 of the Business Information Resources project.

The study forms Phase 2 of a 3-stage work-package, Business Information Resources, which forms part of the JISC Business and Community Engagement (BCE) Programme.

Phase 1 of this work-package was a JISC / British Library Workshop on Business Information Resources for HE Education Innovation and Knowledge Exchange, held on 16 April 2008. The workshop acknowledged not only the need for enhanced access to information and information-related to support SMEs and entrepreneurs but also recognised the existence of skills and resources within higher education institutions, which could be utilised in the delivery of these services.

Phase 3 of this work-package involves the potential creation of pilot regional/sub regional hubs in HEIs and FECs and the success of this study will lie in the delivery of high quality recommendations for implementation within Phase 3.

# 3. Methodology used for the study

## 3.1 Project management

The project was delivered by a Project Team and overseen by a Project Board. The Project Board met at regular intervals throughout the project and provided advice and strategic direction. Its membership is shown in Table 1, along with membership of the Project Team.

Table 1: Membership of the Project Board and Project Team.

| Name | Role | Organisation |
|---|---|---|
| Jude England | Project Board Chair | British Library |
| Dr Joanna Newman | Project Board | British Library |
| Neil Infield | Project Board | British Library |
| Heather Wilkinson | Project Board | Striding Out (SME representative |
| Mr Roger Dalby | Project Board | De Montfort University (Higher education representative) |
| Nigel Spencer | Project Manager | British Library |
| Rob Lucas | Project Team | British Library |
| Shelah Duncan | Project Team | British Library |
| Sue Ashpitel | Project Team | British Library |
| Gabrielle Rose | Project Team | British Library |
| Ariadne Blakey | Project Team | British Library |

## 3.2 Methodology used for consultation and data collection in the UK.

**3.2.1 Objectives:** The objective of the consultation exercise was to build a comprehensive picture of:

- the types of business information service available and the types of information used;
- how SMEs used this information and their preferences in accessing information;
- what aspects of the business information landscape worked well and the obstacles which prevented SMEs from getting the information they needed;
- the types of business activity which will characterise the next 3 years and the impact this will have on the information needed by SMEs;
- the types of organisation and service which SMEs would be most willing to approach for access to information;
- the developments to information provision that SMEs and service providers would like to see in the future.

**3.2.2 Stakeholder groups**: Consultation took place with the broad spectrum of organisations which currently provide, or have the potential to offer, business information services, as well as potential recipients of the services, namely:

- **Service providers:** Public libraries; higher education business and community engagement services; higher and further education libraries; business support services and skills training organisations.
- **Publishers and information suppliers**
- **SMEs**
- **Funding and policy making bodies:** These included regional development agencies, government departments; policy making bodies in the fields of information, higher education and innovation, and business support.

**3.2.3 Methodology:** We used workshops, in-depth interviews and an online survey.

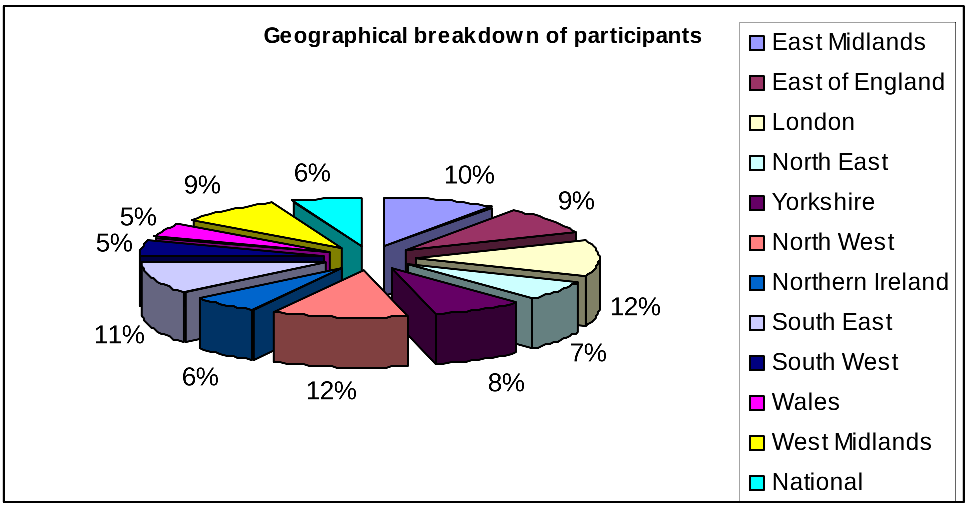
- Twelve workshops were held in all of the UK regions as well as Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Representatives from all stakeholder groups were invited and 121 delegates attended. The workshops explored views on the current state of access to business information; obstacles to accessing information; future trends in entrepreneurship and the types of service which will best meet the challenges of the future.
- We held in-depth one-to-one interviews with 80 representatives from the stakeholder groups. These interviews explored the experiences and perspectives of each group.
- We carried out an online survey, which was completed by 50 SMEs.

**3.2.4 Challenges faced in the consultation**

- It was our initial intention to run 11 workshops with a target of 25 attendees at each event. In spite of a substantial programme of advertising and cold-calling we found that the numbers of attendees ranged between 7 and 15. On reflection the quality of the discussion at the workshops suggested that the smaller numbers promoted more debate.
- We experienced difficulty in getting SMEs to attend workshops and interviews. To increase the contribution from this group interviews we undertook an online survey which could be completed quickly.
- We experienced some reticence on the part of some publishers and information providers to be interviewed. Many expressed a preference for being sent a questionnaire so that they could consider the questions in their own time and most of them used this method to contribute to the study.
- A number of publishers did not wish to be named in the report. In order to respond to this and other concerns about the commercial sensitivity of their input to the study, we have not named any of the commercial publishers and information providers in the list of participants.

Chart 1 is a breakdown of participants who were interviewed or attended workshops. Those working for organisations with a national remit are included under 'national'.

**Chart 1**



### 3.3 Methodology used for review of best practice overseas

The approach taken was to use recommendations and desk research to identify examples of innovative services to inform the development of future service models in the UK. Selection of the organisations to be visited was based on recommendation and desk research.
We were particularly interested in services which displayed the following qualities:

- integration of services offered to SMEs by higher education institutions with other business support services, with a particular focus on service provision at a grass roots level;
- information and support services with a national remit;.
- services displaying innovative means of providing access to information by SMEs and delivering related services, and;

.

Given the focus of the study on the UK, the objective of this part of the research and consultation process was to identify examples of services which could be used as case studies in the final report. Two visits were carried out in Belgium and one in the Netherlands. Further visits were carried out in the USA together with attendance at the annual conference of the US Association of Small Business Development Centers.

# 4. Context of the study

## 4.1 UK economy

The survey was carried out between March 2009 to July 2009; a period in which the UK along with many other economies was officially in recession as highlighted by the following figures from the UK Office of National Statistics for the 1st Quarter of 2009:

- The rate of unemployment increased 2.4% on the year.
- Economic output fell by 4.9% on the year; the steepest rate of decline since records began in 1948.
- Exports fell by 7% on the year.
- Imports fell by 6.7% on the year.

This period also saw a substantial reduction in available funding for businesses.

*'April official data showed the weakest flow of net lending to businesses since June 2000. The major UK lenders reported that net lending remained very weak in May'*
Bank of England *Trends in Lending* – June 2009 (from desk research)

The decline in consumer spending and lack of access to finance has put great pressure on SMEs; a theme which was raised frequently during the consultation exercise.

Another key theme has been the rapid decline in the state of public finances as the UK government sought to support the banking and financial services sector and stimulate the economy, against a backdrop of reduced income from taxation.

There is a high likelihood that this will result in pressures on the budgets of all publicly-funded organisations, and this is likely to have an impact on the bodies that fund many of the stakeholder organisations, such as The HEFCE. This could have implications for the funding available for the development of information services for SMEs.

# 5. Overview: small and medium sized enterprises/ entrepreneurs; the customers

## 5.1 The important role of SMEs

The core purpose of this study was to review the provision of improved access to information to support business development activities by small and medium-sized enterprises. The definition of an SME is a company with 0-249 employees.

However, there is a specific emphasis on the use of information to support of entrepreneurial activities and a recognition that the individuals who may benefit from the services covered in this study may also come from larger businesses.

This category of businesses represents 99% of all businesses in the UK; generates 50% of all revenue and is responsible for 50% of all private sector employment [1].

SMEs play a key role in developing the new products and services which will play a crucial role in the recovery of the UK economy. Their size , 90% of all SMEs have fewer than five employees, is one of the contributory factors behind their flexibility and capacity to innovate. However, their reliance on affordable credit and vulnerability to cash flow problems means that they are also the businesses who are at greatest risk in the current economic climate.

## 5.2 SMEs and Information

The role of information technology and the Web in particular has greatly increased the ability of SMEs to access information, and provides the means to interact with and transact business with a much wider group of contacts and potential customers.

> *“The internet is now an integral part of the operations of many SMEs in the UK. Three quarters use broadband and have some form of web presence. Many use a range of web services in innovative ways to share information, to communicate with customers and to market themselves.”*
> Never too small to join the party, Martin De Saulles, University of Brighton, Information World Review. 3 September 2008, Information World Review: (from desk research)

The importance of information technology has been recognised by central government and has led to initiatives to extend access to broadband and enhancements to infrastructure. However, less attention has been given to information literacy and in enabling SMEs to evaluate and understand information.

> *“… the growth in access online information has not led to a proportional increase in the competence with which most SMEs search for information online and with their capacity to assess the quality of this information. Access to information online has long since ceased to be limited to trained online searchers from the information profession. However, the ability to conduct precise searches, evaluate sources is still a skill which resides primarily in people from the information profession.”*
> *Never too small to join the party*, Martin De Saulles, University of Brighton, *Information World Review.* 3 September 2008, Information World Review (from desk research)

The core question at the heart of this study is how information can be made more accessible for SMEs and how they can apply a level of understanding and evaluation to enable it to help them develop their businesses.

* [1]*Figures for 2007 BERR Enterprise Directorate Analytical Unit. 2008*

### 5.3 Profile of SMEs consulted for the study.

We sought to consult with a broad geographical and sectoral range of businesses, as well as engaging with businesses owned by people from a broad range of demographic groups. Our attention was focussed primarily on businesses with fewer than 50 employees as, in our view, these companies would be most likely to benefit from improved access to, and understanding of business information.

- Fifty-one SMEs completed our online survey and we held 14 one-to-one interviews with SMEs. 15 SMEs attended our workshops

- The response to the online survey was biased towards London and the South East of England with 59% of respondents being based in London and 11% in the South East of England. The next largest representation was from the East Midlands with seven percent. Although the survey was circulated nationally via networks the greatest response appears to have been in response to advertisements through social networks managed by the British Library's Business & IP Centre.

- We held interviews with six SMEs from the North West; five from the South East; two from Yorkshire, the East Midlands and London.

- Two-thirds of SMEs completing the online survey were limited companies with fewer than 50 employees The only other significant category were sole traders who represented thirty percent of respondents.

- The largest category of SMEs interviewed were limited companies with fewer than 50 employees.

## 6. Overview : the service providers

The perspective of those providing services to SMEs was an essential part of the study to help us to build a picture of the services they offer, and have the potential to offer, and because of the information they gather about the SMEs that use their services. We identified the following categories of information service provider:

- Higher/further education institutions/libraries.
- Higher/further education institution/business and community engagement (BCE) services.
- Public libraries.
- Business support organisations.
- Publishers.

For the survey, the higher education institutions were selected from those listed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), The Scottish Funding Council, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and The Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland. Participants were a mix of Post ’92 universities (former polytechnics or colleges) and Russell Group universities (traditional research-led institutions).

In the case of each category we have outlined the:

- role of the service provider;
- services they offer and their clients, based on feedback from interviews;
- strengths of the services, focussing on their potential to offer services to SMEs.
- challenges they face, or would face, in offering services to SMEs.

### 6.1 Higher education libraries

The primary role of higher education libraries is to provide resources for graduate and postgraduate study along with support for academics. We interviewed representatives from 5 higher education libraries and 13 library representatives participated in the workshops. Based on the interviews the information on their service and client profile was as follows.

- We interviewed 6 representatives from higher education libraries and 21 representatives attended workshops.

- The largest group of users for those interviewed were students, who represented 90 %. The next largest group was academics who represented 13%. SMEs were not a significant client base for any of those interviewed.

- All higher education libraries interviewed offered access to academic papers, trade journals and market information databases. Only half of them offered access to business directories and none offered access to intellectual property databases.

- All higher education libraries interviewed offered onsite access to electronic subscription-based resources to students and faculty, and reference and loan access to print publications. Eighty percent offered remote access to subscription-based electronic resources. In the area of training, all offered some workshops and training, with 60% offering this on a one-to-one basis.

- The strength of the services interviewed lies in the in-depth and specialist nature of the collections and the professional expertise of the staff in research and information techniques. This professional expertise also includes experience of training students in carrying out research.

- When exploring the potential role of higher education libraries to open their facilities to SMEs, we identified three major challenges.

  - Many of the most valuable business information resources are accessed as subscription-based online services. The licences for permit usage by students and academics onsite in the library. In many cases, students can access resources off-campus via a proxy service using the Shibboleth identity management service. However, these licences do not permit access by other groups and use for business purposes. This means that local SMEs will not be able to use these services without changes to the licences.

  - HE libraries are already facing pressure on resources from the large number of fee-paying students using their facilities. This places pressure on staff and space and the pressure is likely to become more intense over the coming years.

  - There appears to be limited communication between higher education libraries and other departments, particularly those dealing with business and community engagement.

> *"We need to be working with colleagues outside the library. We are good at networking with librarian colleagues outside our own libraries. We need to be working more with other colleagues: academics, other support agencies, university management and the like. We need to be developing services in partnership with customers, champions and other service providers. We need to be less tied to organisational structures and focus more on organisational needs. We need to get out of our comfort zone. We need to get out of the library more."*
>
> Antony Brewerton of The SCONUL Focus Editorial Board: Sconul Focus – Spring 2007 (from Desk Research)

## 6.2 Higher education business and community engagement services

Business and community engagement (BCE) is a term which incorporates all engagement between higher education institutions and the wider community. There are four main strands of this engagement activity: public, civic, community and business. For this study we were principally interested in the fourth of these; engagement with business.

- We interviewed 14 representatives from BCE services and 20 representatives attended workshops.

- Interview responses illustrated the diversity of the client base with which these services work. Charts 1 and 2 provide breakdowns by organisation type and sector.

**Chart 1**

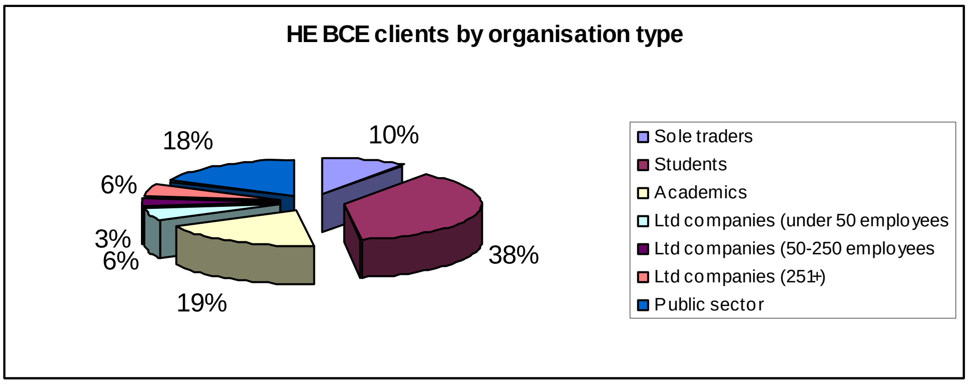



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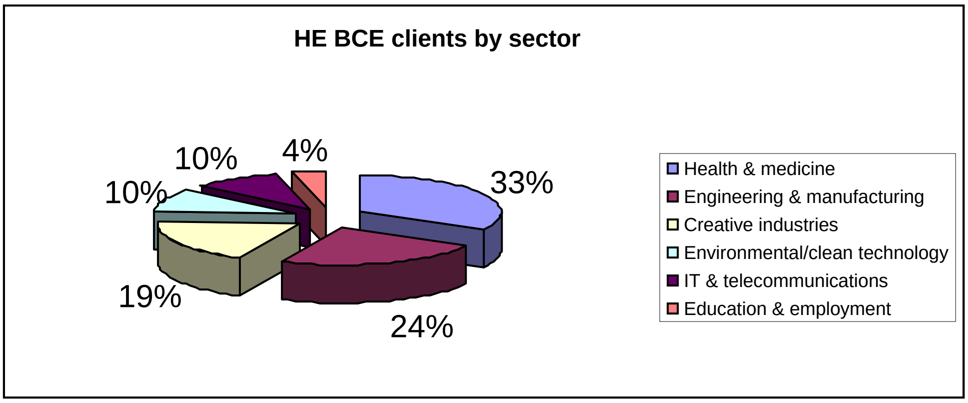
**Chart 2**




- The response from interviews also indicated the range of activities in which these services are involved, these were:
    - 30% provided some remote online access to information and guidance;.
    - 60% provided training;.
    - 70% provided specialist one-to-one consultancy; and
    - 60% provided funding for product development.

- The main strength of BCE services is their role as an interface to the specialist expertise and resources which can be found in higher education institutions. The role of business development officers supporting commercialisation activities also means that they have substantial practical expertise in the development of business ideas and working with early stage businesses.

- The relationships developed with SMEs present an opportunity for a two-way flow of information with the information collected from relationships with SMEs enriching teaching and research activities. The potential also exists for student resources to be made available to support SME through support on individual projects and via placements and internships. BCE services can facilitate the development of these relationships.

- Funding of BCE services represents an ongoing challenge. At present revenue streams are primarily linked to the successful commercialisation of ideas emerging from within institutions. There are also examples of revenue being generated by the provision of training and consultancy services. Funding for these activities is available from sources such as the Higher Education Investment Fund (HEIF) and from regional development agencies, through initiatives such as innovation voucher schemes but this is relatively short-term.

> *"Some commercialisation activities have the objective of making real money for the higher education institutions involved but with the advent of full economic costing very few institutions make money out of these activities. Even MIT in the USA which is held up as a model only generates 3% of revenue through commercialisation. Ultimately the success measurement of these activities is their benefit to the UK economy and this is hard to measure. The Innovation Vouchers scheme is an example of where this activity receives funding from a regional development agency but in most cases it is hard to track any financial benefit for the institution."*
> Higher education policy-making body (from interview)

- Institutions vary considerably in the priority given to engagement activities. This means that it can be difficult for BCE services to get the support of specialist expertise within faculty as academics automatically give research and teaching activities a higher priority.

> There is a need to "...*embed public engagement activities within HEIs, particularly faculty. There is still much opposition from academics who favour more traditional pure research activities which they believe are valued more."*
> Interview: Higher education policy-making body (from interview)

- For many SMEs, there was minimal, if not non-existent, awareness of what universities can offer, in fact among the SMEs interviewed higher education institutions were perceived as inaccessible.

> *"It is clear that much more needs to be done to persuade business of the economic benefits to be gained from innovation, and of working in collaboration with university departments to achieve this goal. This applies especially to SMEs, which have few resources to risk on reaching out to find new ways of developing products and services. The main goal of policymakers in this area must be to make it as easy as possible for such collaborations to occur."*
> The Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration (2003)
> (from desk research)

- Although 93% of institutions offered an SME enquiry point[1], services to business are presented in a range of guises which can be an obstacle.

> *"The real area of weakness is in providing points of access which encourage outside bodies and individuals to approach institutions. A good example of how access to engagement work can be simplified is the CUPP HelpLine at the University of Brighton."*
> Higher education policy-making body (from interview)

[1] *HEFCE Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey* 2007/8[1]
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/econsoc/buscom/hebci/

### 6.3 Public libraries

The primary role of the public library network is serving all aspects of the community. The library network is administered by 149 library authorities across the UK.

- We interviewed four representatives from public libraries and 19 representatives attended workshops.

- The largest groups of business users for those interviewed was companies with fewer than 50 employees and sole traders, both of which represented a third. Companies with 50-250 employees represented 13%. However, most public libraries do not collect detailed usage of services by customers and were only able to supply estimates and were unable to supply a sector breakdown.

- There is a substantial diversity in the quality of business information collections in public libraries but all of the libraries interviewed provided access to some form of market, company, financial, legal, statistical information and business news. Half offered information on intellectual property many of whom came from libraries in the PatLib network which provides access to intellectual property information and expertise through larger reference libraries across the UK.

- Of the libraries interviewed; three quarters permitted customers to borrow business information material to consult offsite and the same proportion offered some remote access to subscription-based online services. All of those interviewed provided some onsite training and a quarter offered one-to-one advice and counselling services

- The breadth of the network means that public libraries are found in central urban locations and in smaller towns and rural locations as there is an extensive network of branch libraries. As a result they are easily accessible. The role libraries play in serving the community means that a diverse range of people use them for leisure purposes and with their families. This provides an opportunity for libraries to present business services to SMEs and aspiring entrepreneurs who may be unaware of the business information they offer.

- Services and collections for SMEs must compete for resources with services and collections serving other parts of the community. This will become an increasingly significant issue at a time when pressure is placed on funding.. Although new libraries are being built, many larger public libraries are located in older buildings which are not easily adapted to deliver services currently needed by SMEs.

### 6.4 Business support organisations

Business support in the UK is delivered by a network of organisations and bodies operating at a local, regional and national level. They are funded primarily by regional development agencies to provide advice, support, brokerage and signposting to start-up and existing businesses and are key players in the delivery of regional economic development strategies.

- As part of the study we interviewed 15 representatives from business support organisations and 19 representatives attended workshops.

- A number of types of organisation and service are incorporated under this heading. The major categories are local enterprise agencies and Business Link; which provides a national network of services presented through a single national website Equivalent services to Business Link in other parts of the UK are; Business Gateway and Highlands & Islands Enterprise in Scotland; Invest Northern Ireland and Flexible Support for Business in Wales.

- The breakdown of clients for the services interviewed is illustrated in Charts 1 and 2.

**Chart 1**

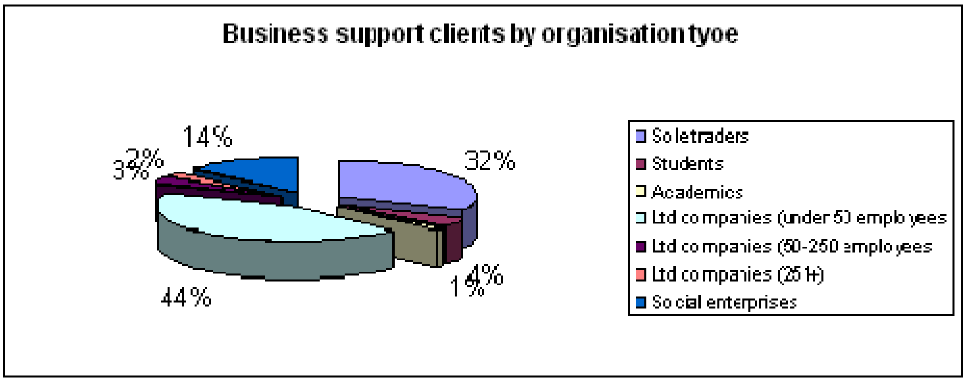
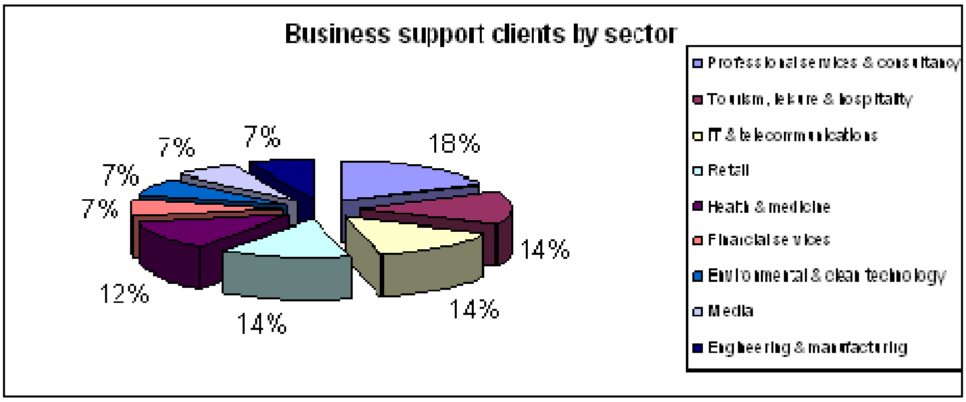



**Chart 2**




- The response from services interviewed indicated that they offered the following services to their clients:
  - o 67% provides some remote online access to information;
  - o 83% provided training, and;
  - o 92% provided one-to-one counselling and consultancy.

- Many SMEs use these organisations as their first port of call when seeking support and advice. Ninety percent of the SMEs interviewed for the study said that they had approached these types of services. For these reasons they can play a key role in raising awareness of the importance for business information provision and directing SMEs to sources of this information.

- The role of *Business Link* as an initial point of contact has been re-enforced by the *Solutions For Business* initiative. This central government initiative has reduced the number of business support products available to SMEs from over 1000 to 30. In order to receive funding from a regional development agency any service provider must offer services which fit this portfolio.

- The national Business Link website provides the most comprehensive central listing of business support services in the UK. This means that linking to the website has the potential to drive a large amount of traffic to websites delivering information services.

### 6.4. Publishers/information suppliers

For the purposes of this research, publishers and information suppliers are commercial organisations which gather, collate and aggregate business information and sell the products of this activity in a variety of packages and formats. The primary delivery medium for their products is now electronic and their business models generally depend on a user entering into an agreement with the provider which is governed by a user license. This licence sets out what the subscriber/purchaser may and may not do with the information to which access is provided.

Publishers play a unique role in collecting, presenting and formatting information and applying quality control. They also enable wider audiences to benefit from the distilled expertise of specialists and industry experts. The online information tools they produce enable users to locate and manipulate data in a greater variety of ways than is the case with many open access web resources.

The engagement (attitudes/strategies/business models) of this stakeholder group is central to future developments in the provision of business information services to SMEs and start-ups in the UK. They provide the feed of data upon which advice is given and decision making is based.

- We sought the views of a number of companies which sell business information products/sources into the UK market. Eight publishers/information suppliers responded to our request for information with some level of data. Issues of commercial confidentiality were a major limiting factor in our conversations with this stakeholder group and not all companies we approached were able or willing to talk to us. Some companies were able to give general views but no specifics and others stipulated that information they shared with us was not attributable. This has limited severely the information we have been able to collect and include in this report. However we were able to identify a number of issues which are relevant to the study.

- The issue of protecting the rights inherent in their intellectual property, in the content of the products they sell, is a major concern to all business information publishers. By making their content easily available in the relatively open forum of a public or academic library they risk compromising sales into their main commercial markets. To this end wherever publishers sell into these markets they look for evidence of mechanisms to restrict access strictly to agreed user communities.

> *"…..the development of acceptable pricing, licensing and access models is a Big Headache. In particular they would have to be reassured that there was minimal risk of their big corporate users using this as a back-gate to save their own spend on the service….."*
>
> Major business information publisher (from interview)

- Start ups and very small businesses are not the target market of most established, mainstream business information publishers with exception of specialist providers like Cobra. Publishers need to develop a business model which can penetrate the SME market at a price and in a form which works for the buyer and protects the commercial interests of the seller.

### 6.5. Other service providers identified by the research.

The research identified other categories of service which are used by SMEs as sources of information. These were:

- **Trade associations and professional/membership bodies**: these included chambers of commerce and associations representing specific trades.
- **Professional advisors**: such as accountants, solicitors and advisors in high street banks.
- **Trade shows and exhibitions.**
- **The Web**.
- **Field research**: this will incorporate the use of questionnaires, surveys, focus groups and other means through which SMEs collect their own primary data.

# 7. Overview : types of business information

This section provides brief definitions of some of the major categories of business information mentioned in the study:

- market information;
- company financial information;
- product and supplier information;
- mailing lists;
- intellectual property;
- statistics and economic news; and
- trade and business news

## 7.1 Market information

Market information consists of data and analysis on the size of specific markets; consumer spending; company market share as well as predictions of future developments. It s an invaluable resource in understanding the market size, its structure, key players, consumers, and future trends. In the United Kingdom well known market research publishers include Key Note, Verdict, Datamonitor, Euromonitor, Frost & Sullivan, Mintel and Ovum.

It is obtained from a variety of sources including market research publishers, trade journals, newspaper articles, trade associations, government bodies, local authorities, academic research and the Web.

## 7.2 Company financial information

Financial data found in company accounts forms the basis of all company financial information and can be used to determine the financial health of competitors, suppliers and customers. The primary source is Companies House whose main function is to incorporate and dissolve limited companies, examine and store company information, and to make this information available to the public.

A number of information providers offer value-added subscription-based services which enable data to be compared, manipulated and analysed. These value added services may also include a credit score and rating and the ability to identify companies meeting certain criteria, such as activity, financial performance and geographic location. Major suppliers in this area include:

- Bureau van Dijk; publishers of the FAME UK company database and the Amadeus European company information database.
- OneSource; publishers of international company products.
- Dun & Bradstreet; publishers of international company information products.

## 7.3 Product and supplier information

Product information is used to find data on products and services produced by competitors and potential suppliers. The sources include company brochures, product and service literature, newsletters, press releases, company websites, trade fairs and exhibitions, trade associations, and online trade directories.

The most heavily used category of sources in this area is directories. They identify products, competitors and suppliers and provide details of the organisations involved in the market as suppliers or other roles. Many directories which were previously only available in hard copy and/or CD-ROM are now available online via the Internet. Examples are Dun & Bradstreet's Key British Enterprises which supplies essential company data on the top 50,000 companies and in the UK and KOMPASS which has product and service listings for companies worldwide.

### 7.4 Mailing lists

Mailing lists are listings of companies and businesses based on criteria such as geographical location, sector, size and economic performance. They are most frequently used to support sales and marketing activity and field research. The information sources used to generate lists are often the same as those used to find financial information and product information; such as Fame and KOMPASS. These databases enable users to search for companies using a wide range of precise criteria and provide a range of download options including mail merge and spreadsheets.

### 7.5 Intellectual property

The definition of intellectual property incorporates patents, trade marks, registered designs and copyright. Intellectual property information includes:

- Information on the nature and extent of intellectual property rights - to whom do the rights belong, are they currently in force, in which countries are they in force, when do they expire, are they available to buy or licence?
- Information about the property which is the subject of these rights – the detailed technical description contained in a patent specification, the full description of a trade mark, the detailed representation of a registered design.

This information is placed in the public domain by IP authorities world wide and much of it is available to end users online and free of charge.

A number of companies package and manipulate the information to make it easier to search and understand. In other words they add value to the basic, freely available product. Probably the highest profile player in this field is Thomson Reuters with its flagship database, Derwent World Patents Index®, at the head of a family of IP information products which includes Derwent Innovations Index®, a much more end-user friendly resource. However, end users must be made aware that, however easy it may be to retrieve IP data, expert advice (technical and/or legal) must sought before acting on the information retrieved.

### 7.6 Statistics and economic information

Statistics and economic data is basic research data and is one of the key sources used by publishers of secondary sources. Most government websites provides access to statistical and economic information. This information is supplied in the UK by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).The key areas ONS is responsible for are: The National Accounts, the census, labour market statistics, population and demography data, economic and social surveys, the Consumer Prices index (CPI), the Retail Prices Index (RPI), social and vital statistics, regional and neighbourhood statistics.

Examples of information include:

- *Family spending* which contains analyses on *household* expenditure on goods and services by household income, composition, size, type and location,
- *Regional trends* provides a wide range of demographic, social, industrial and economic statistics, covering aspects of life in the region

Information on trade data and statistics on UK imports can be seen at its UK Tradeinfo website.

“Unofficial” statistics are another source which supplement government data. These are produced by trade associations, banks, chambers of commerce, consultants, local authorities, and academic institutions. An example is The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders’ *Motor industry facts*.

### 7.7 Trade and business news

Trade and business news incorporates sources which focus on a specific sector/trade/ business skill and are written for those active in it, These are usually published at least once per month and can help maintain current awareness of issues impacting on a sector as well as giving leads to others active in the sector. They will also offer directory and product listings.

Such sources are increasingly being developed as web based service with an e-newsletter or similar update services. However, they have been slower in making this transition than other forms of publishing.

- Examples of titles in this area are: The Grocer, Drapers Record, Travel Trade Gazette and Marketing Week
- Examples of developing web-based services are: Sport Business site, Organic Monitor site and the Soil Association site.

# 8. The current state of business information provision in the UK

To build a picture of the current state of business information provision in the UK we sought the views and perspectives of service providers and SMEs entrepreneurs on the following issues:

- the types of information that they and their clients valued;
- the sources that were used to find this information;
- the success that businesses had in finding the information they needed; and
- the main obstacles that they faced in finding information.

In this section we have drawn on views from the one-to-one interviews, the online survey and the workshops.

## 8.1 What types of business information are used and valued?

This question explored the demand for types of business information and the impact and value which the various types of information had on the success of businesses. The key findings were:

- **Market information** was viewed by service providers and customers and mixed groups as the most heavily sought type of information.
- **Mailing lists** were the least frequently sought information type and were also viewed by SMEs interviewed as having the least beneficial impact on businesses.
- Customers interviewed viewed **product information** as having the greatest positive impact on their business. However, this was not supported by the feedback from mixed workshop groups which placed this as sixth in the list of most valuable sources.
- The greatest variation of perceptions of usage amongst service providers related to **intellectual property** with higher education and public libraries seeing this as being less in demand than higher education BCE practitioners who gave it a much higher rating. The evidence from interviews indicates that this variation is explained by higher education knowledge transfer activities, which place a high emphasis on management and commercialisation of intellectual property.
- We did not include information on **sources of funding** and **guides/manuals** in our initial lists but individual interviews and workshops raised these as important types of information.

## 8.2 What types of information are used? - breakdown by consultation group

| **Table 1. Service providers: Which types of information are most heavily used by their clients? (*Ranking based on average rating out of 10. 10 = equals very heavily used)*** |
|---|
| 1) Market *(7.9)*<br>2) Company financial (5.7)<br>3) Statistics and economic data *(5.1)*<br>4) Industry and trade news (*4.9)*<br>5) Product (*4.3)*<br>6) Legal *(3.8*)<br>7) Intellectual property *(3.3)*<br>8) Mailing lists *(3.1)* |

| **Table 2. SME interviews: What types of information have they used.** ***(Ranking based on % who have used each information type*****)** |
|---|
| 1) Market information (86%).<br>2) Legal/ product /intellectual property (78%).<br>3) Company financial/Trade and industry news (71%)<br>4) Statistics and economic data (64%)<br>5) Mailing lists. (57%) |

| **Table 3. SME interviews: How did they rate the contribution of types of information types to their business success? (*****Ranking based on average rating out of 10)*** |
|---|
| 1) Product (7.3)<br>2) Market (6.9)<br>3) Legal (6.4)<br>4) Trade and industry news (5.8)<br>5) Intellectual property (5.4)<br>6) Statistics and economic data (5.3)<br>7) Company financial (5.2)<br>8) Mailing lists (5.0) |

| **Table 4. Mixed workshop groups: What types of business information are most valuable?** ***(Ranking based on frequency with which categories were listed. 1. = most frequently listed)*** |
|---|
| 1) Market information<br>2) Company financial<br>3) Sources of funding/competitor information<br>4) Legal information<br>5) Sources of business support/intellectual property/Statistics and economic data<br>6) Source lists/product information/mailing lists/manuals & guides |

### 8.3 Where do SMEs look for information?

This question explored the types of organisation and sources used by businesses and to whom service providers refer SMEs when they need business information. These could be online or onsite services. The results reflect the breadth of sources which act as sources of business information; and indicate that they extend significantly beyond what might be viewed as the business information landscape. Feedback indicated that sources used will depend heavily on the nature of the industry in which the SMEs operate and their own experiences and levels of awareness of information.

The key findings were that the sources most heavily used by SMEs were :

- The Web;
- Trade associations/professional bodies; and
- Public libraries.

| **Table 1. Service providers: Where do they refer customers for information?** ***(% who have referred to these sources)*** |
| --- |
| 1) The Web (89%)<br>2) Trade associations and professional bodies (78%)<br>3) The British Library (68%)<br>4) Higher education libraries (55%)<br>5) Funding organisation (53%)<br>6) Public libraries (46%)<br>7) Purchased information (42%)<br>8) Field research (38%)<br>9) Consultants (38%)<br>10) Higher education faculty (31%) |

| **Table 2. SME interviews: Where do they look for information?** ***(% who have used these sources)*** |
| --- |
| 1) Web search engines*(92%)*<br>2) Trade shows *(72%)*<br>3) Consultants *(64%)*<br>4) Specific websites *(64%)*<br>5) Public libraries *(59%)*<br>6) Trade associations and professional bodies *(43%)*<br>7) Higher education libraries *(43%)*<br>8) Purchased information *(28%)* |

| **Table 3. Mixed workshop groups: What categories of service or organisation are key players in providing access to business information?** ***(Ranking based on frequency with which categories were listed)*** |
| --- |
| 1) Trade associations and professional bodies<br>2) Business support organisations<br>3) Web search engines<br>4) Central government/national bodies<br>5) Public libraries<br>6) Own field research<br>7) Regional development agencies and local authorities<br>8) Purchased information<br>9) National libraries<br>10) Financial/legal sector |

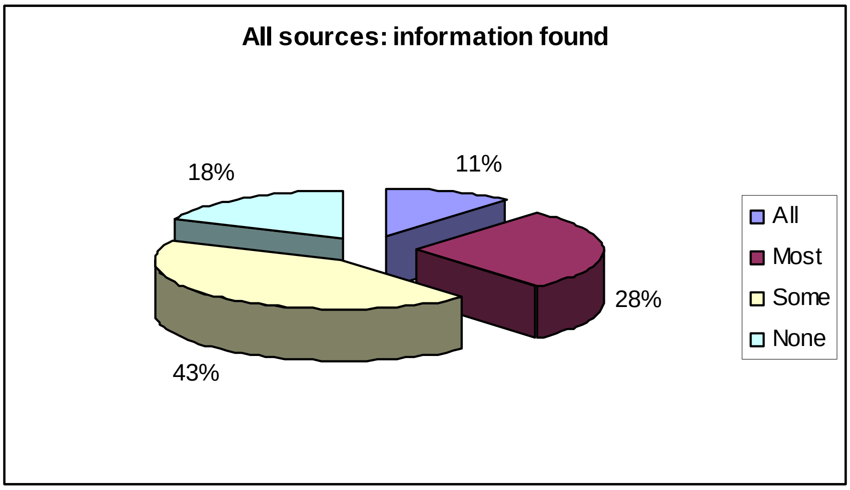
## 8.4 How successful have SMEs been in finding the information they need?

Through interviews and the online survey, we sought to build a picture of the extent to which SMEs found the information they needed for their businesses. In the interviews we asked about their overall success rate and we used the online survey to identify their success when using specified information sources. The responses are based on the extent to which expectations were met. Given that feedback from many SMEs indicated that they did not know what information was available, it is likely that this will inform their perception of success or failure.

A significantly higher number of interviewees (84%) found 'all; and 'most' of the information they needed than online survey respondents (39%). Given that the online survey was a larger sample it should be viewed as a more representative figure.

| Finding 'all' or 'most' | Finding 'none' |
|---|---|
| 1) The Web (68%)<br>2) Field research and contacts (35%)<br>3) Public libraries (33%)<br>4) Professional advisors (24%)<br>5) Trade associations/professional bodies (18%)<br>6) Purchased publications (9%)<br>7) Higher education libraries (8%)<br>8) Trade shows (8%) | 1) Higher education libraries (38%)<br>2) Purchased publications (34%)<br>3) Trade shows (32%)<br>4) Professional advisors (25%)<br>5) Trade associations/professional bodies (19%)<br>6) Public libraries (16%)<br>7) Field research (4%)<br>8) The Web (2%) |

**Chart 1. SME online survey: How much of the information needed have they found?**



**Charts 2-8. SME online survey: How much of the information needed have they found using specified sources?**

**Chart 1**

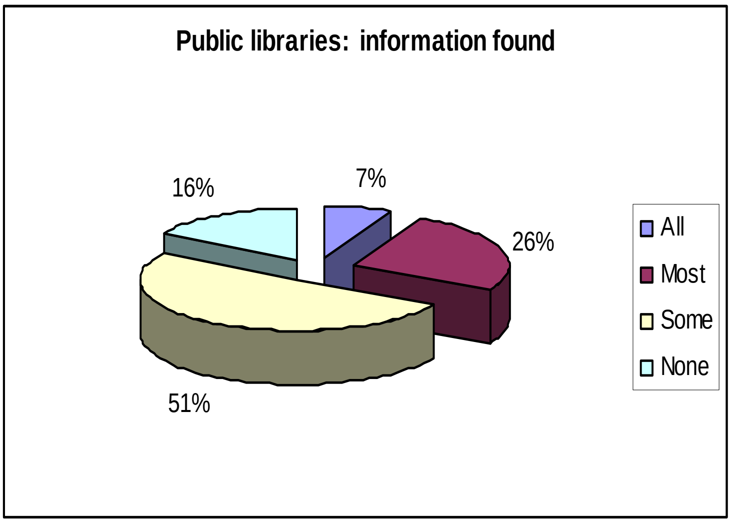



**Chart 2**

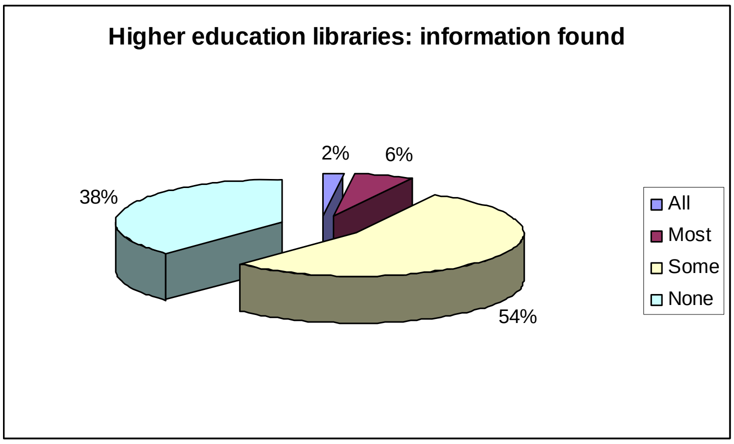



**Chart 3**

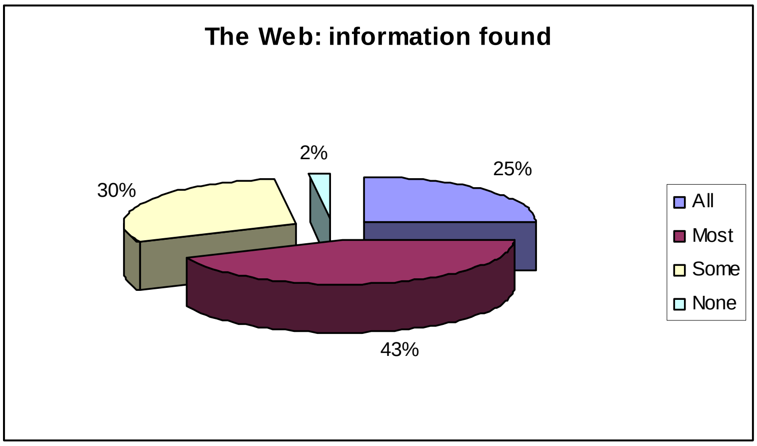


**Chart 4**

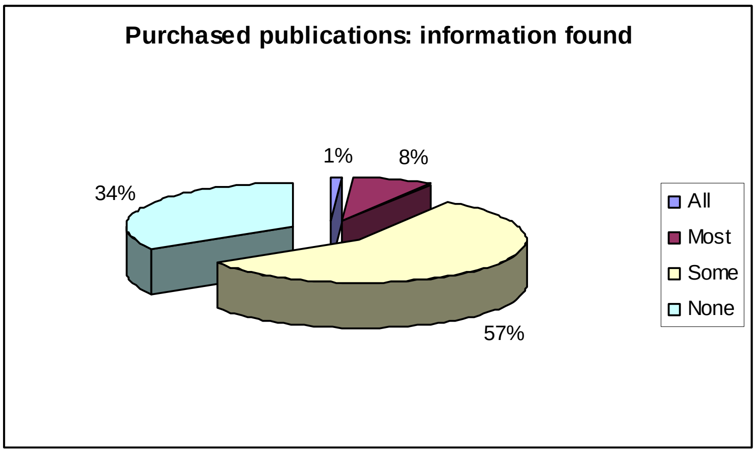



**Chart 5**

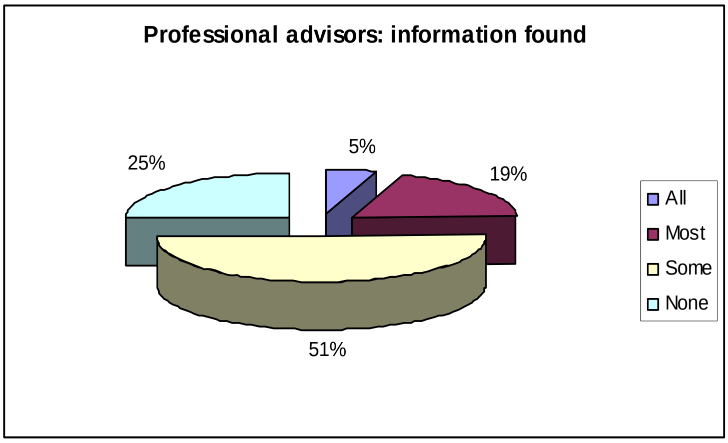



**Chart 6**

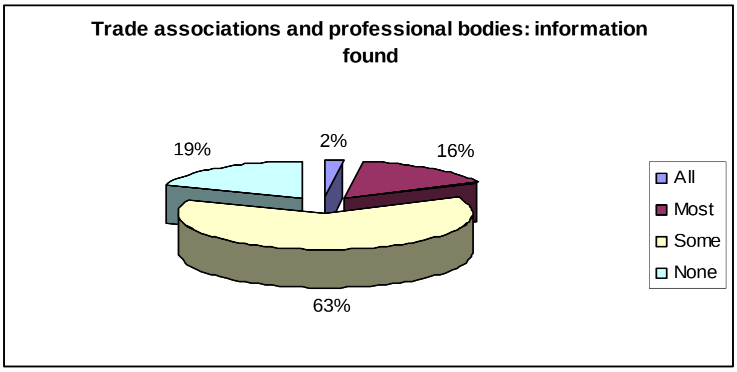


**Chart 7**

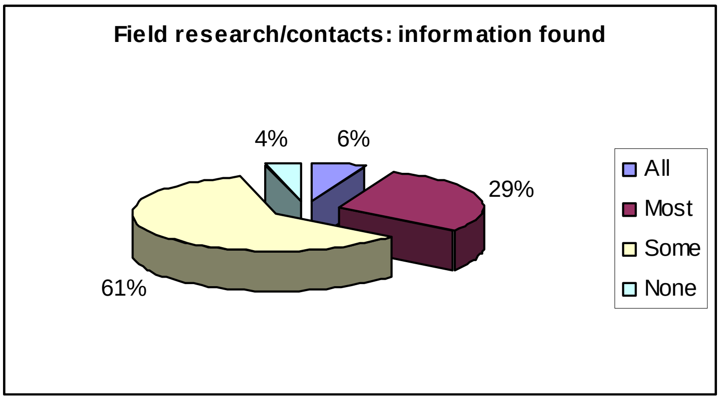
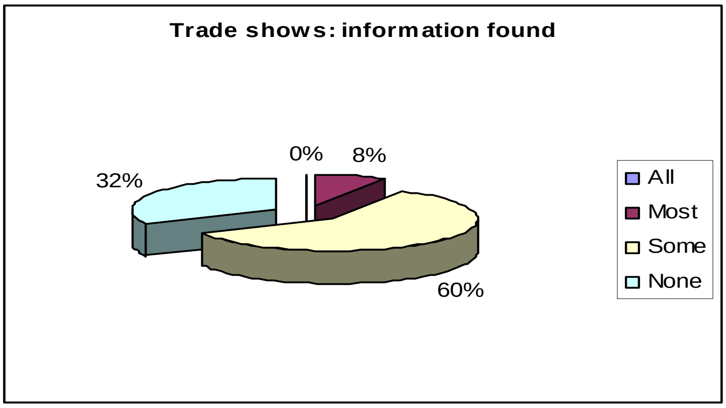



**Chart 8**




## 8.5 How do SMEs like to receive information?

We asked SMEs through interviews, and the online survey, how they liked to receive and access information. The key findings were:

- There were strong preferences for accessing information online through a desktop. Ninety percent of those from the online survey expressing a preference/strong preference for receiving information in this way. Such a result might be expected from a survey which was received online and 49% of the same online survey group also expressed preferences/strong preferences for receiving information as a part of a one-to-one counselling service or as part of a training course. In contrast fewer than 30% expressed a preference for receiving information in a library or as part of an online course. This indicates a preference for receiving and absorbing online but a willingness to visit facilities which present information as part of training, personalised or value-added services.

  The importance of personalised services was also emphasised through interviews and the online survey. 51% from the online survey and 57% of interviewees said that it was important or very important to have a person to talk to and a personalised service, when receiving business information and support.

- Over eight out of ten in both interviews and the survey were prepared to pay an 'appropriate' price for information. This contrasts with a concern, identified elsewhere in the report, that cost and price is an obstacle to accessing information..

### 8.6 What are the major obstacles to finding information for a business?

A key part of the consultation was to identify the reasons why businesses fail to get the information they need. The most frequently raised issues were:

- The business information landscape is confusing and it is not clear where a business can find information.

> *"Initial lack of knowledge about where to find good information and advice. We are a very new start-up and just finding out about the various services available to us. Stumbling across the Business & IP Centre and exploring Business Link has been hugely useful in finding a basis for support."*
>
> *"'Other than The Web I do not know where I can go for assistance."*
>
> *"There exists a silo mentality in government with restrictive lines of demarcation in who supplies information. Sometimes you need to deal with about 20 different people.".*
>
> SMEs (from online survey)

- The pricing of much published information means that it is inaccessible to SMEs.

> *'"he cost is the main issue. There is no support available for market research and other business information services."*
> SME (from online survey)

- Many SMEs have a limited awareness of what information is available and how to carry out research.

> *"The difficulty is not in finding the answer but rather in knowing how to ask the right question."*
> SME from online survey
>
> *"You don't know what you don't know."*
> Comment East Midlands workshop
>
> *"Knowing what to ask about. Having never gone into business before it is very difficult to realise all the things you don't know about."*
> SME from online survey

- It can be difficult to assess the quality and reliability of information.

> *"..assessing the quality and relevance of the many different sources of information."*
> SME (from online survey)

- SMEs do not have the time to spend looking for information.

> *"SMEs do not have time to do research for information for future opportunities, many are busy fire-fighting and keeping afloat."*
> Comment from North West workshop

- It is difficult to find current, accurate and relevant information, particularly for those in niche markets.

> *"We launched a new product ….that had no direct existing equivalent. There was no information about the specific area, but far too much about slightly related areas."*
>
> *"Mine is a niche market and it is difficult to find data on it."*
>
> *"I find that a lot of information is group by Govt based markets (eg SIC) - this makes it quite difficult to find info on new/emerging technology markets. An example is that when I completed my line of business on a previous question - we don't fall into any of the categories listed."*
>
> SMEs (from online survey)

- Staff working in libraries and other frontline services do not understand, or are viewed as being unlikely to understand, what SMEs and entrepreneurs need.

> *"There is a problem of perception/image when it comes to public libraries. Will entrepreneur ever think that a public library is on their wavelength?."*
> Comment from South West workshop
>
> *"You would not expect a library to be able to offer staff with expertise in the needs and experiences of an SME."*
> Comment from West Midlands workshop.
>
> *"Getting people to respond in my time frame is a problem."*
> SME (from online survey)
>
> *"Lack of training for service delivery staff means that they are not always as helpful/aware as they could be.. Also, sometimes it can be quite difficult to get the information that you specifically want."*
> SME (from online survey)

- Not enough high quality information can be accessed online.

> *"Lack of direct online access to quality information*…is a problem."
> SME (from online survey)

# 9. The options for the future provision of business information

## 9.1 What will be the trends in entrepreneurial activity in the next 3 years?

We asked mixed workshop groups and interviewees the trends which they expected to see in the types of business development and entrepreneurial activity over a 3 year period. Given that the study was carried out against a backdrop of the UK's worst economic performance in a generation, the responses provided an interesting gauge of the mood of a range of people and sectors. It was notable that the overall tone of the responses was more positive than the overall state of the UK economy would have led us to expect; there was a strong feeling that this period would see the businesses emerge that would lead the UK out of the recession.

The trends and characteristics which were most frequently mentioned were:

- **An increase in the number of start-up businesses** – This will be driven by an increase in redundancies elsewhere, would inevitably be followed by an increase in the rate of business failures due to greater competition and because people may be starting businesses without the skills and attributes required of a successful entrepreneur. Overall, the business life cycle is likely to become shorter;

- **Growth in graduate entrepreneurship** - with the alumni of higher education institutions turning to entrepreneurship as the recession made other career options less viable and, comparatively, less secure;

- **An increase in businesses with an ethical/environmental element in their business model -** This would mean not only companies operating in fields such as clean technology but companies in all sectors embedding ethical practices in the way that they do business. This would be driven by an increased awareness of environmental, and other factors, both on the part of the businesses themselves and on consumers;

- **More companies will transact business online -** This will have the potential of widening the customer-base that they can serve but will also expose them to greater competition;

- **An increase in technology-based and knowledge-based start-ups as well as an increase in companies operating in niche markets -** These could be companies serving very specific groups or specific geographical areas;

- **The failure of some large national retailers which might present opportunities for smaller retailers to build up their businesses**; and

- **Pressure on public finances will see an overall reduction in the funding available to support businesses -** This would increase the need for more co-operative working and a greater scrutiny of the performance of service providers.

## 9.2 How do SMEs plan to develop their businesses?

To get a perspective from the businesses themselves we asked SME interviewees what plans they had for their businesses. Most likely activities were:

- **Launch new products and services**; and
- **Grow their business in the UK**.

In contrast very few were likely to:

- **Move to new premises**;
- **Merge with, or acquire, new companies**; or
- **Reduce the range of products and services offered**.

## 9.3 What challenges will SMEs face in developing their businesses?

SME interviewees were asked for the main challenges they faced in developing their businesses and these are ranked below. The most common were:

1) **financial management** (61%);
2) **planning/testing and making decisions on new product or service developments** (53%);
3) **marketing of products and services** (46%);

Others mentioned were:

4) managing time: to respond to changes in markets and to achieve a better work life balance (38%);
5) compliance with legal procedures. Examples cited included areas such as insurance, patenting, employment and procurement (30%);
6) getting the support needed from business support services (23%); and
7) having access to the right skills to deliver products and services (15%)

The balance between taking timely action and making sound decisions was summed up by one interviewee:

> *"I had difficulty having the patience to collect and use feedback before making decisions."*
> SME (from interview)

When asked their perception of the challenges being faced by SMEs, service providers identified two major obstacles both of which related to the services which they offered. These were:

- SMEs lack of awareness of the services which were available to help them; and.
- lack of funding for those services.

## 9.4 What types of information and information service will be needed to support these plans and meet these challenges ?

Having identified the types of business development activity which SMEs expected to engaged in, we asked service provider and SME interviewees to assess the importance of specified types of information in helping them and their clients to support these activities. The purpose of this was to identify any differences between the information used in the past and what they expected to be using in the future.

Overall, few significant trends were identified, but some variations emerged including:

- **An increase in the perceived importance of, and demand for, mailing and contacts lists**. General feedback indicated that this is a reflection of the increased importance of marketing and of carrying out field research as both activities require contact names;

- **An increase in the perceived importance of intellectual property information on the part of SMEs -** perhaps linked to plans to launch new products and services, an element of many of future plans of those we interviewed; and

- **A decrease in the perceived importance of company financial information** - perhaps linked to the rapid rate of economic change over the past two years This means that historic figures based on annual financial returns may not be a reliable indicator of current and future performance of a specific company or the sector in which they operate.

Workshop groups were asked an open question about how changes in the nature of entrepreneurial activity changed the types of information needed. The discussions tended to take a wider look at information services and forms of delivery as well as information types. The most frequently mentioned changes and developments were;

- more information freely available at the desktop;
- more detailed information on industry sectors to support companies in niche and specialist markets;
- more up-to-date information was a recurring theme throughout the study with a concern that much data produced by central government was too old to be useful;
- information available on industries at a global, regional and national level;
- more comprehensive guides, signposting sources to information sources;
- a greater variety of formats in which information is delivered, particularly online; and
- better guides to legal information, particularly related to employment law.

*"Emerging new media will provide a greater variety of means of delivery of information and formats."*
Comment from East of England workshop

*"There is a need for publishers and vendors to develop products which are more tailored to customer needs and more user friendly and sell those to wider markets."*
Comment from Scotland workshop

*"The shelf-life of information will need to reflect a shorter business life cycle."*
Comment from North East workshop

### 9.5 Which organisations could play a greater role in providing access to information in the future?

Our next approach was to look at the types of organisation with the potential to be key players in the future provision of access to business information. This question was explored by the mixed workshop groups. A clear distinction must be made between this and the rankings found in 8.3 as the listing below emphasises unrealised potential and the scope for the organisations to play a greater role than they do at present. Below were the top five most listed categories, ranked by frequency with which they were listed.

1) Public libraries.
2) Local and regional government organisations (including services run by regional development agencies, Invest NI, Scottish Enterprise and the Welsh Assembly Government.
3) Higher education libraries.
4) Business support organisations
5) UK government agencies (this would include IPO and UK Trade and Investment).

### 9.6 What are the most important issues which will impact on the ability of service providers to deliver information services to their clients in the future?

Each service provider interviewed was asked to list the three most important issues likely to impact on their ability to deliver. Recurring themes were: major concerns about funding; the desire to work more closely with related services and the need to have skilled and competent staff. The most frequently mentioned issues, by provider, follow.

**Business support organisations**

- lack of future funding for their service;
- their ability to meet changing needs and expectations of their clients. This is a reflection of both the services and resources they offer, but also on the need for clients to have more realistic expectations of the service they receive;
- their ability to access the information they need;
- recruiting and retaining the right staff to offer a good service; and
- better integration with other business support services.

**Higher education BCE services**

- lack of future funding for their service;
- access to detailed and relevant information;
- the awareness of the services they can offer amongst the business community;
- recruiting skilled and qualified people to work with businesses; and
- lack of collaboration with other higher education institutions.

**Higher education libraries**

- lack of future funding for their service;
- lack of capacity within their library to meet increased number of students;
- the high cost of online subscriptions and restrictive licences;
- the need for them to play a role in giving students the information literacy skills; and
- the opportunity to have an input into course content.

**Public libraries**

- the impact of political and structural changes within local government;
- the impact of the design of library buildings and facilities on the ability to offer services;
- the need to continue to work closely with business support organisations;.
- the ongoing need to offer high quality staff training; and
- Their continued commitment to serve the community at a difficult time.

### 9.7 What developments would have the most benefit on ensuring that businesses get the information they need?

To identify the changes that would be needed to allow SMEs and service providers to meet the challenges identified above, we invited service provider interviewees, representatives from funding and policy bodies and the mixed workshop groups to 'wave a magic wand' and name three things which would have the most beneficial impact.

- **Mixed workshop groups**

In spite of the diversity in backgrounds and perspectives of those attending workshops, there was general agreement around the types of development that would have the most impact. The majority of these themes were echoed in interviews held and which means that this is as close as we have come to a generic wish list.

The six most frequently listed developments by workshop groups were:

- a central portal which provides searchable links to UK-wide sources of information for business;
- greater integration of services providing business support and information;
- more flexible publisher licences for subscription-based electronic resources;
- online access to more free data and more information available through open access platforms;
- business support and mentoring services delivered on a more personalised basis to help improve signposting to relevant sources of information; and
- better marketing of information services to increase the visibility of these services.

- **Service providers**

The responses from all categories of service providers reinforced these messages. The only significant additional themes were introduced by higher education BCE services who raised issues relating more specifically to higher education institutions. These were:

- the need for a national model for business information based around centres of excellence with institutions working together in collaboration and not duplicating expertise; and
- greater opportunity to incorporate more of the specialist expertise within their institutions into the services they offer businesses; greater collaboration between higher education institutions.

"*Technology transfer offices should collaborate more openly on cross-university tie ups to share their resources and expertise. They should be able to call on another university for the relevant expertise*."

"*The ability to have faculty staff work full-time on business engagement.*"

*"We need an intern programme like they do in the States so that they can get hands-n experience."*
Higher education BCE (from interviews)

- **Funding and policy-making organisations**

This question was put to representatives from organisations responsible for funding and influencing and defining policy. The majority of the issues raised centred on a single point of access and more tailored services, as highlighted:;

> *"The creation of a single integrated implementation plan across all RDAs which incorporates all regional investment plans."*
>
> *"Clearer means through which people can get information on sources of funding. There is a lot there but there is no single place where the options are set out."*
>
> *"Better career advice, including entrepreneurship. This should focus on where a particular area of training can lead and on where a career path will take people in 10-15 years time."*
>
> *"More services/literature in multiple languages."*
>
> *"I wish more people would be able to have the confidence to come forward to seek advice."*
>
> Central and regional government (from interviews)

> *"Greater clarity from policy makers that business support is a role that libraries should perform. This will give greater legitimacy to initiatives in this area and help to overcome some resistance from those working within libraries."*
>
> *"Greater imagination and more creative thinking from people working in libraries to enable them to develop more innovative services and relationships."*
>
> Library policy (from interviews)

> *"A widening of the open access agenda will facilitate access to information and reduce dependence on 3rd party sources"'*
>
> *"'Greater vision and clearer and more consistent narrative from funders."*
>
> *"A need for 'greater public awareness of the benefits and applications of research. This may be starting to happen with a raised profile for entrepreneurship."*
>
> *"Local variation in service models within HE is an obstacle to co-ordinated action and development."*
>
> Higher education and research policy (from interviews)

> *"New pricing models for access to business information; current pricing does not give sufficient consideration of the value of the information to the customer or their relative ability to pay. This limits access to information for smaller companies."*
>
> *"The priced (as opposed to open access) model has placed an additional barrier to access in addition to ability/willingness to pay. The process of having to make the payment makes one think twice about whether to view a document."*
>
> *"Better knowledge of business on the part of service providers."*
>
> Innovation policy (from interviews)

# 10. The views of business information providers

Eight information producers/publishers agreed to contribute to this research. Concerns around commercial confidentiality meant that none of the respondents felt able to provide a full and detailed response to all of the questions. None of the respondents are named in this document.

All of those we spoke to are companies well established and well know in the UK business information sector

The following useful data emerged from our conversations.

## 10.1 Current engagement with higher/further education

All of the companies consulted reported some level of engagement with the higher education sector and specifically with higher education libraries

Four respondents reported significant engagement with higher education in the form of provision of academic library access to their e-resources. Two quantified the degree of this engagement: for one higher education amounted to 20% of their client base and for the other the figure was 30% .
In a third case the respondent found it difficult to quantify the degree of engagement as use in the academic community was via third party aggregators.

One respondent specifically mentioned engagement with universities operating on a commercial level (as opposed to straight academic use by students/staff we infer).

*"…many universities around the world have access [to our service] through subscriptions to our services. We also work with universities on more complex engagements with their business clients."*

*"There is always a willingness to engage with Universities who are trying to serve different communities but we do not have examples where seed companies affiliated to a University have been able to leverage off existing agreements."*

Publishers (from interview)

There was little evidence of any engagement with the FE sector.

'We would like to sell into FEIs but their funding position is always very poor."
Publisher (from interview)

## 10.2 How much of a target market are SMEs and start-ups?

We asked the companies if they regarded SMEs and start-ups as a current or potential target market. Only one of the 8 respondents identified start-ups and SMEs specifically as their core target market; they cited business support organisations as their most important channel to market.

| |
|---|
| *"[We] don't currently see start-ups and SMEs as a target market - use by these groups is probably accidental. Might be a market in future but [the] company would have to tweak its offering and its pricing model to suit the market. [We] do on occasions talk to RDAs but the problem is always the RDA need for very local (micro) information."* |
| Publisher (from interview) |

Another identified the sheer size of the potential market as an issue, pointing out that the company would need very effective channels into this market to make successful sales.

## 10.3 How might business information publishers/producers engage with SMEs and start-ups?

We asked the companies about how they might engage with SMEs and start ups. Five gave a quantifiable response.
They all saw considerable potential in offering onsite access to their information products to SMEs and start-ups in libraries and resource centres. One commented that they saw the provision of this sort of access as "seed corn".

Three saw considerable potential in offering access to their information products remotely through networks, consortia or libraries.

Two saw less potential in providing remote access, although one mentioned that they saw some potential in a JISC-style deal for providing remote access to SMEs and start-ups but commented that, as their data was already available via aggregators, it was important to guard against damage to this side of their business when exploring new models.

Three respondents also saw considerable potential in offering consultancy services to the SME/start up market although none of them elaborated on this and one saw particular potential in offering online courses in how to find and interpret business information.

A sixth respondent commented:

| |
|---|
| "*To engage with more users [we] will be introducing an internet service based on a pay per report model later this summer and we hope that will enable more members of the SME community to use [our] reports …… I am sure it will be particularly useful for users seeking data on international companies or a comprehensive understanding of group structures. These are both areas where extensive and reliable data is traditionally difficult to source*." |
| Publisher (from interview) |

### 10.4 Many libraries and providers of services to start-ups/SMEs would like to offer their users remote access to subscription databases. How likely are the publishers/information providers to develop a model which incorporates this, within the next few years?

We attempted to gauge the attitude of our respondents to the issue of providing remote access to their e-information products. Five of the eight responded: they all had a broadly positive attitude to the concept of remote access and at least two of them have already developed a remote access model for the public/national/academic library sector. Their major concerns are around the control of access to the information through a remote access model and the risk it poses to other areas of their business activity.

*"This is a logical extension of the relationships/contracts/subscriptions we already have and would be a means of ensuring continuation of these relationships. However the development of acceptable pricing, licensing and access models is a big headache. In particular we would have to be reassured that there was minimal risk of their big corporate users using this as a back gate to save their own spend on the service. Progress will depend on getting all of the above in place."*

*"..quite likely, but not for at least 3 years……….. We have looked at a) providing a cut-down or 'lite' service and b) using DRM software to limit downloading."*

*" The main issue with libraries having remote access is the difficulty in controlling who is accessing the information. Information providers like us will be keen to support libraries and educational bodies to develop their business but we do not want them to emerge a competitors to our own business."*

*"This model already exists.. with user fulfilment and authentication systems in place. Typically this is done at ID and password level. This is the preferred method of access for most corporate customers and can be extended across all client groups."*

Publishers (from interviews)

### 10.5 Are there any key issues which are likely to inform the kind of services publishers/information providers might offer in future (either directly or through intermediaries) to the start-up/SME market?

We sought to identify any obstacles or opportunities which the respondents thought likely to feature in their interaction with the SME/start-up market. The fact that SMEs and start-ups are not the primary target market for their products and the need to "tweak" their products to suit emerged as a particular concern. The diverse and fragmented nature of the market was also identified as an issue.

*"Fact [is] that potential users are dispersed all over UK - how would they access the services? What would be the best channel to reach them? There would be [a] need to tweak or customise current products for this market - perhaps offer smaller slices or chunks of data at a price acceptable to vendor and to end user – [we] need to work out how both sides can win from any new model."*

*"We would possibly offer cut down versions and snapshots of existing reports to SME's, this would be of a shorter length than our normal reports and priced at this market. We would also look at a start up product which would include market, company and credit information."*

*"The key issue for us is that we are geared up to sell direct to large corporations. Prices are necessarily high and service levels are significant. SMEs are a mass market for us and require a different business model. At the moment the only way we can sell direct to SMEs is by selling single publications from our website. This means that they don't get the benefit of our interactive electronic systems."*

*"SMEs need full support and providing rapid views to markets, channels and how to message and address these is key to driving their success. Dependent on sectors, SMEs have different information requirements. A retailer for example wants to understand about local market customers at a consumer level whereas a startup technology vendor will want to understand how to enter and differentiate themselves in more regional markets. The level of localisation remains the largest issue to address SMEs."*

Publishers (from interviews)

### 10.6 What changes/developments might we see in entrepreneurial and business development activity in the UK in the next few years?

We went on to ask firstly about what developments the publishers/information producers foresaw in UK business activity and then about how they thought any such developments might impact on business information needs. The following issues were identified:

- a push into emerging markets: this will require increased market intelligence. Local market and in-region sales presence will be required as distanced selling into emerging markets is no longer appropriate. The consequences for publishers will be a need for increased collaboration between information providers and the provision of locally-produced content;
- a search for innovative business models. This will involve identifying and looking to exploit societal trends and exploring relationships with suppliers of complementary products. The consequence for publishers will be that clients will be looking for shorter term forecasting and support with identifying prospective clients; and
- a growth in start-ups operating in niche markets and more interest in doing business in Europe.

This general observation was made:

*"Information providers and publishers and public sector policy makers need to understand and adapt to the changing entrepreneurial landscape driven by people's lack of security and economic uncertainty. Without demand for products and services new businesses can't just start up the way they have done in the past. Entrepreneurs will be different people i.e. a lot younger and older, and also have a lot more employment experience. But the common factor will be the need to do much more research to find much smaller but much more accessible market niches and business opportunities. Business information providers will need to change to meet the new demand."*
Publisher (from interview)

# 11. Examples of good practice: UK service profiles

In the course of this study we have identified services and initiatives which provide examples of good practice. We have selected eight of these, each of which illustrates features which can inform the development of services in the future. This is not a full list or a ranking and we have intentionally selected some services which operate on a small scale.

## 11.1 Business Link In The East of England

Business Link in the East of England is run by a private company called East of England IDB Ltd which is owned by the University of Hertfordshire. The funding for the service comes from the East of England Development Agency (EEDA). When accessing this services through the East of England Development Agency website, Business Link services are presented as a 'Business Map' . This map presents the range of services and activities in a simple and user-friendly format.

The range of services is extensive. A programme of training courses is offered across the region such as pre-startup 'boot camps' and there is a brokered service to external providers. The services which are of particular interest in the context of this study are the information services offered by the Information and Intelligence Centre in Hatfield. The centre provides advice and information services delivered by experienced information professionals.

The full range of information needs for business is covered and they provide mediated access to a broad selection of online subscription services. In addition to these they use local and regions resources such as the East of England Development Agency knowledge system to get regional and local data. The majority of services are free but they charge for more in-depth and extensive research. Business Link In The East Of England also houses the Enterprise Europe Centre for the East of England.

The strengths of the service are:

- the breadth of services offered across a large and diverse region;
- the emphasis on the importance of high quality information services delivered by information specialists using a broad range of resources;
- good links with the university library and local public library; and
- a well-presented service offering.

## 11.2 Enterprise Europe

The Enterprise Europe network was created in 2008 by combining the Innovation Relay Centre and EuroInfo Centres. The service has single specified contact points in each of the English regions, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The services are delivered by the organisations specified as contact points as well as consortium partners. In the UK there are 17 organisations classified as partners and these include public and private sector organisations. The service is aimed at assisting businesses in maximising opportunities to innovate and develop within the EU. Therefore, there is a focus on providing access to EU legislation and funding and the potential to partner and operate on a cross-border basis. There target audience are SMEs.

The types of service offered are as follows:

- providing information and advice on markets and European legislation;
- Helping SMEs to partner with other businesses;
- Providing information and assistance on tenders and other applications for funding; and
- Signposting to other organisations.

The strengths of the network are:

- a standard level of service across all service providers which incorporates business information with advice and guidance on a legal and funding issues;
- a one-stop shop to assist businesses in navigating organisations and procedures across the European Union; and
- a high level of interaction and personal contact across the network. Our experiences showed that people operating the centres seemed to know their counterparts in other parts of the UK, something which is less evident in some other areas of business support.

### 11.3 National Library of Scotland (SCOTBIS) Scottish Business Information Service

SCOTBIS is the business information service delivered by the National Library of Scotland. They offer onsite access to a comprehensive range of subscription-based electronic resources in the library in Edinburgh. They also provide access and guidance to online resources through their website which includes links to free web resources providing information on Scotland and the rest of the world and links to the websites of Scottish companies. They have started to address the demand for remote access to subscription-based online resources by enabling registered users to access Dun & Bradstreet Global Reference Solution from their desks. In order to enable their users to benefit from the expertise of their staff, they offer free and charged information services.

Their strengths are:

- the range and quality of their collections; and.
- the steps they have taken to provide remote access to high value business information.

### 11.4 British Library Business & IP Centre

The British Library Business & IP Centre (BIPC), is part of the British Library, that national library for the UK. The BL has offered access to the largest collection of business information material in the UK since the early 1980s, and to the national collection intellectual property information since the 1970s.

The opening of the BIPC in March 2006 saw the services and resources being presented as a resource centre specifically designed to meet the needs of entrepreneurs. Although the BIPC is primarily funded by central government it has received additional funding from the London Development Agency which has enabled the Centre to offer a range of enhanced services. These have included:

- one-to-one mentoring services offered by British Library staff and a network of partner organisations;
- training courses and workshops covering a range of topics ranging from research techniques to topics which are key to starting a business, such as writing a business plan;
- a fee-based research service which includes a special research offer for London-based businesses subsidised by the London Development Agency;
- online courses in intellectual property and research techniques; and
- networking events.

In the context of this study we have identified these specific strengths:

- The experience of working with a regional development agency and a developing network of partners, who offer complimentary services. This has enabled BIPC to offer an innovative and comprehensive range of services designed to meet the needs of SMEs and to operate within a network of service providers.
-

- The development of the staff working in the Centre to enable them to better understand the needs of SMEs. This has involved training of a number of staff as business advisors.
- The provision of a number of levels of assistance to SMEs from the access to resources for them to carry out their own research to personalised services. This has been made possible largely by dual funding from central government, which funds core reference services and collections and from the London Development Agency which funds value added services.

### 11.5 Interface

Interface provides a human interface between business and 27 higher education institutions and research organisations in Scotland. They provide access to expertise in faculty, research expertise and incubation/technical support. The majority of the relationships they broker are knowledge-based and involve businesses and institutions from Scotland. A quarter involve businesses outside Scotland who wish to work with Scottish institutions.
The types of business approaching them match the overall sector profile in Scotland such as food and drink; life sciences; chemicals and tourism.

Businesses approach them with details of the skills and resources they need and they use a database of expertise to identify people/institutions which may be able to provide these. They make contact with the individual and institution and only bring the parties together when they have established that the institution has the ability, capacity and willingness to collaborate. Once the relationship has been created Interface withdraws only to check on outcomes on which they can report and potential case studies to be used to illustrate their role. They have no involvement in the legal aspect of any resulting relationship.

Interface is operated by a team of four and is funded by the Scottish Funding Council, The Scottish Government's SEEKIT Programme and received funding from Scottish Innovative Actions.

The strengths of the service lie in the combination of a single cross-institution database of expertise and the delivery of a personalised service which identifies the specific needs of the businesses approaching them. Specific areas of strength are as follows:

- the use of a detailed tool for identifying expertise across a range of higher education institutions; and
- provision of a personalised service which identifies the needs of the business.

I

### 11.6 Innovation Vouchers

Innovation Vouchers in the UK were pioneered by Aston University with the launch of their INDEX voucher scheme in 2006. This was based on similar schemes in the Netherlands. Innovation voucher schemes are now offered and funded by regional development agencies throughout the UK and have been identified as a recognised part of the business support portfolio covered by the 'Solutions For Business' programme.

The vouchers provide SMEs with financial support to engage with universities and other academic institutions, such as further education colleges and research organisations within their region. Vouchers up to the value of £3000 (up to £7,000 in certain RDAs) can be redeemed to fund the cost of this practical knowledge and expertise. The vouchers can be used to purchase an academic's expertise to help deliver a knowledge solution to an innovative project.

Innovation vouchers are issued in 'rounds' and are granted on a 'lottery' basis, meaning that a qualifying application may not necessarily be granted a voucher.

*A measure of the success of the innovation voucher scheme is exemplified by the Northwest Development Agency's allocated vouchers; 495 successful applications over three rounds (November 08, February 09 and May 09).

### 11.7 Insight East

Insight East is the economic intelligence centre for the East of England. It is funded by the East of England Development Agency. The service generates and analyses economic data to provide reports on the key trends and issues facing the East of England.

Insight East provides a range of services to help the region's decision-makers better understand the economy and factors affecting it. These include:

- quarterly economic briefings on the state of the regional economy
- special research reports on specific factors affecting the economy
- an interactive map monitoring progress against the Regional Economic Strategy indicators
- a fully searchable online resource of all Insight East materials, together with links to information from other organisations.
- regular electronic briefings

This well organised site contains examples of the value of information being generated by regional development associations and local government. Much of this is regularly updated and is local and regional in nature thereby addressing the concerns expressed by many SMEs that much published information is outdated and not specific enough in terms of geographical coverage.

### 11.8 University of Brighton CUPP HelpDesk

CUPP HelpDesk is part of the Community University Partnership Programme. It operates as an interface between the community/voluntary sector and the university. The helpdesk is a one-stop shop for any requests for assistance from organisations who want to access expertise held within the university.

CUPP's original target constituency is non-commercial organisations, notable community and voluntary organisations or projects which have outcomes which have primarily a social dimension and which lead to the university making a contribution in projects which will involve the university being involved in projects which result in a social benefit. This means that their work with commercial organisations is dependant on this criteria being met. As part of their interface role, the HelpDesk can put people from the university in contact with the community/voluntary sector should their assistance be needed for research and teaching purposes.

The service is of interest in the context of this study for two reasons:

- as an example of a simple, but effective, point of access between the university and the local community. The website stresses the personal and accessible nature of the service;
- as it raises the question of where the dividing line exists between serving local business and the wider community. In order to have the visibility and the credibility to develop sustainable relationships with local business, institutions need to be seen to be engaging with the wider community on a number of different levels.

### 11.9 Other services mentioned in consultation

During the course of the consultation a number of other services were cited as examples of good practice.

- The nature of the discussions tended to mean that the definition of good practice extended beyond information services to cover a broader range of support services.
- The following list should be viewed as a useful indication of levels of awareness of services but is not a definitive list of companies operating good services. Such a list will inevitably favour higher profile organisations with a UK-wide presence. The workshop format may have impacted on the services listed as modesty may have prevented delegates from naming organisations for which they worked.
- The selection of Business Link as an example of best practice does not indicate a universal endorsement of the service they operate. The most commonly-held view was that, although they are key players in support and information, there is potential for them to be able to offer improved services.

**1) Interviews with service providers**

Specific organisations and services identified interviewees as good sources of business information were as follows:

| Services |
|---|
| Biocity Nottingham |
| Business Link Website |
| CEIS |
| CYCLH: Wales Community Recycling Network |
| Business Link South West |
| EFRS: Scottish Enterprise Research Service |
| City Business Library |
| Hatfield Public Library |

**2) Services mentioned by mixed workshop groups**

| Examples of specific organisations and services/ places which are good sources of business information | No of workshop groups listing these |
|---|---|
| Business Link* | 11 |
| British Library Business & IP Centre* | 6 |
| UK Trade & Industry | 4 |
| Business Gateway (Scotland) | 3 |
| Cobweb | 3 |
| National Library of Scotland, Scotbis* | 3 |
| Ask About Business: Manchester City Libraries | 2 |
| Datamonitor | 2 |
| Enterprise Europe* | 2 |
| Federation of Small Businesses | 2 |
| Interface | 2 |
| Keynote | 2 |
| Mintel | 2 |
| Institute of Directors | 2 |
| Princes Trust/Prime | 2 |
| ACAS | 1 |
| Business Insight, Birmingham | 1 |
| City Business Library | 1 |
| Confederation Of British Industry | 1 |
| De Montfort University | 1 |
| East Midlands Incubation Network: Clear Intelligence Service | 1 |
| East Midlands Knowledge Network | 1 |
| Engineering Employers Federation | 1 |
| Everywoman | 1 |
| Frost and Sullivan | 1 |
| IPO | 1 |
| J4B Website | 1 |
| IPO | 1 |
| Kingston University | 1 |
| LinkedIn | 1 |
| Manchester Business School | 1 |
| Manchester Knowledge Capital | 1 |
| Manchester Metropolitan University | 1 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Newcastle City Library | 1 |
| NI Business Information | 1 |
| NOMIS | 1 |
| North East Chamber of Commerce | 1 |
| Office Of National Statistics | 1 |
| Prowess | 1 |
| Scottish Institute For Enterprise | 1 |
| Skills for Business | 1 |
| Social Enterprise Sunderland | 1 |
| South East England Development Agency: Enterprise Hub Network | 1 |
| StartUps.co.uk | 1 |
| University Of The West Of England QuickMark Service | 1 |
| University of East London | 1 |
| University of Warwick | 1 |
| Westminster Reference Library | 1 |

# 12. Examples of good practice: overseas service profiles

## 12.1 Syntens (Netherlands)

Syntens was established in 1998 as a national network for innovators, their specific mission being to increase the capacity of SMEs to innovate. They have 12 offices, covering all parts of the Netherlands and employ 400 staff. They are fully financed from public funds and only nominal fees are charged to SMEs for some services. Their funding comes from the Department of Economic Affairs with project funding from other government departments; regional government; and the European Union. They act as a link between SMEs and organisations defined as 'knowledge institutes'; a heading which incorporates higher education; research institutes; learned societies and membership organisations.

Their focus is on increasing the innovative capacity of an SME so that innovation is embedded in the culture and business processes of a company. For this reason, they take a holistic view of the innovative process and see all aspects of a company's business processes and culture as contributing to the conditions in which they can innovate successfully. The services that they offer are based around the 3-stage process described below.

| | Stage | Activities/services offered by Syntens |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Awareness of the need for innovation | This is viewed as a marketing activity based around workshops, meetings and some direct marketing. |
| 2 | Stimulation of innovative process | This is the stage at which Syntens' advisors will have direct 1-1 involvement with an SME through the following activities:<br><br>▪ Advice and coaching.<br>▪ Creation of innovation action plans.<br>▪ Patent information and advice in collaboration with the Dutch Patent Institute.<br>▪ International information and advice in partnership with Enterprise Europe network.<br><br>SMEs will also be supported by workshops, training and an increasing amount of online content. |
| 3 | Knowledge sharing/co-operation | Syntens' role is to facilitate the building of relationships between SMEs and between SMEs and knowledge suppliers and service providers. Central to this is their development of a network of knowledge and business clusters. |

**Innovation action plans**
The development of an 'innovation action plan' is central to their service offer. The first stage of this plan involves a diagnostic check on the potential of an SME to innovate. This check is carried out using an online diagnostic tool called 'Innovation Quick Scan'.

The second stage is a more in-depth 'Innovation Scan' which is carried out with a Syntens advisor. The assessment of 'innovative ability' is based around focussing on the specific aspects of an SMEs business as described below.

| | What is assessed? |
|---|---|
| Strategy | The ability to plan the business of the future. |
| Organisation and processes | How much the organisation and its processes are geared for innovation. |
| Culture | How much the corporate culture focuses on innovation. |
| Acquiring knowledge and technology | The ability to acquire the right information, knowledge and technology. |
| Skills | The ability of people to develop the necessary skills. |
| Financing | The ability to acquire funds for innovation. |
| Generating ideas | The ability to come up with new ideas. |
| Defining ideas | The ability to translate innovative ideas into solid results. |
| Marketing new products | The ability to find new customers and open markets. |
| Exploiting new products | The ability to extract maximum profit from innovation. |

The Syntens advisor uses the results of this to work with the SME to deliver a tailored innovation action plan for the next three to four years based on the ambitions and goals of the entrepreneur.

In addition to the regional office structure, Syntens also has teams which focus on the following sectors and produce sector innovation plans.

- industry;
- logistics, wholesale and maritime;
- human health;
- building and construction;
- creative industry; and
- agriculture and food.

The service is of specific interest in the context of this study due to:

- The focus on the SME rather than on the business idea or product, and;.
- The central and national role they play in linking SMEs with knowledge suppliers.

### 12.2: Small Business Development Center Network (U.S.A)

The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) network was founded in 1979 as a co-operative venture between the U.S Small Business Administration, private enterprise and higher education.

The objective of the network is to provide free advice and low-cost training to existing SMEs and entrepreneurs wishing to start a business as well as existing businesses. Services are delivered by professionally-qualified business counsellors and the development of a close one-to-one working relationship between the business and the counsellor is the core element of the business model.

The network is broken down into 63 regions with one for each state with more than one regional office for Texas and California. SBDC offices are also located in the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, The Virgin Islands, American Samoa and Guam. The model is also being adopted by Mexico, Colombia, Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America. There is an extensive network of individual offices with over 1100 locations across the USA, employing 4500 counsellors. 75% of offices are located in universities, 20% are located in colleges and 5% within economic development centers. It is estimated that a high percentage of the U.S. population are located within one hour’s drive of an SBDC and this includes less densely populated states such as Montana and Wyoming.

Centers are funded directly from the Small Business Administration; their host institutions and private sponsorship and donations. Although the SBDC operates as a national network, individual regions and offices have considerable levels of autonomy and levels of funding are variable. This de-centralised model leads to the development of individual service initiatives and branding as well as a high level of local innovation. However, this can also lead to some duplication of effort and a variety of brands and logos.

SBDCs, which are hosted by universities, benefit considerably from being able to utilise the infrastructure of these institutions in areas such as marketing, IT and human resources management. The Centers and their clients can also utilise the expertise of students. This is a win-win situation as clients benefit from the student's expertise and the students benefit from their experience of working with business in real-life scenarios. Centers which are hosted by community colleges benefit from the local links that these institutions enjoy.

The primary focus for business information within the SBDC network is SBDCNet, which is profiled below, although some SBDCs, such as Arkansas, have their own limited library services. Many SBDC counsellors also make use of the information services offered by the James. J. Hill Reference Library in St Paul, Minnesota; a private library which offers free and priced onsite access as well as a fee-based research service.

The SBDC network is of specific interest in the context of this study due to:

- the involvement of higher education institutions in providing first line business support services;
- a simple service model which offers a level of consistency across the U.S.A. This means that an entrepreneur based in Oregon receives the same core service as an entrepreneur in Mexico, and;
- the partnership between higher education institutions, Federal Government and the private sector.

Specific services which operate across the network have been selected as being of particular interest in the context of this study and these are profiled below.

**SBDCNet**
SBDCNet provides an online community for SBDC counsellors and a resource centre open to all visitors to the site. It is the primary point of access to business information and information-related services across the SBDC network.

SBDCNet, and related services, are based in the National Information Clearing House, which is hosted by the Institute for Economic Development at the University of Texas, San Antonio.

The services and resources which can be accessed through SBDCNet are as follows:
- an online learning section with access to 33 short online courses;
- access to information content in the form of toolkits;
- content in Spanish;
- industry newsletters and a newsletter highlighting new product and service developments across the SBDC network, and;
- access to the research service provided by the National Information Clearing House.

The National Information Clearing House provides a central research and information service for the SBDC network. They employ four full-time researchers, 10-13 part-time researchers and 5 to 6 interns from the University of Texas. They deal directly with counsellors and do not have direct contact with the clients. Approximately 500 advisors are regular customers and they work with 400-600 clients a month, a number which is on the increase.
The information resources used are a combination of freely-available web sources and a selection of subscription-based sources.

Many referrals are from advisors representing people in rural communities with limited access to library facilities or from advisors in urban areas who are heavily overloaded.

The majority of requests involve the delivery of Geographic Information System (GIS) reports which provide localised market and demographic data; some published research, is delivered within 15-18 days. There is no charge made for GIS reports and the only reports for which a charge is made are:

- Market sizing and analysis: $500-$750;
- Export feasibility assessment: $500-$750;
- Patent search report: $750; and,
- Technology commercialization nd markets sizing report: $500

SBDC counsellors can place orders using an online order form with a similar look and feel to forms used in online retailing. Customer satisfaction is closely monitored and recent satisfaction levels have been as follows:

- 90%: delivery time;
- 91%: research quality; and,
- 93%: ease of use of the online ordering facility.

The SBDCNet online community has also addressed the issue of duplication of effort identified above by enabling SBDCs to share examples of good practice across the network. An example of this is the SBDCNet Tech Forward Magazine which highlights web and technology-based service enhancements and initiatives.

SBDCNet is of specific interest in the context of this study due to:

- The provision of a central information service to a national network;
- The simplicity and focus of their research service portfolio, which enables the researchers to manage a high volume of requests and to communicate the service offer to counsellors with great clarity; and,
- The creation of an online community to support this network which facilitates information sharing. This community and interface presents a platform through which new and enhanced services and products can be developed.

**SBDC Global**

Based in the SBDC International Trade Centre at the University of Texas, San Antonio, this service provides an online platform which connects SBDC clients throughout the USA and with the expanding network of sixty SBDCs in Mexico. It enables SBDC clients to advertise goods and services and to conduct sales negotiations online so it can be used for both selling and sourcing.

The service is free to all clients registered with an SBDC and to SBDC counsellors. As the client counsellor relationship is central to the SBDC service model, the submission of any offer to sell, by a client, requires the approval of their counsellor. The counsellor also gets full access to details of any online negotiations via their Dashboard service.

The platform provides the facility for partnership projects to be managed online and an electronic translation services enables English and Spanish speakers to communicate through their interactive services.

SBDC Global also provides access to information relating to overseas trade and overseas markets and has a network of affiliate members who contribute content to the site. However, much of this trade information is only accessible to counsellors.

The focus of the service is North and Latin America at present but there may be scope to extend access to the European Union in future. Full integration of the buying and selling model would require identifying a comparable network of business counsellors in Europe.

However, there is substantial potential to enhance access to information on Europe through affiliate membership.

SBDC Global is of specific interest in the context of this study due to:

- the creation of a platform which provides access to global information as well as the facility through which international trade and domestic commerce can be transacted, and;
- the future potential for this platform to be extended outside North and Latin America.

**Export U-Com**
The Export-U-Com website is hosted by the University of Georgia SBDC, in partnership with the U.S. Export Assistance Centre in Atlanta. Development funding has been received from U.S. Department of Commerce with additional support from the U.S. Small Business Administration and Georgia Department of Economic Development

The website provides free online training aimed at the needs of any business exploring international trade options, with the current focus being on those with limited or no previous experience of international trade. The training is delivered through streamed webinars and eight out of ten introductory-level workshops are currently live. The range of topics takes an holistic view of international trade focussing on a wide range of topics including:

- Global market research;
- Secondary research;
- Costing;
- INCOTERMS for shipping, and;
- Approaching the market,

Future plans involve the development of more advanced, Level II, courses, on topics such as:

- Risk management and insurance;
- Budgeting for international business;
- Protecting intellectual property, and;
- Cultural issues.

The site requires registration and is expected to receive 800 registered business users per year. The

Export U-Com. is of specific interest in the context of this study due to:

- the extensive range of online training options offered.

### 12.3 Disney Entrepreneur Center (U.S.A.)

The Center provides counselling, training, and technical expertise to entrepreneurs and established small businesses in Central Florida. It was opened in 2003 with the aim of creating a more diverse economy in Central Florida, following a decline in tourism in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The formation of the Center was the result of a partnership agreement between the local Orange County administration; the University of Central Florida and the Walt Disney World Corporation.

Although it provides services to start-ups, the key goal is to grow established businesses so that they can provide employment and have a significant impact on the local economy.

The Center provides accommodation for eight complementary non-profit service providers in a convenient location in downtown Orlando. The clients benefit from having the service providers in the one location, which makes referral much easier. Through sharing facilities such as printing, the service providers enjoy reduced in operating costs. The terms of the relationship between the Center and service providers are set out in a source provider agreement. In addition to office space the facility also provides meeting space and training rooms containing state-of-the-art training and conferencing equipment. The Center also houses a small business library, although its proximity to Orlando Public Library, means that referrals are often made to the extensive collection of business information material held by this library.

Some examples of service providers at the Center are:

- SCORE, Counselor's to America's Small Business;
- University of Central Florida Technology Incubator;
- University of Central Florida Small Business Development Center (SBDC), and;
- Hispanic Business Initiative Fund.

The Center is run by three full-time staff, employed by the University of Central Florida, with the primary role of managing relationships with service providers, administration of the Center and seeking sponsorship. They also provide some diagnostic and signposting services to clients visiting the Centre. The relationship with the University is crucial as they can access the university infrastructure.

The Center is funded jointly by Orange County, the University of Central Florida and a sponsors, of which the Walt Disney World Corporation is the largest. Other sponsors include:

- City of Orlando;.
- Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Florida;
- Banco Popular;
- Florida High Tech Corridor, and;
- Darden's Restaurants.

The initial point of contact for clients is a diagnostic/introductory meeting. This could be with a member of the Disney Center staff or with counsellors from the SBDC or SCORE. Meetings can be made by prior appointment but are also offered to walk-in clients. Once a referral is made by staff of the Disney Center to a service provider, the business relationship is solely with that provider. Disney Center staff establish the success of the services by following up the client to assess their satisfaction with the service provided and with statistical outputs produced by the service providers.

The Disney Entrepeneur Center is of specific interest in the context of this study due to:

- the location of a number of service providers in a single central location, and;.
- the partnership between local government, a higher education institution, non-profit making service providers and private sponsors.

### 12.4 Women's Business Center, Florida Institute Of Technology (U.S.A)

The Center is based on the campus of the Florida Institute of Technology, in Melbourne, and provides counselling training and networking services and activities for women entrepreneurs and women involved in developing small businesses. It opened in 2007 but prior to this was part of the National Centre For Small Business Information, a training centre offering instruction for small businesses and individuals n the fundamentals of government contracting and using related software packages. Prior to 2007, 70% of the clients were women which highlighted the need for a resource centre for women in Central Florida and this led to their joining the Women's Business Center network which was funded by the Small Business Administration.

This network operates 122 Centers in the U.S.A, which can be found in most states as well as the District of Columbia, Guam and American Samoa. They receive $150,000 a year funding from the Small Business Administration, which must be matched by money raised by sponsorship and through the provision of in-kind services.

As the Center only employs two full-time staff they are heavily dependent on a network of volunteers to run the training and mentoring services as well as referral to other services, such as the two Small Business Development Centers within close proximity. The role of the Center staff is to carry out initial diagnostic interviews with clients and to manage activities and services. The staff are employees of the host institution. The Center aims for a 10% annual increase in demand for services and the numbers attending events annually at present are as follows; 70 for counselling sessions; 1,000 for training events; 350 for networking activities.

They have a close relationship with the host institution and benefit from a major contribution from students who support information and financial management activities in the Center and also work directly with clients on a project basis.

Business information provision is not a central part of the service they offer, however they do have a library containing books and reference works. They make some referral to the university library but there are some restrictions on use of electronic resources by people who are not students or faculty members.

The Center has a specific focus on women entrepreneurs and is particularly interested in assisting those from disadvantaged groups. However, they welcome a broad audience to their events and these include men and employees of local businesses looking to develop their skills.

The Women's Business Center is of specific interest in the context of this study due to:

- their ability to offer services at low operating cost due to their ability to fully utilise volunteers; students and other service providers, and;
- the role they play in acting as a local catalyst and, in particular, one which connects the host institution with the local community.

## 13. Conclusions based on research findings

Drawing together the threads through the report, we have identified eleven key conclusions.

### 13.1 The business information landscape

**The business information service landscape is fragmented and difficult to navigate**. There is widespread confusion from businesses as to where to source information. The growth of sites like 'Confused.com' and others has led to an expectation that portals and one-stop shops can reduce the need for having to search numerous websites or rely on web search engine searches. There is frustration that no such site exists to help navigate information sources and a concern that they never know the full extent of information available.

### 13.2 Access to ' grey literature' generated to support business development.

**There is a growing need to access information generated by local and regional government, specialist organisations and trade bodies.** The growth in the development of businesses operating in niche markets has led to a growing need for businesses to track regional and sectoral trends and developments. This has placed increased importance on the data being compiled by regional development agencies, local councils, chambers of commerce and trade bodies. However lack of common standards for the indexing of this data means that it is difficult to find out what data is available. This means that businesses and service providers are likely to be missing valuable data to support them and their clients.

> *'The impact of the recession has meant… that the information that the regional development agencies compile and disseminate becomes more valuable as it helps to track changes within the economy of the region.'*
> Regional development agency (from interview)

### 13.3 Access to online and personalises onsite services.

**SMEs have an ambiguous approach to the question of location-based as opposed to online-based services**. There is a clear preference for a maximum amount of desktop access to information, the use of social networking and other interactive tools, to communicate with customers and share experiences with other entrepreneurs. However, there is also a preference for meeting face-to-face with business advisors and professionals to facilitate the building of trust and for the energising nature of interaction with people at networking events. Any service delivery model must therefore provide the opportunity for businesses to receive a personalised service with face-to-face contact and the ability to develop an ongoing relationship with the service provider.

> *'Online has its place but people often do not have any recollection of online experiences and their services/targets are all based around 'meaningful engagements'*
> Regional development agency (from interview)
>
> *'There is a substantial demand for 1-1 information advice and guidance. This would best be offered by advisors visiting the businesses and the people offering the service must have a good knowledge of business issues to have any credibility. This would be an attractive and cheap alternative to reliance on legal professionals and accountants.'*
> Policy unit; trade body (from interview)
>
> *'The key factor in access to information is ease of access, which does not neccesarily mean online, it can just mean local. Online access scores less highly than site access as a key mediation role. In the areas of training and guidance 1-1 and personalised services are vital as most SMEs will not relate to generic examples and will view their product/service as unique.'*
> Government department (from interview)

## 13.4 Levels of information and support services

**From the perspective of a business, access to information-related services can be broken down into levels of service** based on the level of engagement with the service provider and other contacts. We can identify these three distinct levels of interaction:

| |
|---|
| **Level 1 -** Many businesses will use the Web and resources like a public library to research an idea in a wholly anonymous way, carrying out their own research with minimal contact with service providers. This may be due to the fact that their idea is at an early embryonic stage, concerns about commercial confidentiality or it may just be a personal preference. Service providers will have no awareness of how their services are being used by this individual or company. |
| **Level 2 -** Many businesses will seek the assistance of staff working for service providers to guide their research or as part of training packages. This level of interaction will involve some level of contact and sharing of information with the service provider. For example in an online environment this may involve creating an online profile to use in social networking or to set up services. There will often be some means for the service provider to build a picture of how this individual or company is using the service. |
| **Level 3 -** The highest level of interaction will involve the delivery of intensive mentoring and value-added services offered by specialists. In this instance the business will share a large amount of information with the service provider and the relationship may require a financial transaction. |

## 13.5 Definition of business information

**The existing definitions of business information are too limited in scope.**
For a business, the concept of business information as understood within the library and information profession is largely meaningless. It is a question of accessing data, contacts and guidance when needed as well as obtaining feedback. Information can underpin a major business development decision; it can resolve an immediate operational problem or it can be the name of a useful business contact. This means that those providing information services should be more aware of the use to which information is made and more aware of means of accessing information, such as field research, other than published material.

## 13.6 Pricing of information

**For businesses, the pricing of much business information is a major barrier to access.** The pricing of published information and the formats in which it is delivered prevents many smaller businesses from accessing this information. Indeed publishing models for not many business information providers have not changed significantly over past twenty years, with the Web providing a means to deliver content without fundamentally changing the structure and packaging of the information. Evidence from the study indicates a willingness on the part of SMEs to pay for high quality information delivered in more flexible pricing and more varied packages and datasets, but the publishers have yet to respond. This means that publishers are failing to reach potential customers. With public and higher education libraries and other public sector organisations facing reduced funding, there is evidence of cuts being made to budgets for purchase of information sources.

## 13.7 The impact of the recession on profile of those starting businesses

**The recession is likely to lead to an increased number of people looking to start a business,** in particular more graduate entrepreneurs and/or people from the professions and the financial services sectors looking to start a business. Their experiences will mean that they will be more likely to approach higher education institutions and libraries. However, they are also likely to have high expectations of the service provided which in turn creates challenges and opportunities.

*'There are 3 categories of entrepreneur in the current climate:.serial entrepreneurs who will carry on looking to develop business ideas; thinkers who will probably hold back and those being forced to look at entrepreneurship due to redundancy. The latter group are likely to have differing expectations from services as many will have operated in professions, finance and had more formal education'.*
Regional development agency (from interview)

'*There would be a substantial demand for 1-1 information advice and guidance. This would best be offered by advisors visiting the businesses and the people offering the service must have a good knowledge of business issues to have any credibility. This would be an attractive and cheap alternative to reliance on legal professionals and accountants'*.
Small business development policy unit (from interview)

## 13.8 The impact of the speed of economic change on services

**The recession has had an impact on the type of information and information services needed**. The rate of economic change means that businesses must react quickly to developments and opportunities; services which provide the information and guidance to support decision-making must reflect these reduced timeframes.

*'…Another aspect of the recession is that things change very quickly which has an impact on the types of service needed, speed of responsiveness and currency of information.'*
Regional development agency (from interview)

## 13.9 The impact of targets on the integration of services.

**Many targets do not provide incentives for integration of services.** The ability for potential information and support service providers to work in co-operation is compromised by a range of different funding organisations. Targets and outputs often actively penalise co-operative working.

## 13. 10 The role of Business Link

**Business Link has a key referral and diagnostic role to play** within the business support framework identified by ‘Solutions for Business’. The role in relation to business information is primarily one of referring businesses to sources and raising their awareness of the role of information. In order to deliver this, there will be a requirement for them to have a raised level of information literacy and access to better online guidance to information sources.

## 13.10 The role of higher education institutions

**Higher education institutions have a key role to play in utilising specialist information and expertise to support businesses**. Using the definitions of service level identified at 12.4, we have concluded that the focus should be on services offered at levels two and three. Through these services, higher education institutions will be able to form and develop close relationships with businesses. This will enable them to undertake activities and services which are already a strength within many institutions such as:

- consultancy services based on the expertise of academics and business development managers;
- the generation of information based on research carried out within institutions and provision of open access to this information;
- access to specialist information sources within higher education libraries on a controlled and referral basis, and;.
- the use of students internship, joint project working which support both teaching activities and business engagement.

## 13.11 Overseas best practice

**We believe that the American Small Business Development Center (SBDC) network provides numerous examples of good practice.** This is particularly the case in the following areas:

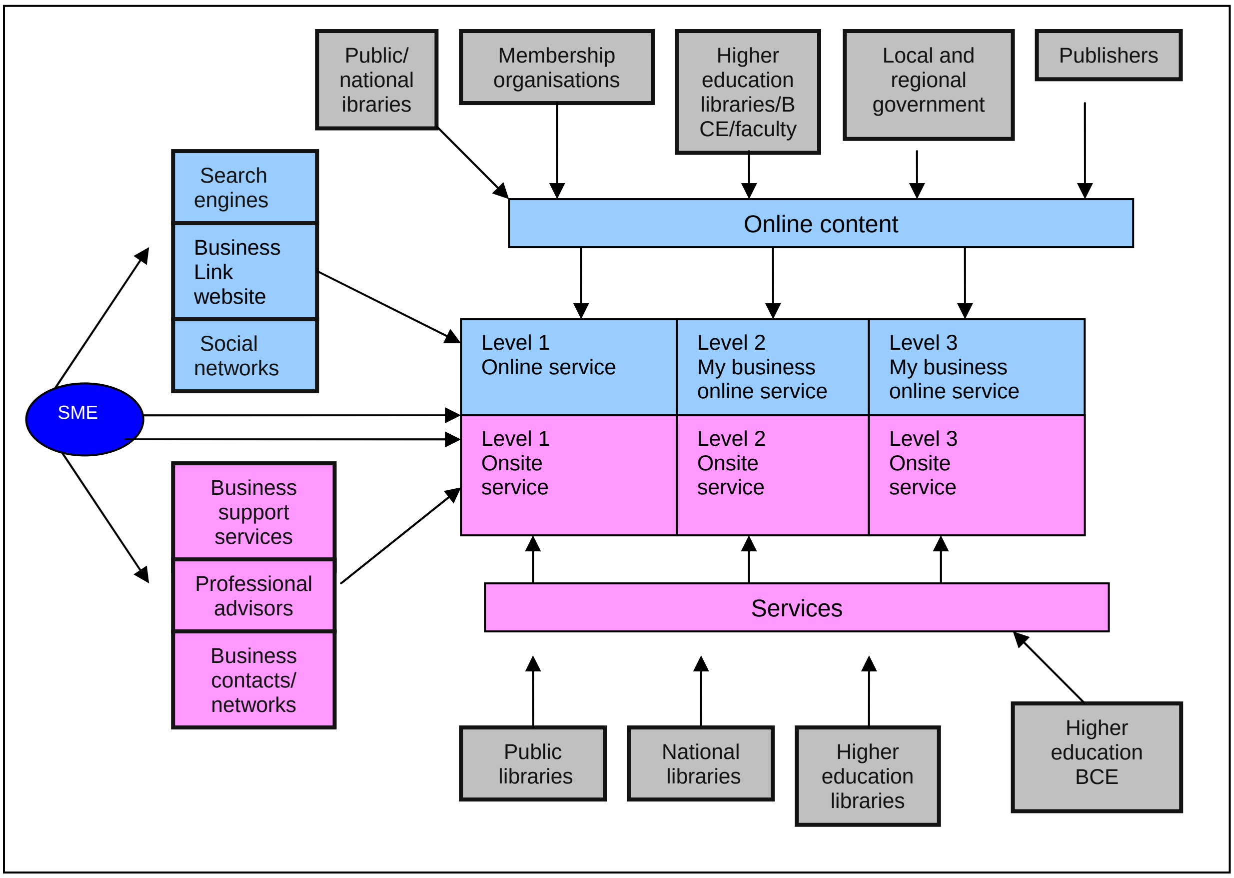
- the provision of a national network of business support services with a consistent core service, which is easy for clients to understand and to navigate;
- the involvement of higher education institutions in business and community engagement at a local level and, in particular, the role played in connecting local businesses with students;
- partnership between higher education institutions; central and local government and the private sector in developing and delivering services;
- the development of innovative information-based products within the network.

Whilst we acknowledge that the development of a similar network in the UK would involve higher education institutions encroaching on activities performed by organisations like Business Link and enterprise agencies, we believe that there are lessons to be learned and benefits to be gained from closer links between UK higher education institutions and the SBDC network.

# 14. Our recommendations for the future

The purpose of this research was to assess the current state of business information provision and identify future models for development. The findings and conclusions from the research lead us to propose an integrated information service model which incorporates online and onsite services. This model will be co-ordinated at a national level and managed at a local and regional level. This is an aspirational objective but we have identified specific workpackages which will provide the basis for such a model and will have their own value as stand-alone projects which bring shorter-term benefits to the business community.

**Integrated information service model**




## 14.1 Basis for the integrated service model

The model is based on the following principles:

- The integration of services provided by the range of service providers to prevent duplication and to maximise the use of resources which are available to help businesses access and understand information.
- To maximise the access businesses have to information and guidance at their desks through a one-stop information portal. This portal will operate on a number of different levels and will provide the infrastructure for personalising and customising usage.
- To present publishers and information providers with the opportunity to sell packages of data through a single information portal, thereby enabling them to sell direct to businesses. This will allow all publishers to access a much larger audience and will be of particular benefit to smaller publishers with more limited resources for sale and marketing.

- To provide businesses with the opportunity to access and interact on a one-to-one basis with information and subject specialists.
- To provide greater clarity in the roles that specific services play in providing information to support businesses. This will assist funding bodies in ensuring that funding is allocated where it can have the greatest impact.
- To provide a service model which can link seamlessly to the business support model identified in the 'Solutions For Business' programme.
- The desirability of building on existing examples of good practice. It is essential that services which operate successfully at present are able to continue and to provide benchmarks for other service providers.

The model is based around the perspective of businesses when accessing information and support services. A determining element of this is the extent to which businesses develop a personalised relationship with a service provider and the commitment of time and resources required to support individual businesses. Our research has identified three distinct levels which are a useful indicator to determine which service providers are best placed to offer the service, the type of relationships which the service provider is seeking to develop to meet their strategic objectives, service targets and conditions of funding.

This is an outline of the nature of the relationship between businesses and service providers and the information which is shared.

| | **SME** | **Service Provider** |
|---|---|---|
| **Level 1** | Accesses service without the need to share information or have any significant interaction with service provider. | Does not capture data or track usage by individual client. |
| **Level 2** | Has some level of interaction with service provider and may share some information about business needs and activities. | Is able to record and track usage of services by individual business. May be able to collect top level data on information needs of business, the sector they are from and demographic information. |
| **Level 3** | Develops a personalised one-to-one relationship with service provider and shares a high level of detailed information with them. The relationship may be subject to a contract and non-disclosure agreement. | Has a closely managed relationship with the customer and commits significant resources to providing personalised service. Service may be subject to a financial transaction between service provider and a funding body or business. |

## 14.2 The services to be offered

Given the breadth of scope of organisations potentially involved in business information provision and the overlap between advice and information, it is essential to define the types of service which will be incorporated into the model.

Although the definitions of business advice and information clearly overlap it is our view that provision of information-related services and the management of information should be viewed as requiring specific and distinct levels of expertise. For this reason the model will include the categories below but will not incorporate business advice. However access to specialist expertise and knowledge exchange is incorporated in the model and this will be a key role for higher education institutions.

The services are broken into three general categories:

- **Onsite services**. Services which require the customer to visit a location or engage directly with a service provider through phone, email, instant messaging or related means.
- **Online services**. Guidance and content which can be accessed directly and anonymously without any need for pre-registration.
- **Customisable online services**. Online services, content and guidance which will require the customer to pre-register and create an online profile and create a 'My Business' home page.

These are examples of services which can be offered at each level.

| Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 |
|---|---|---|
| **Online services** | **Customisable online services 'My Business'** | **Customisable online services 'My Business'** |
| Online access to open access third-party published information through web portal | The facility to customise the home page and create a 'my library' page for storing and downloading of material | Updating and awareness services based on specific criteria set by the customer. |
| On-demand purchase of premium content. | Purchase of premium content on an ongoing subscription-based service or based around deals for specific groups. | Services based around instant messaging and other forms of real time online interaction between clients and specialists. |
| | Standard updating and awareness services. | |
| | Online networking services | |
| | Controlled remote access to premium online content | |
| **Onsite services** | **Onsite services** | **Onsite services** |
| Access to collections and premium online content in libraries. | One-to-one diagnostic and guidance in using information | In-depth one-to-one mentoring. |
| Reference services in library | Access to collections and premium online content in libraries by special arrangements/agreements. | Access to specialist expertise and resources. |
| | Workshops and training in the use of information. | In-depth research services. |
| | | Staff exchange and internships. |

### 14.3 Who will deliver the onsite services?

This is an outline of the types of organisation best placed to offer these services. However, we recognise that there are a number of factors which will lead to variations on a local and regional level. These could be based around facilities available, the way that services have developed and the local and regional profile of these services. The potential role of service providers is as follows:.

- **Public libraries:** Public libraries are ideally placed to play the role of a hub at a local level. This is because of their central locations and their remit to support local communities. It is also noted that the development of personalised relationships with customers is not a basis for how libraries are funded. They are therefore well placed to be providers of Level 1 and Level 2 services. They will be the initial point to which businesses will be referred for access to information and guidance in how to source information. They will carry out a diagnostic and signposting role to identify other Level 2 and Level 3 service providers which can assist the business. They will also be in a position to offer a generic workshops and training. It is envisaged that the role of hub will be played by larger reference libraries in urban centres and that there will be referral to these hubs from branch libraries

- **National libraries:** The British Library and National Library of Scotland are in a unique position in that they have the potential to offer services on a local and national level at all levels. The National Library of Wales does not currently play a significant role in the provision of business information services but they would clearly have a potential role to play in future, should this change.

- **Higher education libraries:** The primary role of higher education libraries is to serve students and academics and this will continue to provide challenges in the allocation of resources. Existing licences also restrict access to electronic resources to academic users. Recognising these limitations, we view the role of higher education libraries in this model to be the provision of access to Level 2 services. This will involve the provision of access to collections and subscription-based online services to businesses. This access will be controlled and will be accessible to alumni and to other businesses on referral from public libraries. It is likely that this access will be for more specialist information than can be supplied by public libraries. Higher education libraries can also have a role to play in providing undergraduate training, they may also have the potential to offer priced in-depth research.
  We recognise that some Higher education libraries have an existing remit to serve the wider community. This would mean that they have the potential to operate as hubs within the proposed service model and offer Level 1 services. We also acknowledge that there may be changes in the nature of licences which may remove a major obstacle to higher education libraries providing Level 1 services.

- **Higher education BCE:** The role of higher education BCE practitioners will be provide access to specialist and in-depth assistance and consultancy services . They will operate Level 2 and Level 3 services primarily to innovation-based companies and those in the creative industries. These will include existing knowledge transfer activities but will be extended to provide a central point of contact between businesses and expertise held within institutions. Although it is anticipated that the majority of services offered, and relationships developed, will be within the regions and localities in which the institution is based, a key part of this model will be the extent to which these services will co-operate on a national basis.

- 

- **Business support organisations** Given that the primary role of organisations such as Business Link and Enterprise Agencies is to provide advice, their role is primarily one of referral. However, it is noted that there are examples of Level 1 and Level 2 information-based services being offered by these organisations. In these cases it is envisaged that these services should be incorporated in the model.

## 14.4 Who will manage the online portal?

This will require central management and co-ordination at a national level as well as co-ordination at a regional and local level.

- **National level:** It is desirable that the national co-ordination is the responsibility of a single organisation that will set standards, confirm a central architecture for the site and agree content on a national and international level. Although such a body would consult with stakeholders throughout the design and implementation stage, and on an ongoing basis thereafter, it is essential that lines of responsibility and accountability are clear. This body would also work closely with publishers. The organisation concerned would ideally have a national remit in relation to information provision. The option of partnering with a partner from the private sector with the ability to deliver the information infrastructure could be investigated.

- **Local/regional:** We believe that co-ordination at a local and regional level could be carried out by a grouping incorporating service providers and business representatives with input from bodies like the Federation of Small Business and Chambers of Commerce. The mix of organisations is likely to vary on a local and regional basis. However, there may be potential for higher education institutions to play a leading role on a regional level and that this could involve higher education libraries, BCE practitioners and students via placements and project work.

## 14.5 Who will supply the content?

The content will include freely accessible online content and priced content supplied by information publishers. The portal will use a single searchable interface to identify and provide links to downloadable content.

- **Freely accessible online content:** This will include data and guidance provided by a range of information suppliers. Here are some examples of the kind of content that will be included:
  - Central government official statistics.
  - Local and regionally generated data and regional intelligence.
  - Open access specialist data produced by higher education institutions.
  - Information produced by trade associations and other bodies.

- **Priced online content:** This will be supplied by publishers and information providers and will be delivered in a variety of packages and formats.

## 14.6 What should be in place to facilitate the development of this model?

In order for the integrated service model to work certain things need to be in place. We have outlined some essential building blocks for an integrated business support and information infrastructure. Each of the recommendations has some intrinsic value and would lead to an improvement in the infrastructure without the need for all others to be in place. Each can be defined as specific project for which funding and potential commercial partners can be sought.

- Common indexing standards for priced published data and open access data produced at local and central government data. This would facilitate access from a central portal but also facilitate search engine optimisation.
- Common standards for service descriptions for all service providers. This is particularly important for higher education BCE activities.
- Standardised licence agreements for priced online content.
- Greater awareness of information services and a higher level of awareness of the importance on the part of the bodies that will offer key referral point. These will include: business support organisations; professional services such as banks and chambers of commerce.
- Greater understanding of the needs of businesses and how they use information on the part of information service providers, particularly those working in public libraries.
- Common indexing standards/taxonomy for business engagement activities from higher education business and community engagement services.
- A national scheme of innovation vouchers as a common form of currency across UK services, including information services. This will enable SMEs to access Level 3 services from service providers across the UK and to purchase information services and published data.
- Funding which is based on targets which incentivise co-operation and referral and not competition between service providers.

## 14.7 Action plan

**1)Regional online business information and service portal pilot**

The setting up of a service pilot based around the creation of a regional information portal. This will be an opportunity for various service providers and local businesses to work together on a well defined project with easily identifiable mutual benefits. The result will be a service which will offer immediate benefits for businesses and will test the viability of a national portal. It will also lead to greater communication and awareness of onsite services. Whilst being a regional information portal, in addition, there are requirements for any small business to have access to national information and as such, this should be included. Higher education institutions are well placed to play a leading and co-ordinating role in the initiation and development of such a portal. This is due to the experience of delivery of services to the business community which exists in many institutions; the local profile and reputation of these institutions and the potential to include students in the development work.

This action plan will include:

- Selecting a region to pilot the on-line portal. Major determining factors will be the existence of higher education institutions with a strong record of business and community engagement; the active support of regional development agencies for this initiative.
- Creation of portal framework.
- Identifying and collaborating with service providers:
    - Publishers (subscription and free-to-access)
    - Funding bodies
    - Business support organisations
    - Chambers of commerce
    - Federation of Small Businesses
    - Skills and training organisations
    - Government fiscal and policy information
    - Local government/council information provision
    - Regional news and initiatives
    - Regional higher education BCE services
    - Local and national statistics
    - Regional industry-specific trade associations

The workshop findings and interviews undertaken demonstrate that it is important for SMEs to be able to use a search facility on such a portal that takes them directly to the information that they require. Initially, the pilot portal may be considered a signposting exercise with each of the service providers permitting access to their respective sites, but strong feedback indicates that their respective sites in the future should evolve with a commonality of format that permits an ease of access to the appropriate required information and services.

**2) The opening of a dialogue with publishers and information providers.**
This will address potential models through which content could be made accessible through an online. Although the results of these discussions could be tested within the regional pilot described above, we believe that such a dialogue should be conducted by a body with a national remit.

**3) Survey of 'grey literature' generated to support business development.**
There is a need to identify the economic, statistical and sector-based data being produced by the regional and local government, by trade associations, chambers of commerce and other membership organisations. This could also incorporate studies being carried out across higher education institutions.

**4) Review of feasibility of extension of innovation voucher scheme to include information.**
As identified early in this report, the Innovation Voucher scheme can be considered a success by many small businesses. To facilitate access to the subscription and paid for information through the regional pilot portal, extending the use of the Innovation Voucher for purchasing information is considered a valuable and important catalyst to SMEs accessing and using such information. It is recognised that services currently funded by innovation vouchers are currently included in the portfolio of services identified by Solutions For Business. Therefore such an extension will potentially impact on that initiative and further work is required to assess the feasibility of this approach.

**5) Creation of a national programme of training in information literacy for business support organisations and professional services.**
We have identified a key role for business support organisations and professional advisors such as lawyers and accountants in raising awareness of the importance of information and referring businesses to services. There is a need to provide training to these ‘second tier’ organisations in information literacy. A starting point in this will be the establishment of a common standard and format for training that can be applied across the UK.

**6) Further research into graduate entrepreneurship.**
The study has identified an increasing trend for graduates to see entrepreneurship as a career option as the recession restricts the potential to explore other career options. This development could have a substantial impact on the role that higher education institutions can play. However, all we have had this far is speculation and more research is needed on this specific group of entrepreneurs as it could impact on services offered to post graduates and training and education offered to under graduates.

**7) Creation of contacts between UK BCE and the American Small Business Development Center network.**
The initiation of a dialogue between UK BCE practitioners and the Association of an Small Business Development Centers in the U.S.A. to share knowledge and best practice. This dialogue could be initiated by a body such as JISC or the National Co-ordinating Centre For Public Engagement.

## Appendix A: List of consultees

| Organisation | Name |
|---|---|
| Acting the Party ® | Claire Hainstock |
| Advantage NI | Sharon Browne |
| Association of Community-Based Business Advisors | Armando Pardo |
| Aston University | Peter Shearer |
| Ballymena Business Centre | Patricia Elliott |
| Beacon South West | Sue Baker |
| Beacon South West | Colin Spencer Halsey |
| Belfast Central Library | Gary Patterson |
| Belfast Central Library | Stephen McFarlane |
| Belfast City Council | Rhonda Lynn |
| Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (at time of interview) | Leigh Jackson |
| Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (at time of interview) | Michel Woodman |
| Birmingham City Libraries | Duncan Jones |
| Bolton Central Library | Steven Hartshorne |
| Bravo Computers | Mark Wake |
| Bravo Computers | John Pattinson |
| Brighton & Hove City Libraries | Stephanie Green |
| Brighton & Hove City Libraries | Margaret Curson |
| British Library Business & IP Centre | Jeremy O'Hare |
| Business & Enterprise North East | Katrina McGregor |
| Business Link (East Midlands) | Peter McBride |
| Business Link East of England | Roger Riseley |
| Business Link East of England | Emma Heath |
| Business Link in London | Claire Whayman |
| Business Link Northwest | Gemma Smith |
| Business Link Yorkshire | Sarah Carette |
| Business Plan Services | Jane Khedair |
| Cambridgeshire Libraries | Pat Birch |
| Cardiff University Library | Stephen Ratcliffe |
| Centre for Micro Enterprise, London Metropolitan University | Hilary Farnworth |
| City Business Library | Goretti Considine |

| Organisation | Name |
|---|---|
| City of Edinburgh Council | Charlie Shanlin |
| Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce | Mick Page |
| Coventry City Council | John Norton |
| Coventry University Enterprises | Brian More |
| Coventry University Library | Caroline Rock |
| Coventry University Library | Sue Marshall |
| Coventry, Solihull Warwickshire Partnership | Lynda Pinks |
| Cyberoak Ltd | Charles Dixon |
| De Montfort University | Joanna Lawrence |
| De Montfort University Kimberlin Library | Nathan Rush |
| Design Network North | Martin McGurk |
| Dragon Innovation Partnership (Swansea University) | Chris Talbot |
| East Midlands Development Agency | Martin French |
| East Midlands Development Agency | Fred Forshaw |
| East Midlands Incubation Network | Russell Copley |
| East of England Development Agency | Catherine Rowe |
| East of England Development Agency | Steven Thain |
| East of England Development Agency | David Wall |
| East of England Development Agency | Jan Pinkerton |
| East of England Development Agency | Tim Burton |
| East Sussex Enterprise Hub | Ian Goodyer |
| Edward Boyle Library, University of Leeds | Rosemary Campbell-Blair |
| Edward Boyle Library, University of Leeds | Deirdre Andre |
| Elixir Foundations | Ben Donnelly |
| Emily Cummins | Emily Cummins |
| Enterprise Europe | Gillian Kears |
| Enterprise Europe Network | Claudia Lock-Fuerst |
| Enterprise Europe Network | Veronique Lefebvre |
| European Business and Innovation Centre Network | Giordano S.Dichter |
| Exeter Central Library | Joanne Launder |
| Factories For The Future | Dr Martin Ziarati |
| Federation of Small Businesses | Maxine Aldred |
| Federation of Small Businesses | Mike Salamon |
| Federation of Small Businesses (East Midlands Policy unit) | John Hardwick |
| Federation of Small Businesses (East of England Area Policy Unit) | Michael Mealing |
| Federation of Small Businesses, Policy Unit | Matthew Jaffa |
| Federation of Small Businesses, Suffolk Branch | Chris Soule |

| Organisation | Name |
|---|---|
| fitgencY | Scott Woodhead |
| Freed New Fashion | Jennifer Graham |
| Glow New Media | Phil Blything |
| Go Glasgow | Sue Lindsay |
| Hampshire Public Libraries | Helen Brewer |
| Hampshire Public Libraries | Terry Firth |
| HERDA-SW | Robin Bower |
| Heriott Watt University | Tony Weir |
| Heriott Watt University | Catherine Ure |
| Hospital Aids | Steve Clarke |
| Institute of Chartered Accountants Scotland | Ellen Peacock |
| Integra Communications, Nottingham | Louise Third |
| Interface | Louise Arnold |
| Invest NI | Mandy Mills |
| InvestMentors | Barbara Hankins |
| Islington Library & Cultural Services | Keith Scott |
| Keele University | David Carson |
| Keele University | Katherine Birch |
| Leicester Chamber of Commerce | Martin Traynor |
| Leonard Cheshire Disability | Ann Chaplin |
| Leonard Cheshire Disability | Leonore Lord |
| Liverpool Central Library | Ruth Grodner |
| London Borough of Camden | Steven Lack |
| London Business Support Services | David Scott |
| London Business Support Services | Peter Landau |
| London Development Agency | Kirstie McBriar |
| London Development Agency | Pani Christodoulou |
| Mallusk Enterprise Park | Lorraine Moore |
| Manchester Business School Library | Dominic Broadhurst |
| Manchester Central Library | Chris Brown |
| Manchester Central Library | Jonathan Ebbs |
| Manchester Enterprises | Alex Cole |
| Manchester Metropolitan University | Jane Bentley |
| Manchester Metropolitan University Library | Margaret Robinson |
| Michael Creedy | |
| Motasem | Sabina Ali |
| Museums Libraries & Archives, London | Ellen Collins |
| National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement | Paul Manners |
| National Library Of Scotland | John Coll |
| NESTA | Albert Bravo-Biosca |
| Newry & Mourne Enterprise Ageny | Barbara Whitfield |
| Newry & Mourne Enterprise Ageny | Colin Hanna |
| Norfolk & Norwich Millennium Public Library | Catherine Wymer |
| Nottingham Trent University | Phil Clarke |
| Nottingham University Business Library | Jane Grogan |
| One NorthEast | Oliver Roberts |

| Organisation | Name |
|---|---|
| Organipets | John Rice |
| Oswald Consultancy | Jim Oswald |
| Plastipack | Peter Adlington |
| Plymouth Public Libraries | Chris Goddard |
| Precious Online | Foluke Akinlose |
| Proton Europe | Jose Syne |
| Pulse Creative Marketing | Paul Finch |
| Pulse Creative Marketing | Karen Foster |
| QED Consulting Doncaster | Steve Hinton |
| Queens University Belfast | Lorraine Marks |
| Quite Frankly Water | Paul Ulett |
| RBS | Carla Waller |
| Research Councils UK | Mark Claydon-Smith |
| Research Councils UK | Gillian Rendle |
| Right Communications | Chris Charlton |
| Robert Gordon University | Anne Nichol |
| RTC North | Catherine Smith |
| RTC North | Rob Ashworth |
| SCONUL | Toby Bainton |
| Scotland UnLtd | Gina Headden |
| Scottish Cultural Enterprise Office | Marie Milligan |
| Scottish Enterprise | Billy Wong |
| Scottish Enterprise | Lorna McLean |
| Scottish Enterprise | Sarah McSkimming |
| Scottish Enterprise | Jane Watters |
| Scottish Enterprise | Emily Wilson |
| Sensible Media Ltd | Neil Courtis |
| Sheffield Hallam University | Terri Gibson |
| Sheffield Hallam University | Lloyd Snellgrove |
| Shirlaws | Jane Borer |
| Shoppers Anonymous | Jonathan Winchester |
| Skills For Enterprise | Amanda McGregor |
| Skills For Enterprise | Sanjay Pancholi |
| Social Firms Wales | Sam Leonard |
| Somerset College | Andrew Hobbs |
| South East England Development Agency | Claire Shah |
| Street Style Surgery | Sissy Roonery |
| Sunderland City Council | Kevin Perkins |
| Syntens | Greetje Biljoo |
| Syntens | Emile Louzada |
| Tacpac | Hilary Wainer |
| Tag Tennis | Sally Relton Shakespeare |
| Tameside Libraries | Stephanie Booth |
| TBD | Damian Flannery |
| Technology Innovation International | Christine Robinson |

| Organisation | Name |
|---|---|
| The Mitchell Library | Karen Donnelly |
| Tissue Viability Consultancy | Sylvie Hampton |
| Tourism & Marketing | Bill Richards |
| Trovo Ltd | David Gerrard |
| UK Business Incubation | Arnaud Drapier |
| UK IPO | Dave Hopkins |
| UniversitiesUK | Vivienne Stern |
| University of Hertfordshire | Helen Singer |
| University of Hertfordshire | Jane Bilson |
| University of Bath | David Cockayne |
| University of Bedforshire Library | Peter Godwin |
| University of Bedforshire Library | Alan Bullimore |
| University of Bolton | Ted Martin |
| University of Bradford | Sarah Jarmin |
| University of Bradford | Sally Mardikian |
| University of Bristol | Neil Bradshaw |
| University of Cambridge, Judge Business School | Kirsty Taylor |
| University of East Anglia | Ellen Paterson |
| University of East London | Sally Crosthwaite |
| University of Edinburgh | Denny Colledge |
| University of Edinburgh Business School | Deborah Morrison |
| University of Glamorgan Commercial Services | Alun Cox |
| University of Glasgow | Laura Tyler |
| University of Glasgow Library | Moira Sinclair |
| University of Leeds, Enterprise Innovation Office | Adam Getliff |
| University of Lincoln | Andrew Stevenson |
| University of Manchester Rylands Library | John French |
| University of Manchester Rylands Library | Jane Marshall |
| University of Manchester, Manchester Enterprise Centre | Dr Lee Webster |
| University of Salford | Sandra MacPherson |
| University of Sheffield | Maria Mawson |
| University of Stirling | Joelle Russell |
| University of Stirling | Alasdair Stewart |
| University of Sunderland | Vince Robson |
| University of Sussex Library | Cath Morgan |
| University of Ulster | Sean Nelson |
| University of Warwick | Anne Bell |
| University of Warwick Ventures | David Calvert |
| University of York | Simon Newton |
| University of York | Mark Mortimor |
| Wales Innovator's Network | Phil Lewis |
| Wales Innovator's Network | Phil Sims |
| Welsh Assembly | Huw Pritchard |
| Westminster Reference Library | Susanna Barnes |
| Wood Green Library | Diana Edmonds |
| Worcester Business School | Tim Maxfield |

# Appendix B: Further reading


## Higher education libraries

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**Innovation and entrepreneurship**
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FEDERATION OF SMALL BUSINESSES, 2009. *Business support and finance* and *skills and training*. Both available at: http://www.fsb.org.uk/default.aspx?id=18&loc=general
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**Business support**
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*http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file51789.pdf*

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## Related JISC studies: Business and Community Engagement

All available at: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/themes/bce.aspx

- User needs study*: How JISC could support Buiness and Community Engagement.*
- Evaluation report*: JISC Services and the third stream.*
- Final report*: Study of Customer Relationship Management Issues in UK HE institutions.*
- Study: *The use of publicly-funded infrastructure, services, and intellectual property for BCE..*
- *Business and Community Engagement: An overview of JISC activities.*
- *JISC BCE Consultation Workshop Series 2008/2009 Report.*

# Appendix C: Full set of results from consultation

## 1) The current state of business information provision in the UK: service provider interviews.

### 1.1 What types of business are represented in their client base?

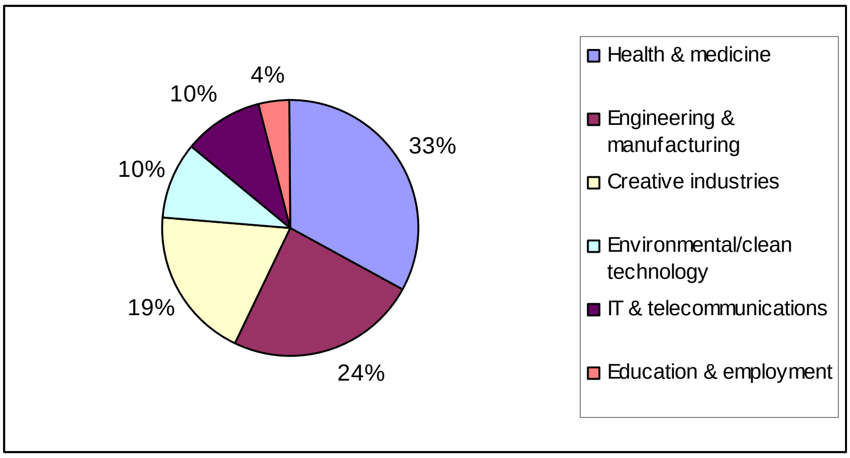
Interviewees were asked to offer a percentage breakdown of the types of business represented in their client base.

| % | Sole traders | Students | Academics | Ltd companies (under 50 employees | Ltd companies (50-250 employees | Ltd companies (251+) | Social enterpises | Public Sector |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public libraries | 33 | 2 | 2 | 35 | 13 | 5 | 10 | 0 |
| Higher/further education libraries | 0 | 87 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Higher education BCE | 7 | 19 | 16 | 19 | 16 | 10 | 3 | 10 |
| Business support organisations | 31 | 5 | 1 | 44 | 2 | 2 | 15 | 0 |
| **Total** | 18 | 23 | 9 | 27 | 7 | 4 | 8 | 3 |

### 1.2 Which are the main sectors represented in their client base?

Interviewees were asked to name the top three sectors represented in their client base. The figures are presented for higher education business and community engagement (BCE) and business support organisations as many of the other categories of service provider were unable to supply this information.

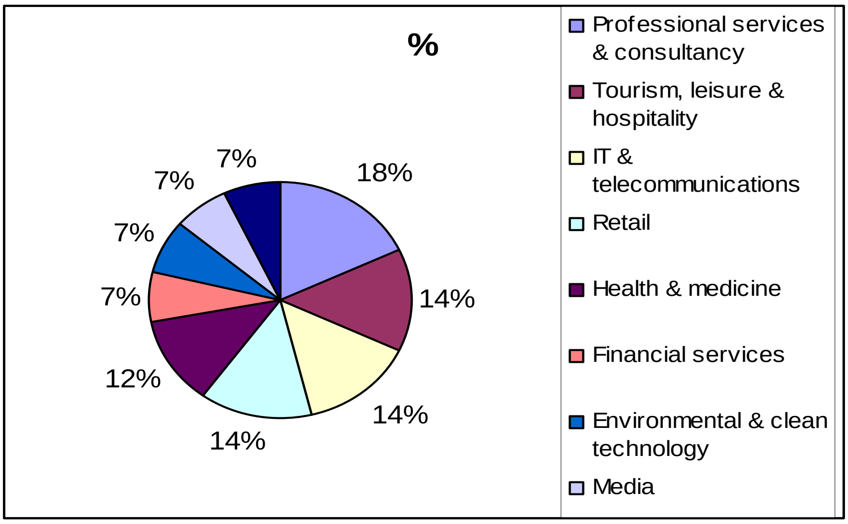
#### 1.2.1 Higher education business & community engagement: % breakdown of client base




**Notes**

- With most higher education institutions, commercial relationships tended to match the sector/subject specialisation of the institutions and the industries which are prevalent in that region.

### 1.2.2 Business support organisations: % breakdown of client base




### 1.3 What services do they offer their clients?

Interviewees were asked to select their core services from a list of services. The table shows the percentage of interviewees offering each service.

| % | Provide Business Advice | Provide Business Information | Provide Development Work Through the Faculties | Assist in Seeking Finance/Funding | Help with IP protection of their product/idea | Provide incubation/Office/ workshop facilities |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public libraries | 50 | 100 | 0 | 75 | 50 | 75 |
| Higher/further education libraries | 0 | 80 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Higher education BCE | 80 | 50 | 60 | 80 | 60 | 50 |
| Business support organisations | 83 | 83 | 42 | 75 | 58 | 25 |
| **Total** | 64 | 76 | 33 | 67 | 45 | 33 |

### 1.4 Which types of business information do they offer their clients?

Interviewees who offered access to business information were asked to select from a list of types of information. The table shows the percentage of interviewees offering access to each type of information.

| % | Market | Company financial | Product | IP | Industry and trade news | Legal | Statistics & economic data | Design | Mailing Lists |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public libraries | 100 | 100 | 100 | 50 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 50 | 100 |
| Higher education libraries | 100 | 100 | 100 | 20 | 60 | 100 | 80 | 20 | 0 |
| Higher education BCE | 75 | 50 | 50 | 88 | 63 | 38 | 38 | 38 | 25 |
| Business support organisations | 67 | 50 | 42 | 42 | 42 | 42 | 67 | 33 | 33 |
| **Total** | **85** | **75** | **73** | **51** | **70** | **70** | **76** | **36** | **40** |

### 1.5 Which types of business information are most heavily used by their clients?

Interviewees were asked to give an overall mark out of ten for each information type listed. The table indicates the average mark given by interviewees from each organisation type.

| Average rating out of 10 | Market | Company financial | Product | IP | Industry and trade news | Legal | Statistics & economic data | Mailing lists |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public libraries | 9 | 8 | 6 | 1 | 8 | 4 | 7 | 7 |
| Higher/further education libraries | 8 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 6 | n/a |
| Higher education BCE | 7 | 4 | 4 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Business support organisations | 7 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 2 |
| **Total** | **8** | **6** | **5** | **3** | **5** | **4** | **5** | **3** |

### 1.6 Where else do they refer clients who need information?

Interviewees were asked to select the types of organisation/service/source to which they refer clients who need information. The table shows the percentage of interviewees selecting each organisation/service.

| % | The Web | Public libraries | HE libraries | HE faculty | The British Library | Publications to be purchased | Consul-tants | Trade associations | Field research | Funding organisations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public libraries | 75 | 25 | 50 | 0 | 75 | 50 | 25 | 100 | 25 | 50 |
| Higher/further education libraries | 100 | 80 | 80 | 40 | 80 | 40 | 0 | 60 | 20 | 20 |
| Higher education BCE | 80 | 20 | 50 | 50 | 40 | 20 | 50 | 60 | 30 | 60 |
| Business support organisations | 100 | 58 | 42 | 33 | 75 | 58 | 75 | 92 | 75 | 83 |
| **Total** | 89 | 46 | 55 | 31 | 68 | 42 | 38 | 78 | 38 | 53 |

### 1.7: The percentage of organisations offering specified information-related services to customers

Interviewees were asked to select from the list of categories of service. The table shows the percentage of interviewees offering each service.

| % | Literature to study off-site | Remote online access to information | On-site training courses with supporting literature | Off-site training courses with supporting literature | One-to-one consultancy with supporting Literature | E-Courses |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public libraries | 75 | 75 | 100 | 75 | 25 | 0 |
| Higher/further education libraries | 100 | 80 | 100 | 20 | 60 | 0 |
| Higher education BCE | 80 | 30 | 60 | 60 | 70 | 40 |
| Business support organisations | 92 | 67 | 75 | 83 | 92 | 42 |
| **Total** | 87 | 62 | 84 | 61 | 59 | 20 |

**1.8 Where do they get the information and information-related expertise to enable them to deliver services to their clients?**

Interviewees were asked to select the types of service from which they get the information or expertise to provide services to clients. The table shows the percentage of interviewees selecting each service.

| % | Higher education | Business support | Training and skills | Libraries | Publishers | Funding & strategy | In-house specialists |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public libraries | 0 | 75 | 50 | 50 | 100 | 50 | 100 |
| Higher education libraries | 60 | 0 | 0 | 40 | 100 | 0 | 60 |
| Higher education BCE | 80 | 70 | 40 | 30 | 40 | 70 | 70 |
| Business support organisations | 42 | 92 | 83 | 67 | 67 | 75 | 75 |
| **Total** | 50 | 69 | 53 | 50 | 69 | 59 | 75 |

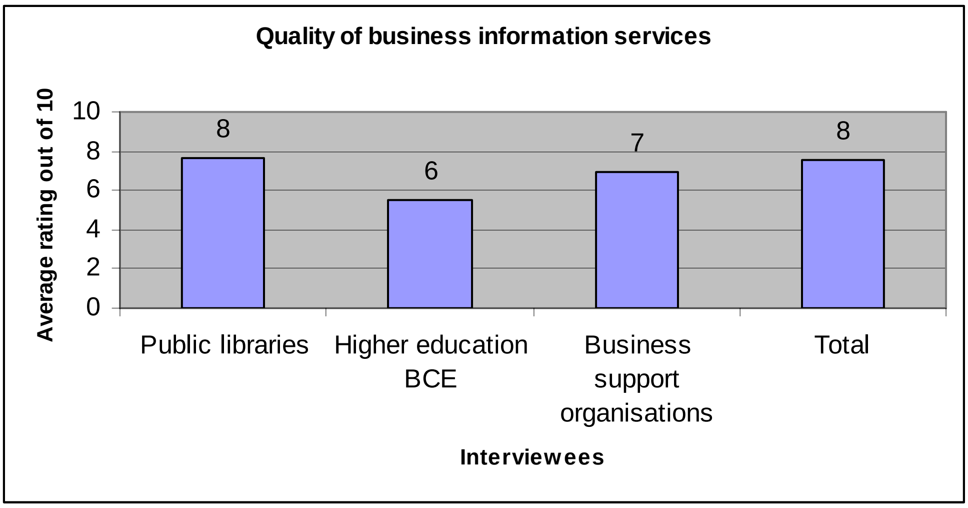
**1.9 What are the main contributory factors which enable them to offer a good service to their clients?**

Interviewees were asked to give an overall mark out of ten for a range of factors. The table indicates the average mark given by interviewees from each organisation type.

| % | Depth of information resources available | Quality of expertise of staff | Level of funding received | High profile within community | Speed and quality of service delivery |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public libraries | 8 | 8 | 5 | 7 | 9 |
| Higher/further education libraries | 8 | 8 | 7 | 5 | 8 |
| Higher education BCE | 7 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 7 |
| Business support organisations | 7 | 7 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| **Total** | 8 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 8 |

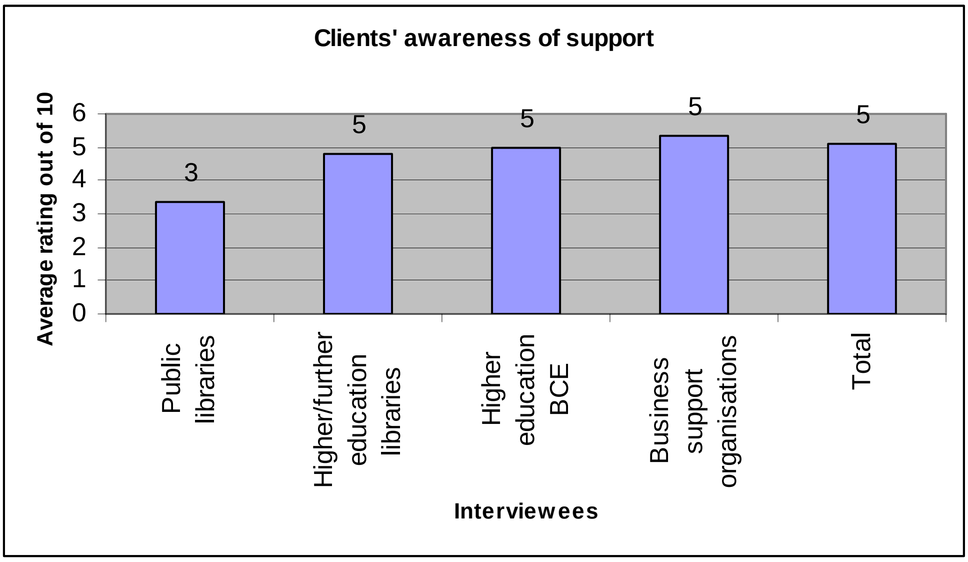
**1.10 What is their overall assessment of the quality of business information services offered by other types of organisation in the UK.**

Interviewees were asked to give an overall mark out of ten for the quality of services offered. The chart indicates the average mark given by interviewees from each organisation type.



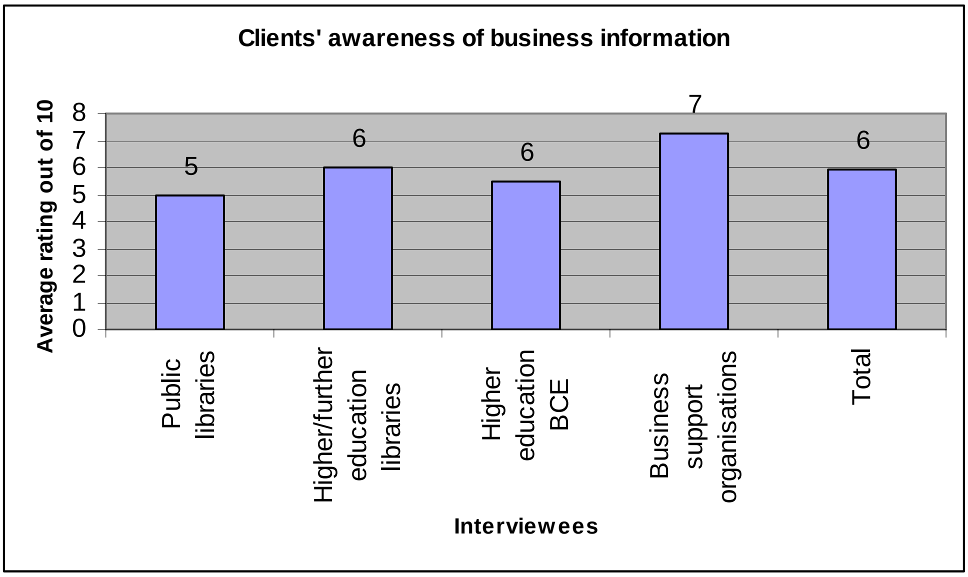
**1.11 How aware are their clients of the support that is available to them?**

Interviewees were asked to give a mark out of ten for what they perceived to be their clients' general of awareness. The chart indicates the average mark given by interviewees from each organisation type.




**1.12 How aware are their clients of the importance of business information?**

Interviewees were asked to give a mark out of ten for what they perceived to be their clients' general of awareness of the importance of business information. The chart indicates the average mark given by interviewees from each organisation type.

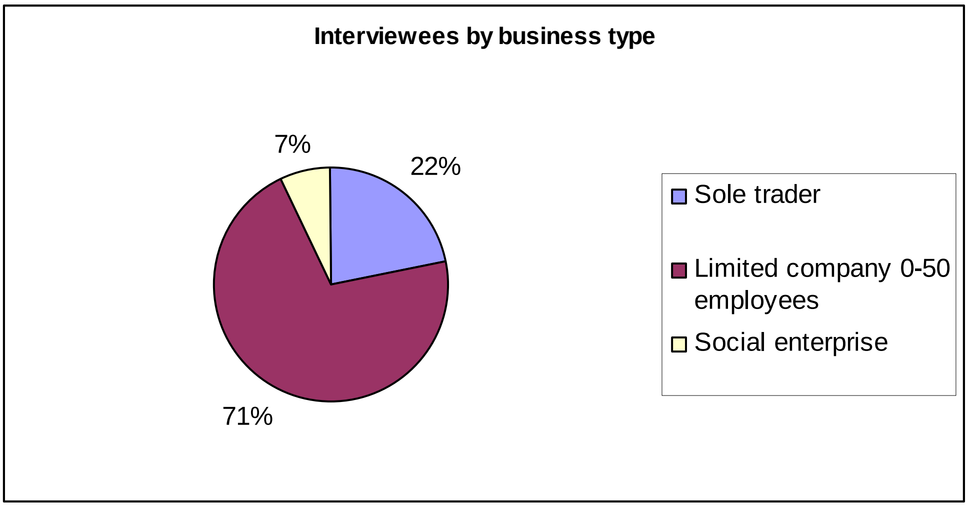



**Notes**

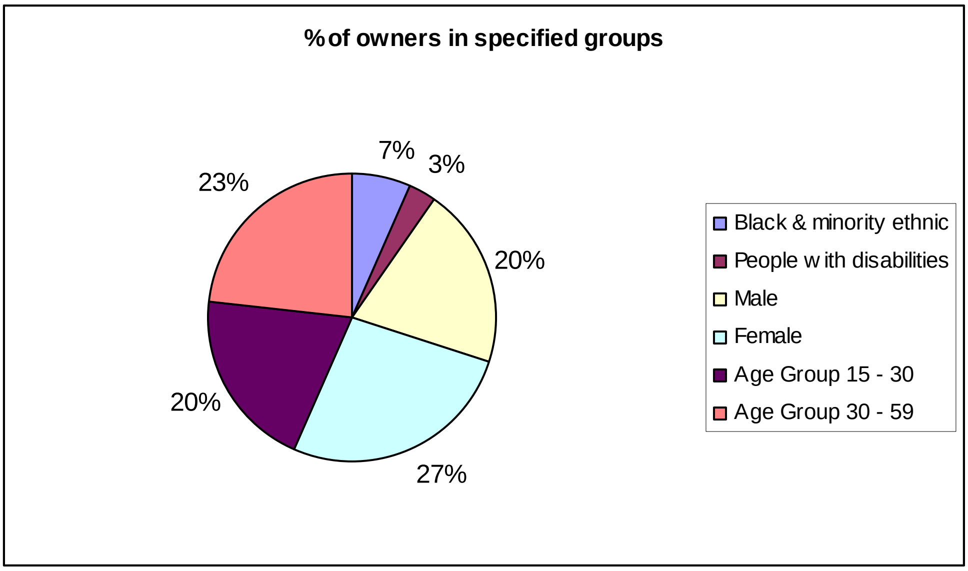
- Interviewees from the higher education library and public library organisations said that they had difficulty in assessing this and therefore the figures below represent a small sample.
- Interviewees from the higher education business & community engagement sector said that awareness was high from customers within a trading environment but very low for students.

## 2) The current state of business information provision in the UK: SME interviews.

### 2.1 What types of business are they?

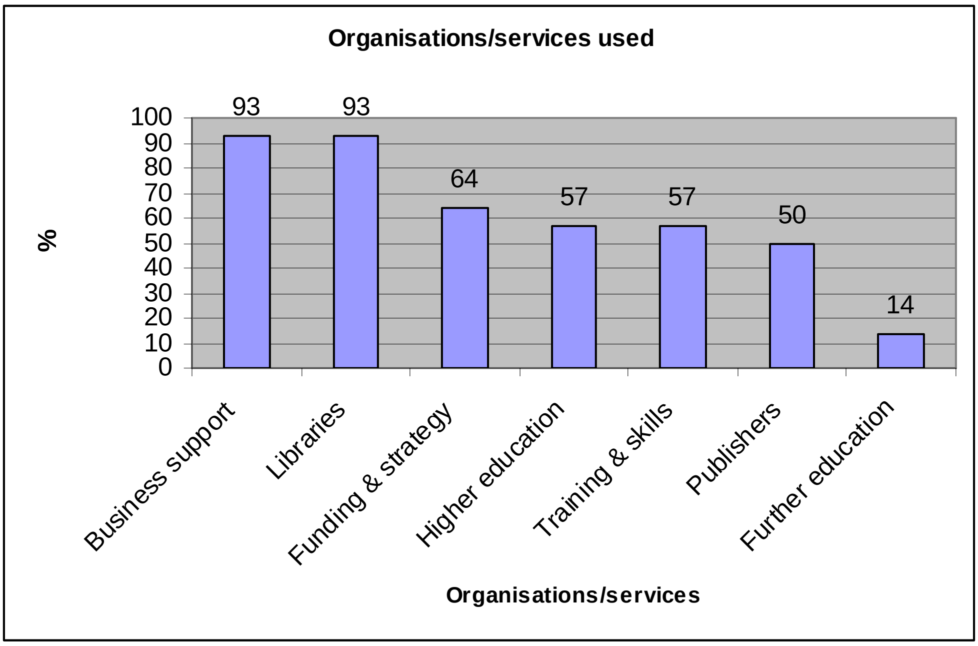



### 2.2 What is the profile of the owners of the businesses interviewed?

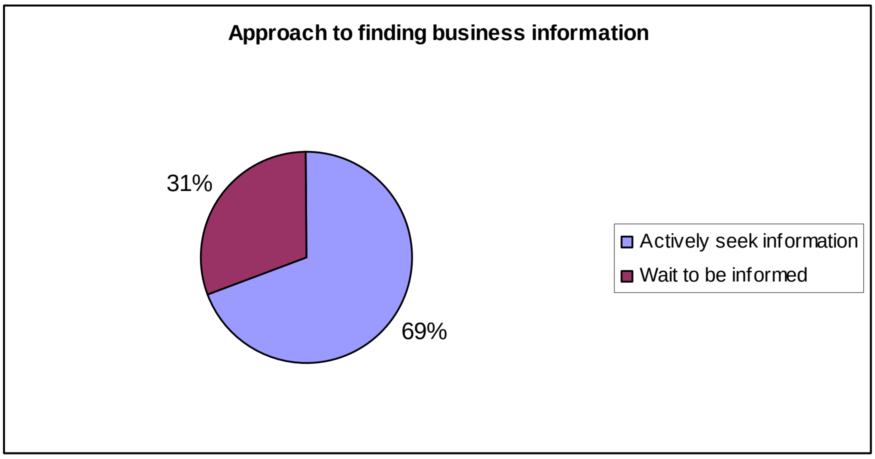


**2.3 What services and organisations have they used to help them develop their business ideas?**

Interviewees were asked to select from a list of specified types of organisation or service. The table below shows the percentage that have used that type of information.

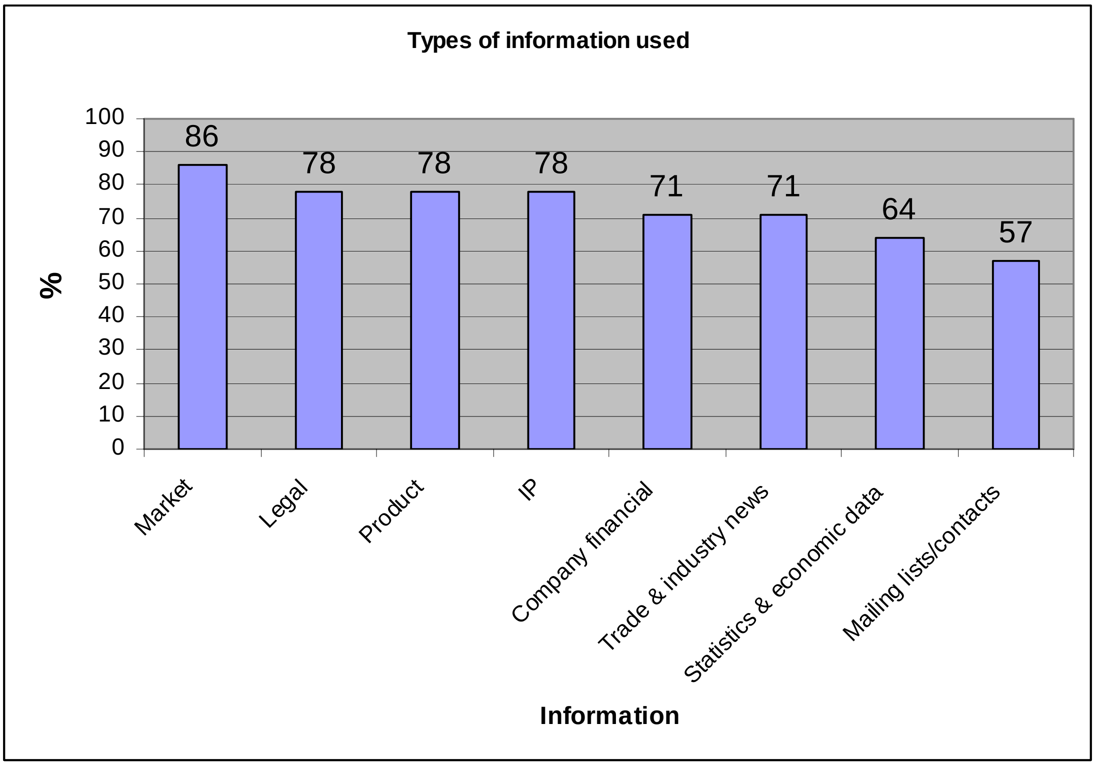



**2.4. To what extent do they actively seek information to support and develop their business?**



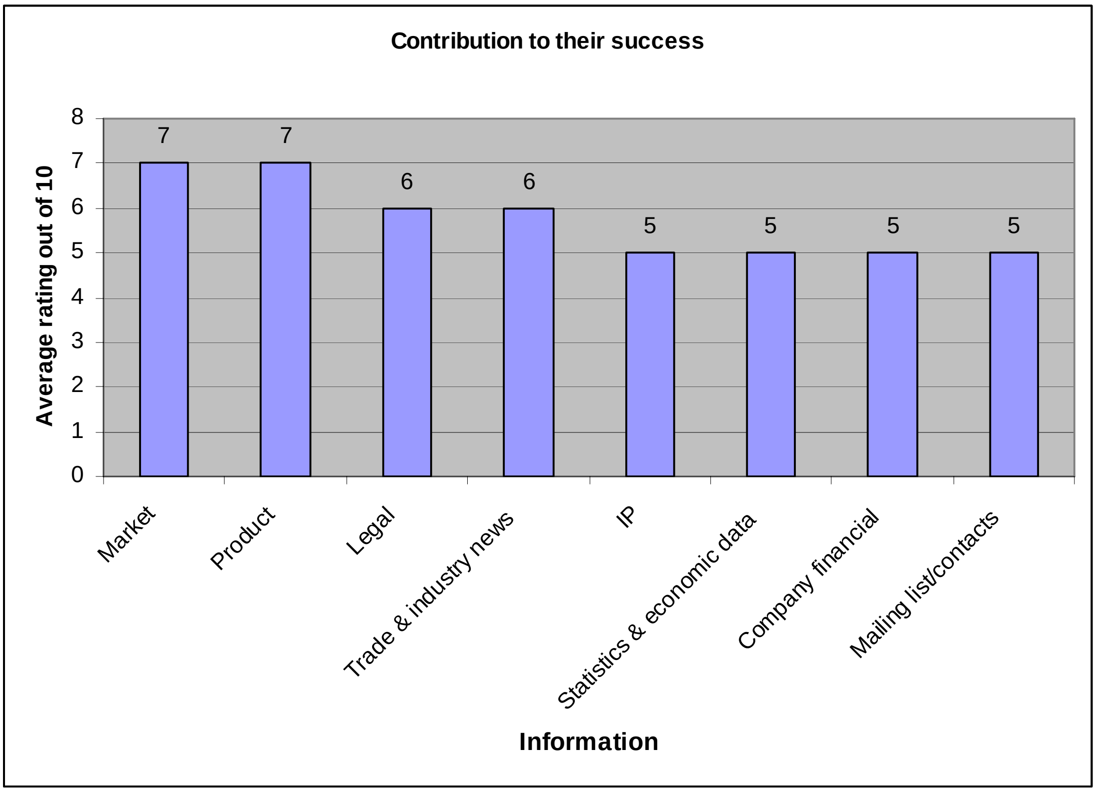
### 2.5 What types of information have they used?

Interviewees were asked to select the from a list of specified types of information. The table below shows the percentage that have used that type of information.



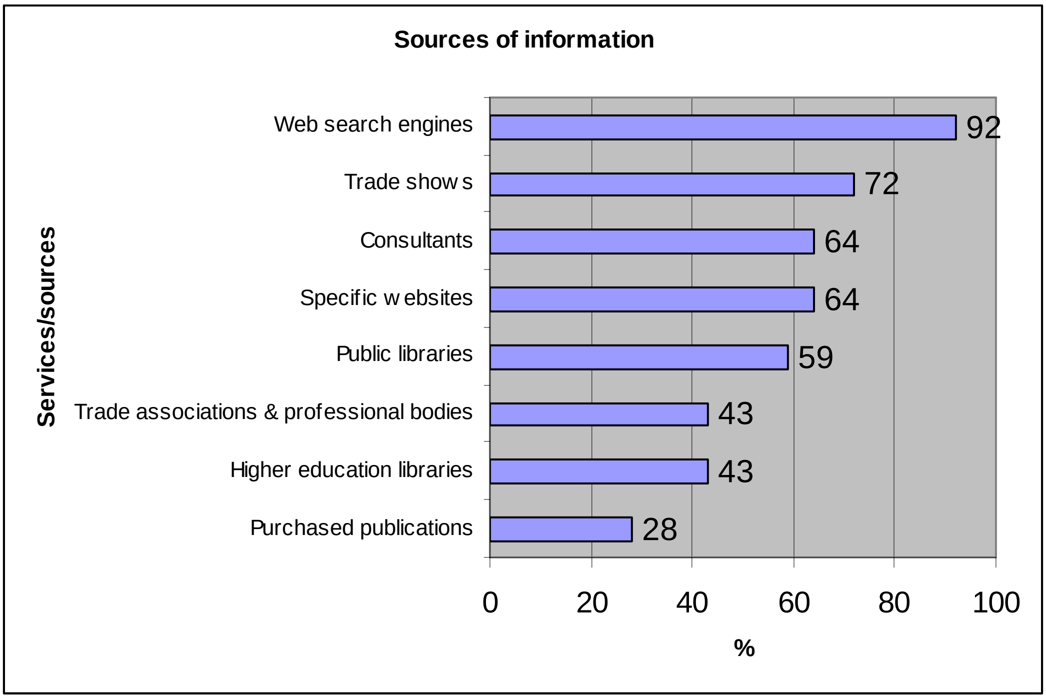
### 2.6 How did they rate the contribution of types of information to their business success?

Interviewees were asked to rate the contribution of specified types of information on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest. The average rating is given.



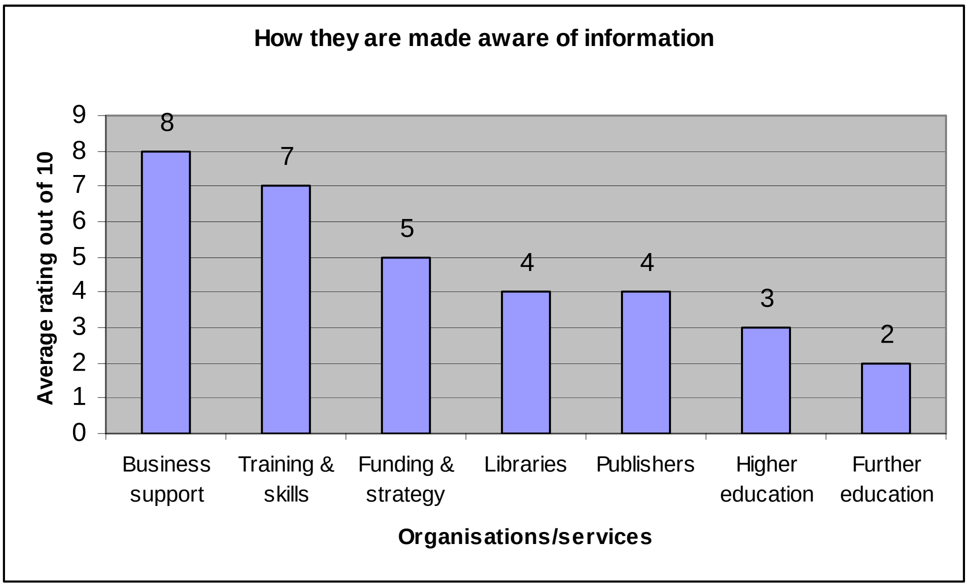

### 2.7 Where do they look for information?

Interviewees were asked to select the from a list of specified types of service or source The table below shows the percentage that have used that type of information.



**2.8 What organisations or services do they use to make them aware of what information is available and where to find it?**

Interviewees were asked to rate specified organisations and services on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest. The average rating is given.



## 3) The current state of business information provision in the UK: workshops

### 3.1 Ranking of business support activities

The workshop groups were asked to select the top four business activities from a list of six and to rank these in order of priority. They were asked to do this for a start-up and an established business.

| **Which activities are the top priorities for start-up and established businesses?** | **Ranking** |
|---|---|
| | |
| **Rankings for a start-up company** | |
| Business advice | 1 |
| Access to funding | *2* |
| Business information | *3* |
| Legal advice | *4* |
| Technical support/prototyping | *5* |
| Property/premises | *6* |
| | |
| **Rankings for an established business** | |
| Access to funding | 1 |
| Business advice | 2 |
| Business information | 3 |
| Property/premises | 4 |
| Legal advice | 5 |
| Technical support/prototyping | 6 |

**Points raised**

- It is impossible to differentiate clearly between the activities. Business advice and information are very closely linked and much of the process of giving advice involves providing information.
- It was significant that business advice was seen as being a lower priority than access to funding for existing businesses. This is a reflection of the view that advice and signposting were very high priorities for a company at the start-up and pre-start up stages but that existing companies are likely to have a greater awareness of the agencies who can assist them.
- There is a difference in priorities for companies from different sectors. However, business advice was clearly the top priority for start-ups and existing companies. This was largely because business advice involved signposting people to the services which could supply the other types of support. It was noted that the nature of advice needed would vary at different stages of a businesses life cycle.

| A sample of comments made | Workshop |
|---|---|
| *Business advice and information are impossible to separate.* | East Midlands |
| *Property/premises would be very important for incubation companies* | West Midlands |
| *You wouldn't walk into a library and ask for business information. Most businesses are not familiar with the term, they just want the information that will help them.* | Scotland |
| *The ranking will vary greatly depending on the nature of the business.* | Scotland |
| *Established businesses tend to be more sophisticated in their information needs and want more targetted specific advice and support.* | South West |
| *Many of these activities are sub sectors of business advice.* | London |
| *Much also depends on economic climate. Even established businesses continue to need legal advice and property advice in changing times.* | North West |

**3.2 Which types of business information are most valuable?**

The workshop groups were asked to list the types/categories of business information which were considered most valuable for them or clients. There were no limits put on the number of categories they could list and were not asked to prioritise.

| What types of information are most valuable | No of workshop groups listing these |
|---|---|
| Market information | 23 |
| Financial Information on companies | 11 |
| Competitor information | 10 |
| Sources of funding | 10 |
| Legal information | 9 |
| Sources of business support | 8 |
| Intellectual property | 8 |
| Statistics and economic information | 8 |
| Sources of business information | 5 |
| Product information (suppliers) | 5 |
| Mailing lists | 5 |
| ‘How to’ guides | 5 |
| Technical information (articles, reports, standards) | 3 |
| Information on doing business overseas | 3 |
| Case studies (examples of good practice) | 3 |

**Points raised**

- The initial definition of business information presented to the groups was information published in print and electronic form covering topics such as market, company, product information and intellectual property. This was viewed as incomplete and unhelpful as most businesses would have no understanding of the term ‘business information’ and would have a much wider definition of the information they need to develop their businesses. This wider definition would include guidance and signposting, manuals, case studies and sources of contact names for networking purposes.
- Information on markets was the most frequently listed category of information, and was listed by all groups. However, concerns were raised as to the currency of much data published in market research reports.

| A sample of comments made | Workshop |
|---|---|
| *There is an increasing need for legal information such as health & safety requirements and employment law as a result of companies having to make staff redundant.* | North West |
| *Statistics on reasons for business failure are very useful as they help growing businesses avoid duplicating obvious or hidden mistakes* | North West |
| *Sources which signpost and guide people to information as well as making them aware of what is available are essential* | North East |
| *Information sources are increasingly used as an aid to networking by identifying people with whom to make direct contact.* | South West |
| *Practical guides are extremely valuable. Such as: 'how to' guides ,factsheets, sample business plans and marketing plans.* | Northern Ireland |
| *Market information is absolutely fundamental* | Wales |
| *To be useful information must be accurate and up-to-date: most government-generated data is out-of-date* | East Midlands |
| *Most useful information is specific and sector-based, SMEs are only interested in information which is of direct relevance to them.* | East Midlands |
| *The most valuable information will depend on the sector in which a company operates, a technology-based business will differ from one in the creative industries.* | East of England |

### 3.3 Which categories of service or organisations are key players in providing access to business information

The workshop groups were asked to list the types of organisation or service they would approach, or to whom they would refer clients, for information. There was no limit on the categories they could list and they were not asked to rank the list.

| Which categories of service or organisations are key players in providing access to business information | No. of workshop groups listing these |
|---|---|
| Professional bodies/membership organisations | 28 |
| Business support organisations | 22 |
| Web search engines | 20 |
| Central government/national bodies | 16 |
| Public libraries | 15 |
| Own field research/networking | 14 |
| Regional/local government/devolved authorities | 11 |
| Published sources | 8 |
| National libraries | 6 |
| Financial/legal sector | 6 |
| Higher education libraries | 5 |
| Private research and consultancy | 5 |
| Higher Education business engagement initiatives | 4 |
| Training & skills development organisation | 2 |

**Points raised**

- Chambers of commerce and trade associations were viewed as the primary sources of information due to the fact that businesses would be willing to approach bodies which they felt understood their specific needs and because of the quality and relevance of the information which they can supply.
- The lack of groups listing higher education libraries was primarily due to licence restrictions for subscription-based electronic services which prevented businesses from accessing these resources.
- The fact that the web was mentioned fewer times than business support or professional bodies/membership organisations indicates a strong preference for services which have an element of personalised service delivery.

| A sample of comments made | Workshop |
|---|---|
| *'A good service would deliver the following: accurate and relevant information, a personalised service, a fast reliable service and value for money, ideally it would be free.'* | West Midlands |
| *'You would not expect a library to be able to offer staff with expertise in the needs and experiences of an SME.'* | West Midlands |
| *'Chambers of Commerce are very good for members but are often selling on services that they have bought in.'* | Wales |
| *'Universities and the British Library can be viewed as intimidating organisations by many starting in business.'* | Wales |
| *'Central government produces some very industry specific information on sectors such as agriculture.'* | Northern Ireland |
| *'Libraries are not an obvious source for all start-ups and small businesses.'* | South West |
| *'Presentation and packaging of information for businesses must be in a digestible form.'* | South West |
| *'Economic development units in local authorities produce detailed and regularly updated information.'* | North East |
| *'Many businesses only approach Business Link as they have no alternative. '* | North East |

### 3.4 The main obstacles to businesses getting and using the information they need

The workshop groups were asked to name the main obstacles which prevented businesses from getting information. There was no limit on the number of obstacles which they could list.

| What are the main obstacles to businesses getting and using the information that would help them? | No. of workshop groups listing these |
|---|---|
| A confusing landscape; it isn't clear where to go | 17 |
| The cost of purchasing information/information services | 16 |
| Not knowing the information they need/the questions to ask | 12 |
| Lack of time | 9 |
| Restrictive licences for subscription-based electronic resources | 8 |
| Websites which are difficult to navigate | 4 |
| Lack of geographic proximity to services, such as libraries | 4 |
| Variable levels of competence of service delivery staff | 3 |
| Lack of integration of existing services/ too many referrals | 3 |
| Lack of means to assess the quality of information | 3 |
| There is too much information | 3 |
| Commercial confidentiality can prevent businesses from exchanging information | 2 |
| Accessibility issues for users with disabilities and others | 2 |

**Points raised**

- Collectively, the reasons most frequently cited related to the confusion experienced by businesses when confronted by a range of disparate services and the sheer volume of information available, primarily through the web. Many of the other obstacles raised, such as lack of time and lack of the means to assess the quality of information are directly linked to the overall landscape.

| A sample of comments made | Workshop |
|---|---|
| *'Lack of training for service delivery staff means that they are not always as helpful/aware as they could be.'* | East Midlands |
| *'Lack of internet searching skills and complexity of some websites; for example the Business Link website.'* | East Midlands |
| *'You don't know what you don't know.'* | East Midlands |
| *'Staff turnaround in service organisations leads to lack of continuity in service relationships and loss of knowledge.'* | West Midlands |
| *'Education: schools are not preparing children for business.'* | West Midlands |
| *'Search engine optimisation can distort results.'* | West Midlands |
| *'Difficulty in knowing if you are getting the whole picture.'* | West Midlands |
| *'Eligibility constraints exist - seems to be little support for micro businesses and start-ups, many RDAs focus on high-growth businesses.'* | Scotland |
| *'The problem with business to business networking is that it is always the same businesses attending the same events.'* | Northern Ireland |
| *'Not knowing enough to know what is a good service, is a problem. How can an entrepreneur know that s/he has been given the best advice or been referred to the best source?'* | Wales |
| *'There exists a silo mentality in government with restrictive lines of demarcation in who supply information. Sometimes you need to deal with about 20 different people.'* | North East |
| *'Business Link has very strong brand recognition but there are lots of business models sitting under it and no consistency'* | South West |
| *'Referral loop: SME or start-up enquirers are often lost in a maze of onward referrals from agency to agency without ever getting to someone who can actually help or give an answer.'* | South West |
| *'There is a problem of perception/image when it comes to public libraries. Will entrepreneur or businessman ever think that a public library is on his wavelength?'* | South West |
| *'Accessibility can be an obstacle for clients with disabilities.'* | London |
| *'If you are based outside London you may not have access to the same level of services as a London-based business. Elsewhere in the country a geographical lottery also exists.'* | London |
| *'SMEs do not have time to do research for information for future opportunities, many are busy fire-fighting and keeping afloat.'* | North West |

## 4) Options for the future provision of business information: Service provider interviews.

### 4.1 What plans do their clients have for their businesses?

Interviewees were asked to give al mark out of ten to reflect their perception of the priority of each of the business activity below to their clients. The table indicates the average mark given by interviewees from each organisation type.

| Average rating out of 10 | Launch new products | Form new company | Expand overseas | Grow UK business | Move to new promises | Merger and acquisition | Partner | Maintain current business | Reduce product range |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public libraries | 9 | 8 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 1 |
| Higher education BCE | 8 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 6 | 2 |
| Business support organisations | 7 | 5 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 2 |
| **Total** | 8 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 1 |

**Notes**

- Overall higher education BCE and business support organisations were better placed to answer this question than libraries due to the nature of the relationship they develop with clients. For this reason the public library sample for this is small and the higher education library sample size was too small to include in the table.

### 4.2 What information will be most valuable in helping their clients develop these plans?

Interviewees were asked to give a mark out of ten to reflect their perception of the value of each information type. The table indicates the average mark given by interviewees from each information type.

| Average rating out of 10 | Market | Company financial | Product | IP | Trade & business news | Legal | Statistics and economic data | Mailing Lists/contacts | Design/ development |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public libraries | 8 | 8 | 8 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 3 | 6 | 2 |
| Higher education BCE | 8 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Business support organisations | 9 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 |
| **Total** | **9** | **8** | **7** | **4** | **6** | **5** | **5** | **6** | **4** |

### 4.3 Which services/sources do they plan to approach for such information?

Interviewees were asked to select from the list of services/sources. The table shows the percentage of interviewees selecting each of these options.

| % | Higher education BCE | Further education | Business support | Training & skills | Libraries | Publishers | Funding & policy | In-house specialists |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Higher/further education libraries** | 78 | 22 | 78 | 33 | 44 | 44 | 89 | 100 |
| **Business support organisations** | 42 | 17 | 92 | 75 | 67 | 75 | 83 | 75 |
| **Total** | **57** | **19** | **86** | **57** | **57** | **62** | **86** | **86** |

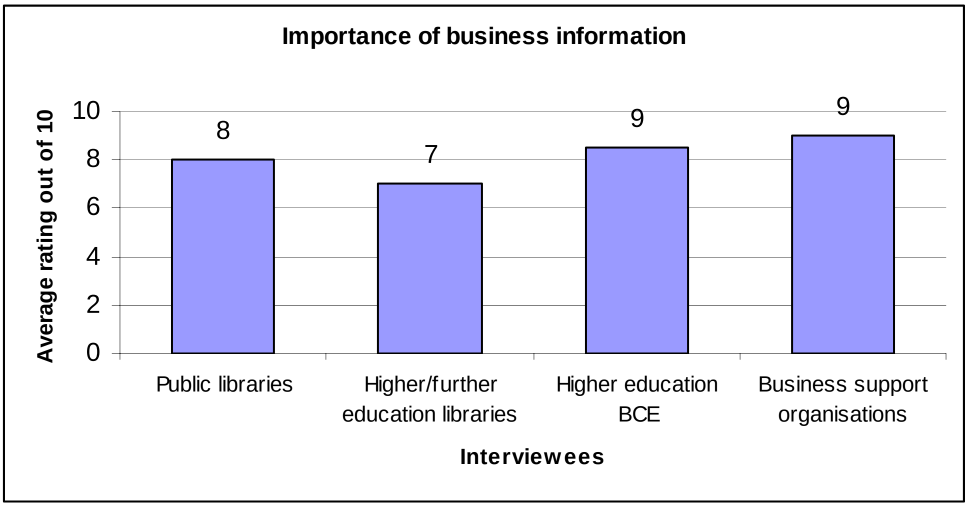
### 4.4 What is the potential for these organisations to deliver these services?

Interviewees were asked to give mark out of ten for their assessment of the potential of these organisations to deliver business information services. The table indicates the average mark given by interviewees.

| Average rating out of 10 | Higher education BCE | Public libraries | Higher education libraries | Business support | British Library | Training & skills development |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public libraries | 4 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 6 |
| Higher education libraries | 8 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 8 |
| Higher education BCE | 7 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3 |
| Business support organisations | 5 | 5 | 5 | 8 | 8 | 6 |
| **Total** | **6** | **6** | **6** | **7** | **7** | **5** |

### 4.5 How critical a factor will business information be in the success of their clients plans?

Interviewees were asked to give mark out of ten for they perceived to be the importance of business information. The chart indicates the average mark given by interviewees



### 4.6 How do they assess the potential value of these services to the delivery of their clients' plans?

Interviewees were asked to give mark out of ten for what they perceived to be the importance of business information. The table indicates the average mark given by interviewees

| Average rating out of 10 | Access to information in libraries and resource centres | Remote online access to information | One-to-one guidance in finding and using information | Workshops in how to find and use information | Online courses in finding and using information |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public libraries | 9 | 9 | 7 | 7 | 5 |
| Higher education libraries | 8 | 9 | 6 | 7 | 6 |
| Higher education BCE | 7 | 8 | 7 | 4 | 4 |
| Business support organisations | 8 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 6 |
| **Total** | **8** | **9** | **8** | **7** | **5** |

### 4.7 What will be the major obstacles to them helping their clients to deliver their plans?

Interviewees were asked to give a mark out of ten for each potential obstacle. The table indicates the average mark given by interviewees.

| Average rating out of 10 | Reluctance to pay | Lack of time | Awareness of services | Lack of funding for services | Reluctance to ask for help | Lack of training for staff |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public libraries | 3 | 1 | 8 | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Higher education libraries | 4 | 6 | 6 | 9 | 8 | 4 |
| Higher education BCE | 7 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 2 |
| Business support organisations | **8** | **7** | **9** | **8** | **6** | **6** |
| **Total** | **6** | **6** | **7** | **7** | **5** | **4** |

### 4.8 What are the three most important aspects/issues which will impact on your providing future service/information support to your clients

Interviewees were asked to name three major issues. These have been divided by stakeholder group under broad categories.

**Business support organisations**

| Issues | % listing challenges in this category | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| **Funding for their service** | 58 | *'Funding for successful projects is coming to an end'.* |
| **Delivering services which meet the needs of clients.** | 42 | *'Do not have the resources to provide the in-depth services that clients need.'* |
| | | *'Need to manage clients' expectations, particularly at the start of the relationship'.* |
| **Access to information** | 33 | *'Limitations of the access to knowledge system maintained by the RDA.'* |
| | | *'Costs of data.'* are a major obstacle |
| **Skills and expertise within the service** | 25 | Importance of *'Employing the right team'* |
| **Integrating and joining up services** | 17 | *'Increased collaboration with Business Link.'* |
| | | *'When offering brokerage services to training organisations it is very difficult to assess the quality of the service offered'.* |
| **Awareness of service amongst business community** | 8 | *'Maintaining the profile and growth of the service'.* |
| | | *Cannot find easy way to get people involved in networking & workshops'* |
| **Measuring success** | 8 | *'How is success measured'?* |

### 4.9 Higher education business and community engagement

| Issues | % listing issues in this category | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| **Funding for their service** | 90 | *'Funding drives the agenda within HE too much and particularly in business and community engagement activities'* |
| | | *'Funding for drawing together support services in provision of business advice.'* is needed. |
| **Access to information** | 80 | *'We need better tools for predicting future trends in technology.'* |
| | | *'The ability to drill down to very detailed market information in market reports.'* |
| | | *'Access to contact names within large corporates….is being made worse as many corporates are scaling down inhouse R&D.'* |
| | | *'Funding required to pay for data licences'.* is an issue. |
| | | *'We need a customisable portal providing access to online resources.'* |
| | | *'Information about licensing activity to enable them to identify who has licensed technologies to whom.' is needed.* |
| | | *'Knowledge of what is available could be better - tend to stumble across knowledge resource. No structure in place for providing information channels.'* |
| **Awareness of services amongst business community** | 40 | *'We should do more* (engagement) *at grass roots level'.* |
| | | *'We should communicate of the value of information through case studies as this has the greatest impact on SMEs.'* |
| **Skills and expertise within the service** | 10 | It is a challenge to '*obtain the right and appropriately skilled and qualified people to support businesses/clients with the depth of knowledge they require'.* |
| **Integrating and joining up of institutions** | 10 | *Need for more collaboration and strategic alliances across higher education institutions*. |
| **Funding for businesses** | | *'Higher subsidies needed to reduce cost to businesses of obtaining information'.* |
| | | *'Need for greater* 'availability of finance to fund small companies'. |

**4.10 Libraries**

| Higher education libraries | Public libraries |
|---|---|
| *'Reduced funding from HEFCE over next 3-4 years'.* | *'Design of new library facilities'.* |
| *'Having the evaluative skills needed to sort out what is a good information sources.'* | *Continued working in partnership with other business information providers, e.g. Business Link and IP21.'.* |
| *Capacity issues within the library - Foot-fall has increased by 50% over last two years, yet there is no more physical space to accommodate'.* | *Primary concern at present is the forthcoming local government reorganization and its effect with the library's continued funding.'* |
| *Information literacy & skills that they (students) can carry into their careers. '* | *Need to support community in current economic situation.'* |
| *Cost of online subscriptions'.* | *Continuing need for staff training.'* |
| *Information from academic staff on courses & student numbers.'* | |

**4.11 Suggestions you may have that would help you benefit your clients**

Interviewees were asked to name any changes or developments that would have a major impact on their clients or on their ability to deliver a service to them. There was no requirement for these to focus on provision of access to information. This is a representative sample of comments made.

| Public libraries |
|---|
| 'Provision for a meeting place for businesses in the library'. |
| 'More direct help for clients in doing own research such as a workshops/' |
| 'Publishers supplying on-line databases at a reasonable cost and providing clear instructions on how to use.' |

| Higher and further education libraries |
|---|
| *'If the government is serious about supporting entrepreneurship and business success, why are we not considering a national information policy in relation to core information resources that would support businesses and aspirant businesses, so that this information would be free at the point of use across the UK?'* |
| *'Knowing what we don't know! In other words, coherent, readily available advice as to which resources of information would be relevant to and benefit existing and aspirant businesses.'* |
| *'On-line guidance and tutorial support by way of a) tutorials on-line and b) intermediated support on-line.'* |
| *'Seamless access to electronic resources. There are many access routes to electronic information which can be confusing.'* |
| *'More funding for resources in general.'.* |
| *'Greater involvement by the librarians in the curriculum and student learning..'* |

| **Higher Education business & community engagement** |
|---|
| *'Ideally…one central directory of services which all businesses can go to obtain business information and business services.'* |
| *'A national model for information with regional centres of excellence so that expertise is not duplicated.'* |
| *'Ready and available access from desktops to Frost and Sullivan (would be prepared to pay a moderate fee for this).'* |
| *'Ability to have faculty staff to work full-time on business engagement.'* |
| *'Academic input into employer engagement is not as great as their engagement in research and teaching'.* |
| *'Academic's job specifications to include a level of business engagement.'* |
| *'An intern programme like they do in the states, so gaining hands-on experience.'* |
| *'Technology transfer offices should collaborate more openly on cross-university tie ups to share their resources and expertise. They should be able to call on another university for the relevant expertise.'* |
| *A need for 'sector knowledge within RDAs and Business advisors. Their knowledge is insufficient to under sectors and clients businesses.'* |
| *'Universities should have access to a self administered business fund. i.e. the RDA should provide a university with a pot of money and for the university to match that funding.'* |
| *'De-mystify business support opportunities i.e. further simplifying the Business Support Simplification Programme (Solutions For Business)'.* |
| *'Building the notion of a 21st century community being built around a university, in the same way that communities in the middle ages were built around a church.'* |
| *'Improving the processes for finding ideas to pump through the pipeline for commercialisation.'* |

| **Business support** |
|---|
| *'An online resource…a membership model with access to online content, HSBC have examples, they can monitor the traffic.* |
| *'Increased openness and sharing of resources to make resources readily available. Not being so protective.'* |
| *'It is important to have the time and opportunity to introduce the client to the importance of information. It is difficult to get clients on board with the value of information as it has never been taught to them. They are often sceptical of it because they do not understand it.'* |
| *'More ready access to advice/funding & start up programmes.'* |
| *'Would like to be in position to run a small financial services scheme. In the past they ran a small grants scheme. Would like access to organization who can supply "micro" finance to start-ups.'* |
| *'Mapping exercise of business support'* |
| *'Join up more services more , make it simple and straight forward'.* |

### 4.12 Suggestions for improvements which would help them to deliver policy objectives or would help assist the performance of organisations operating in their areas of interest

Interviewees were carried out with a number of organisations responsible for providing funding and defining policy. All were invited to make suggestions for changes or developments which would have a major beneficial impact. This is a representative sample of comments made.

| **Central and regional government: regional development authorities, government departments, devolved authorities** |
|---|
| *'The creation of a single integrated implementation plan across all RDAs which incorporates all regional investment plans.'* |
| *'Clearer access points to advice and information both site-based and online.'* |
| *'A single point of information on skills and funding information'.* |
| *'Wider access to free market data.'* |
| Greater *'Ease of access to information'.* |
| *'Enhanced mediation and guidance for SMEs in using information'.* |
| Improvement in*: 'The actual quality of the data made available'.* |
| *Higher quality information and the means by which you can assess the quality of the information accessed.'* |
| *'More services/literature in multiple languages.'* |
| *'More translated information.'* |
| *'Clearer means through which people can get information on sources of funding. There is a lot there but there is no single place where the options are set out.'* |
| *'Better education in use of internet. Some communities have little understanding of the web and they are seriously disadvantaged when it comes to accessing information.'* |
| *'Better career advice, including entrepreneurship. This should focus on where a particular area of training can lead and on where a career path will take people in 10-15 years time.'* |
| *'Better and more sophisticated means of measuring the impact of business support activity.'* |
| *'Easier means of referral to professionals (legal etc).'* |
| *'I wish more people would be able to have the confidence to come forward to seek advice.'* |

| **Public libraries** |
|---|
| A need for *'Greater clarity from policy makers that business support is a role that libraries should perform. This will give greater legitimacy to initiatives in this area and help to overcome some resistance from those working within libraries.'* |
| A need for *'Greater imagination and more creative thinking from people working in libraries to enable them to develop more innovative services and relationships.'* |
| *'More money'.* |

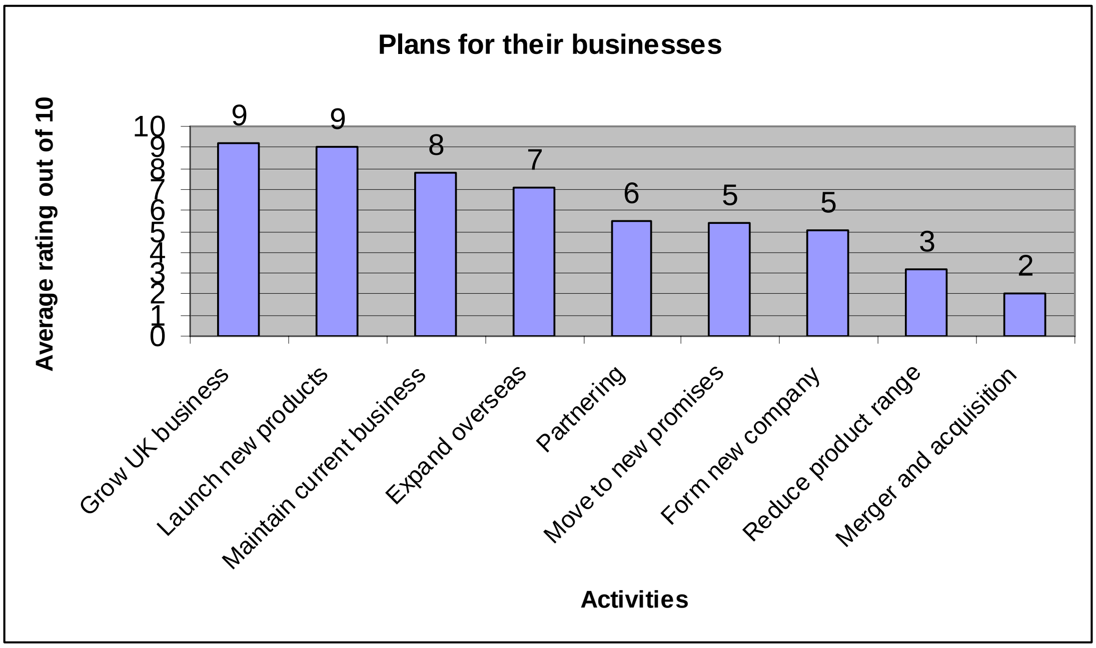
| **Higher education policy, research** |
|---|
| An end to: *'the restrictive nature of licences for 3rd party information sources'.* |
| *A widening of the open access agenda will facilitate access to information and reduce dependence on 3rd party sources. However the tendency of knowledge transfer units to disseminate information through open access sources limits access to information generated within higher education..* |
| A need for *'greater vision and clearer and more consistent narrative from funders.'* |
| *It is in higher education's interest to develop business and community engagement activities as, by doing this, they can align themselves with the central government agenda at this time of recession.* |
| A need for *'embedding of public engagement activities within higher education institutions, particularly faculty. There is still much opposition from academics who favour more traditional pure research activities which they believe are valued more'.* |
| A need for *'more joined up promotion of services'.* |
| *Local variation in service models within HE is an obstacle to co-ordinated action and development.'* |
| A need for *'improved measures and means for measuring 'demonstrable impact' beyond indicators such as spin outs and patents filed'.* |
| *There is a need to stimulate demand and raise awareness of the potential of innovation within the business community.'* |
| *A need for 'greater public awareness of the benefits and applications of research. This may be starting to happen with a raised profile for entrepreneurship.'* |
| |

| **Innovation policy and small business development** |
|---|
| *'A single portal for SMEs providing information, guidance and signposting'.* |
| *'Better knowledge of business on the part of service providers.'* |
| *'New pricing models for access to business information; current pricing does not give sufficient consideration of the value of the information to the customer or their relative ability to pay. This limits access to information for smaller companies. '* |
| *'Greater clarity as to what information is actually available and a means of assessing the quality of that information. '* |
| *'The priced (as opposed to open access) model has placed an additional barrier to access in addition to ability/willingness to pay. The process of having to make the payment made one think twice about whether to view a document.'* |

## 5) Options for the future provision of business information: SME interviews.

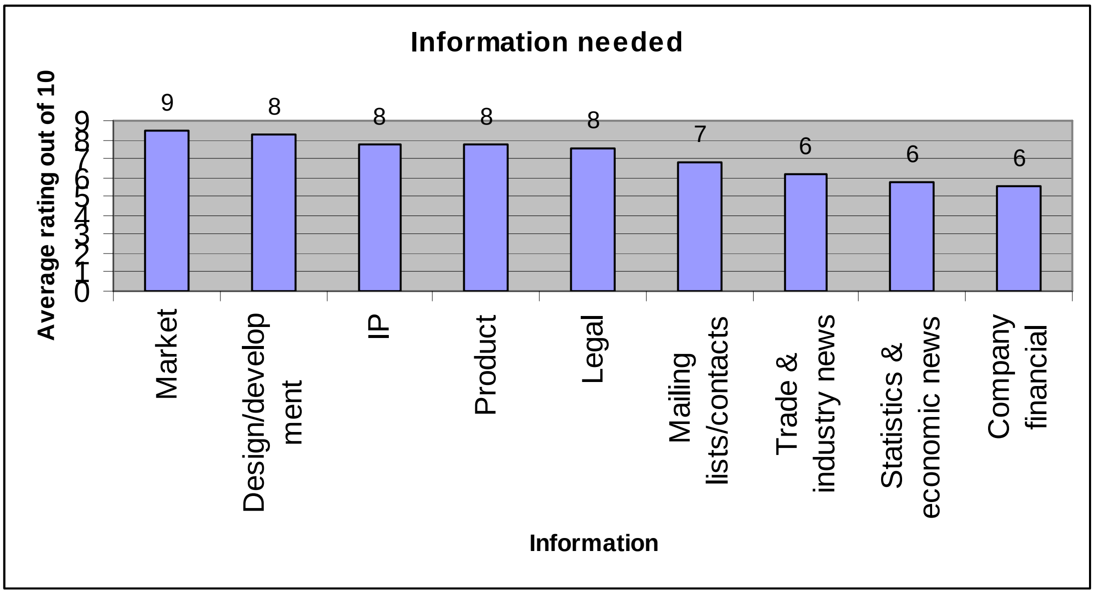
### 5.1 What plans do they have for the businesses over the next 3 years?

Interviewees were asked to rate the priority of specified types of activity on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest. The average ratings are given.




### 5.2 What types of information will help them to deliver their plans over the next 3 years.

Interviewees were asked to rate the value of specified types of information on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest. The average ratings are given.

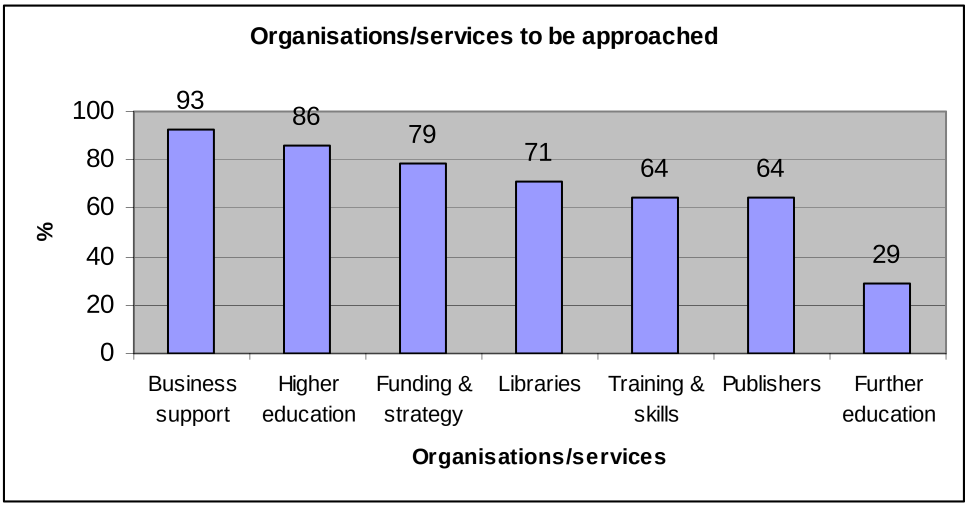



**Comments made**

- Information on sources of funding should be included in this list.

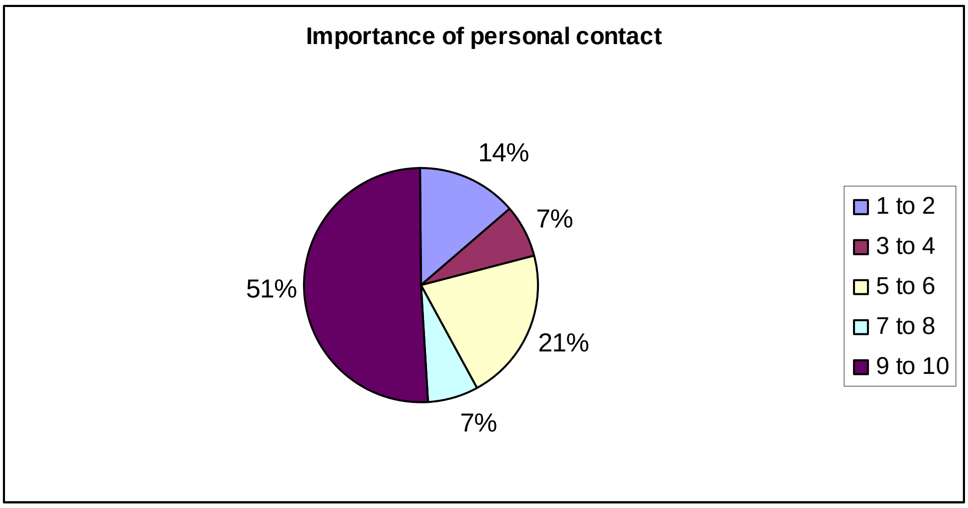
### 5.3 Who do they plan to approach for this information?

Interviewees were asked to select the from a list of specified types of organisation or service. The table below shows the percentage that have used that type of information.

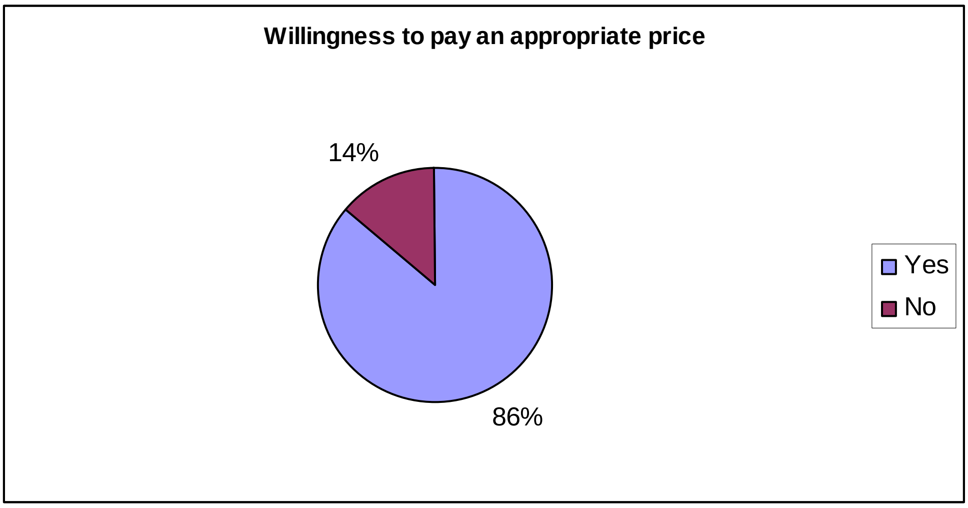



### 5.4 How important is it for them to have a person to talk to when receiving business support or information services.

Interviewees were asked to rate this on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest. The chart below splits the responses into 5 bands and shows the % of respondents per band. 9-10 indicates that they view this as being very important.

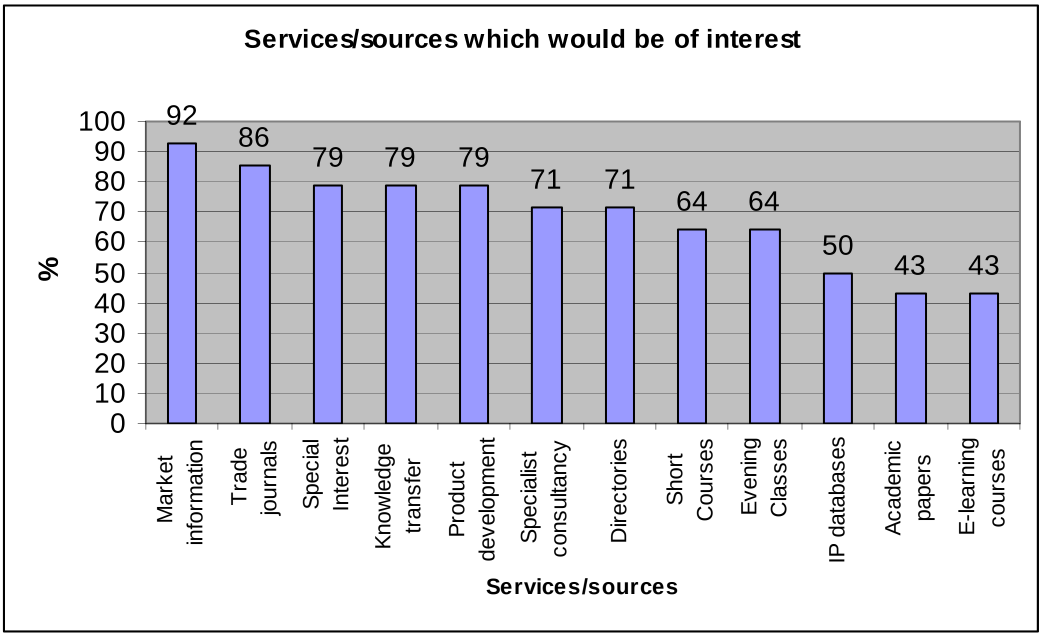


**5.5 Are they prepared to pay an appropriate price for information?**



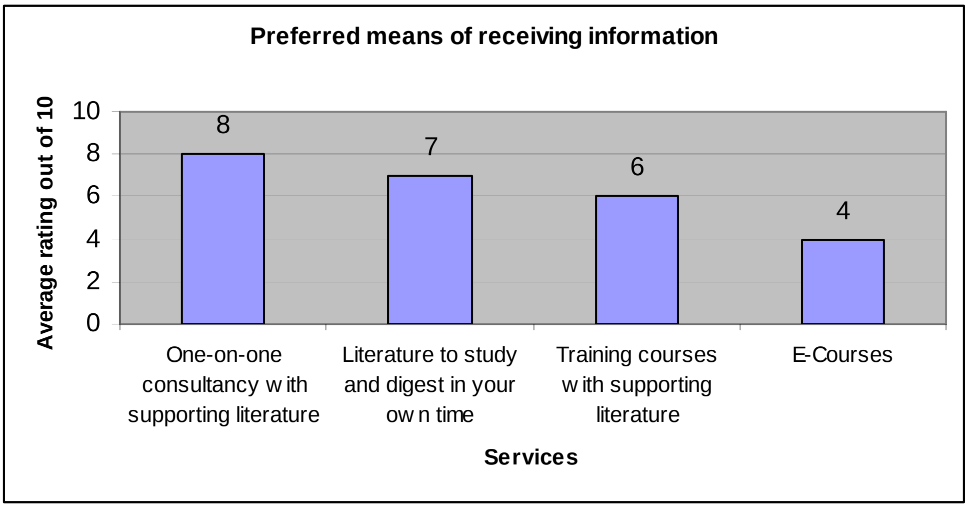

**5.6 Which of the following services and sources would be of interest to you in helping the development of your business?**

Interviewees were asked to select the from a list of specified types of service or source organisation or service. The table below shows the percentage that would be interested in having access to these.



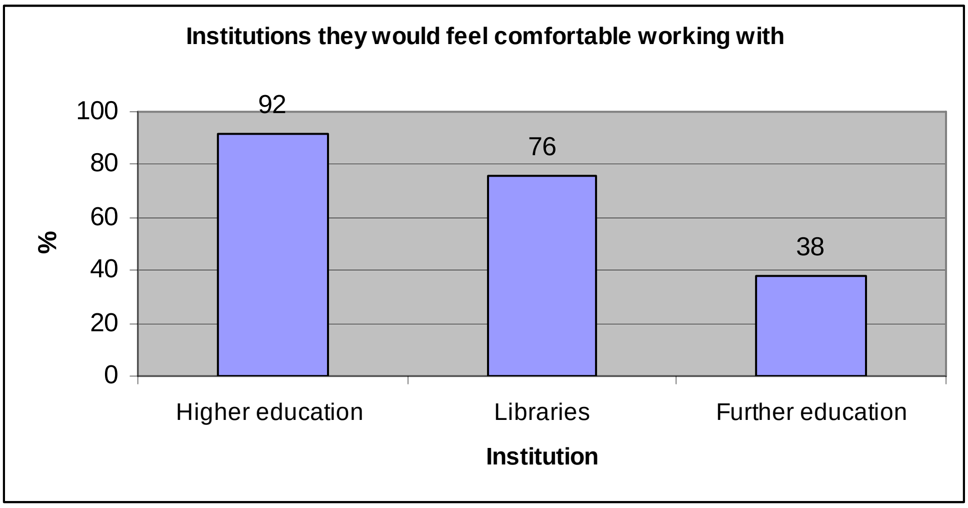
### 5.7 How do they prefer to receive information?

Interviewees were asked to rate the value of specified means of accessing information on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the highest. The average ratings are given. The selections were from a pre-set list.



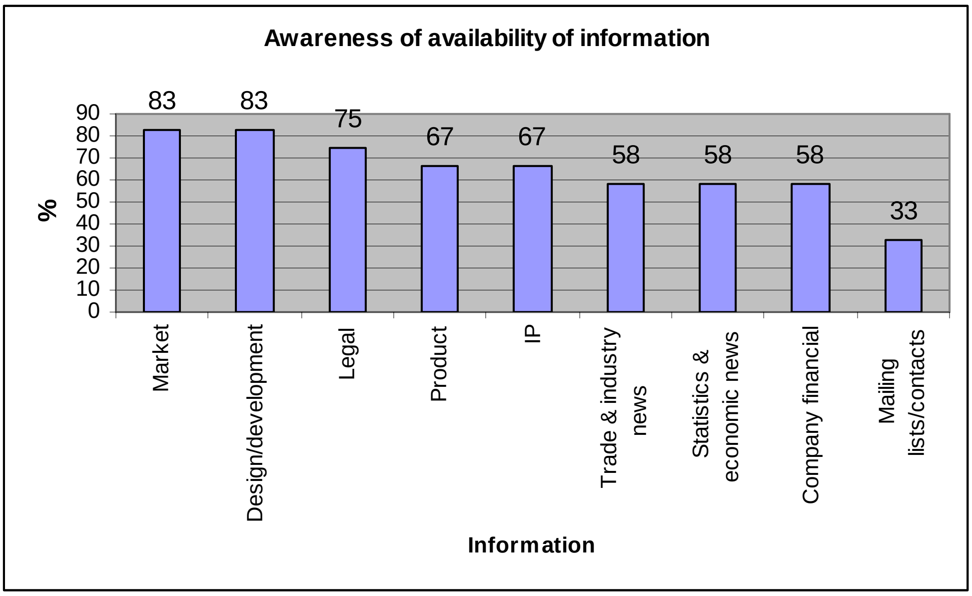

### 5.8 Which type of institution would they feel comfortable working with to develop their business?

Interviewees were asked to select the types of institution with which they would feel comfortable working. The table indicates the percentage responses for each type of institution.



### 5.9 Their awareness of information that is available from libraries, higher education and further education institutions

Interviewees were asked to select types of information that they were aware were available from these institutions. The table below shows the percentage of awareness for each information type.




### 5.10 The three biggest challenges to the development of their business at this time

Interviewees were asked to name the three things which represented the biggest challenges to the development of their business. The responses have been broken down into the broad categories below.

| Challenges | % listing challenges in this category | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| **Managing time** | 38 | *Better work life balance.'* |
| | | *' Developing product before direct rival appears in market'.* |
| **Managing finances** | 61 | *Difficulty of cash flow management.'* |
| | | *Inconsistency of exchange rates.'* |
| **Planning, testing and making decisions on new product/service developments** | 53 | *Taking the decision to leave my job and start a business.'* |
| | | *Having the patience to collect and use feedback before making decisions.'* |
| | | *Carrying out proper R&D on product ideas'* |
| **Marketing of products/services** | 46 | *Acquiring more & better clients.'* |
| | | *Understanding & communicating unique service proposition'.* |
| **Following legal procedures** | 30 | *Going through the patenting process.'* |
| | | *Getting information on tax and insurance.'* |
| **Getting the support needed from support services** | 23 | *Getting Business Link and Train to Gain to deliver on their promises.'* |
| **Having the right skills to deliver products and services** | 15 | *Getting expertise in place quickly enough to allow the business to grow.'* |

### 5.11 Any other things that would have a positive impact on their developing their businesses.

Interviewees were asked if they could make any suggestions for developments which could help them develop their businesses. This is a random selection of comments made.

| Suggestions |
| --- |
| *'Better life skills for younger entrepreneurs'.* |
| *'More mentoring support'.* |
| *'No embargo on Mintel data at the British Library'.* |
| *'Better lists of manufacturers, suppliers and retailers'.* |
| *'Better marketing by libraries'.* |
| *'To have access to a mentor who has taken a product to market'.* |
| *'For those delivering government-funded initiatives to understand small businesses'.* |
| *'For the continued funding of pro-active organisations that provide help to local innovative companies in East Sussex'.* |

## 6) Options for the future provision of business information: workshops.

### 6.1 Trends in entrepreneurial and business development in the next 3 years

Workshop groups were asked to list the main trends they believed would characterise entrepreneurial and business development activity over the next 3 years. There was no limit on the number of trends which they could list.

| What will be the main trends in entrepreneurial and business development activity in the next 3 years? | No. of workshop groups listing these |
|---|---|
| An increase in the number of start-up businesses | 13 |
| An increase in businesses embedding ethical/green practices in their business models. | 12 |
| An increase in companies doing business via the internet | 8 |
| A growth in graduate entrepreneurship and alumni starting businesses | 8 |
| A reduction in the funding available for start-ups and established companies | 7 |
| An increase in technology-based business start-ups | 6 |
| A growth in companies operating in niche markets | 5 |
| An increase in businesses which serve local markets and communities | 5 |
| An increase in businesses in knowledge-driven sectors. | 5 |
| More flexible and varied working patterns; such as home-working and part-time working | 4 |
| An increase in the number of business failures | 3 |
| Increase in businesses selling products/services business overseas | 3 |
| An increase in businesses in the creative industries | 3 |
| More collaborative working between businesses | 3 |
| More outsourcing of services by public sector and larger companies | 2 |
| An increase in the number of higher education spin out companies | 2 |
| An increased emphasis on survival rather than growth for existing businesses | 2 |
| A migration of people from professions and financial services to entrepreneurship | 2 |
| An increase in the number of social enterprises | 2 |
| An increase in lifestyle, rather than high growth, businesses | 2 |
| A greater awareness of the need to market and sell business. Particularly among existing businesses | 2 |

**Points raised**

- There would be an increase in the amount of entrepreneurial activity. This would be triggered by a reduction in employment opportunities in the professions and the financial services sector and increased rates of redundancy. This would lead to an increase in business failures as many businesses would be started by those without the relevant business skills or entrepreneurial instincts. However it would be likely to mean that there would be an increase in the number of entrepreneurs who would have experienced higher education and may be more likely to approach these institutions, and libraries in general, for assistance.
- There would be an increase in start-up business operating within niche markets as well as those looking to serve specific communities, based around geographical location or culture and ethnicity. In the field of retail, consumers will be looking to move their business away from familiar high street names to more local and specialist businesses.
- The increasing ease with which businesses can transact business online will mean that we will see an increase in E-commerce. This will widen the potential customer base but will also mean that businesses will face greater competition.
- Inevitably, the business life cycle will become shorter.
- The recession will bring changes in consumer behaviour which may benefit UK businesses in the tourism and leisure sectors. People will reduce spending in these areas but will not stop altogether which will provide opportunities for businesses offering affordable luxury goods; like high quality domestic food produce.
- The decline in traditional manufacturing industries will continue.

| **A sample of comments made** | **Workshop** |
|---|---|
| *'Faster broadband will facilitate E-commerce.'* | East of England |
| *'Opportunities will arise when economy starts to recover.'* | West Midlands |
| *'Smaller firms will look to local markets while larger firms will look to expand overseas.'* | Scotland |
| *'Failure of high street chains will provide opportunities for smaller retailers. '* | Scotland |
| *'Northern Ireland is directly affected by the economy of the Irish Republic. Retail has been helped by the weakness of Sterling but the construction industry has been hit badly by the reduction in building and construction work in the South.'* | Northern Ireland |
| *'As jobs are lost in manufacturing and technology there will be more women returning to workplace.'* | North East |
| *'Increase in E-commerce will widen potential for companies to access new customers but will also mean that they will face greater competition.'* | South West |
| *'The South West will see an increase in care sector as more people retire in the region.'* | South West |
| '*More businesses will be set up to serve ethnic communities. '* | London and North West |
| *'Local migrant communities will set up more niche businesses.'* | North West |
| '*More lifestyle businesses will lead to more business failures as unemployment is the driver.'* | North West |

### 6.2 What impact will these changes have on types of business information and information services needed?

Workshop groups were asked to discuss the impact that the changes in business activity would have on their information needs.

| What impact will these changes have on the type of business information services needed? | No. of workshop groups listing these |
|---|---|
| More information freely available at the desktop | 13 |
| More detailed information on industry sectors | 8 |
| Faster service delivery from information providers | 7 |
| A variety of formats and means of delivery of information to customers | 7 |
| More global information | 7 |
| More local and regional information | 6 |
| A central point of access/signposting to business information | 6 |
| More up-to-date information | 5 |
| Greater integration of business information and support services | 4 |
| Better guidance and signposting to information sources | 4 |
| Greater use of websites to use diagnostics to filter and direct customers | 3 |
| Greater access for businesses to specialist staff and resources in higher education | 3 |
| Greater need for guidance in finding information in intellectual property | 3 |
| More user-friendly search interfaces for online subscription services | 3 |
| An increased demand by graduate entrepreneurs to get access to information in higher education libraries | 2 |
| More guides to legal information | 2 |

**Points raised**

- The inevitable increase in data available online will increase the need for easier navigation and better tools for finding information.
- As people become more familiar with Web 2.0 functions, there will be an increased expectation for information to be delivered in a range of formats which can be customised to meet the needs of the user. This could be due to personal preference but it is also a means by which groups, such as users with disabilities, and those with first languages other then English, can access information more easily. It is also anticipated that there will be a demand for a greater level of interaction with information providers.
- The growth in niche markets as well as overseas business will lead to a demand for information on a number of different levels. This will enable businesses to find global data, local/regional data and highly sector-specific data.
- It is anticipated that there will be a rapid level of change and volatility in the UK economy which means that the shelf-life of information will become shorter. This means that there will be a need for information to be updated more frequently than is the case now.
- As the decision-making process in business is becoming faster, information services will need to offer faster, more responsive services.

| A sample of comments | Workshop |
|---|---|
| *'Emerging new media will provide a greater variety of means of delivery of information and formats. '* | East of England |
| *'There will be a need for delivery of information in formats which can be used by users with disabilities and in a variety of languages.'* | London |
| *'The market is getting faster and providers of information and support will need to match this expectation with speed of delivery.'* | West Midlands |
| *'There is a demand for open innovation but ultimately someone has to pay for it. The question is who?'* | West Midlands |
| *'Businesses will need to diversify and look at new markets which will increase the need for detailed market information. An example here is diversification within farming after BSE. '* | Scotland |
| *'There is a need for more schemes based on innovation vouchers.'* | West Midlands |
| *'A need for publishers and vendors to develop products more tailored to customer needs and user friendly and to sell these to wider markets.'* | Scotland |
| *'The shelf-life of information will need to reflect shorter business life cycle.'* | North East |
| *'Information will need to be accessible via portals like Business Link.Gov.'* | North East |
| *'There will be a need for more networking on a global basis.'* | Scotland |

### 6.3 Which categories of service or organisations could be key players in providing access to business information

Workshop groups were asked to list the categories of services/organisations which could, or should, be key players in the provision of access to business information in the future. There was no limit on the number of types of organisation they could list.

| Which categories of service or organisations could be key players in providing access to business information | No. of workshop groups listing these |
|---|---|
| Public libraries | 16 |
| Higher education libraries | 14 |
| Local and regional government organisations | 14 |
| Trade associations and professional bodies | 4 |
| Higher education business and community engagement activities | 6 |
| Financial services institutions | 3 |
| Business Link and equivalent organisations | 9 |
| Enterprise agencies | 4 |
| Central government and government agencies | 9 |
| Training and skills development organisations | 1 |
| Charities | 2 |
| Web search engines | 4 |
| Social networking sites | 2 |
| Publishers/vendors | 2 |

*Includes all services/organisations listed by at least 2 groups*

**Points raised**
The response to this question tended to emphasise organisations with potential which they felt was not being realised fully at present. The comments below also reflect the fact that this question led to a more general discussion of future trends in information provision

- Public libraries are well placed to offer access to business information as they tend to occupy highly visible locations in towns and cities. They are also well placed to link in with other local agencies.

| A sample of comments | Workshop |
|---|---|
| *'A change of government is likely to see a greater role in economic development fall to local councils and be taken away from regional development agencies.'* | East of England |
| *'Citizen's Advice Bureaus are a good example of localised and personalised service provision. '* | South East |
| *'When organisations work in partnership the relationship with the small business is often forgotten as all efforts go into managing the partner relationships.'* | East Midlands |
| *'More unified approach to funding of organisations with common goals encourages co-operation and leads to better services. '* | Scotland |
| *'Skype could be used to deliver services.'* | Scotland |
| *'There should be a greater use of consortia deals for purchasing electronic resources by libraries and Higher education institutions.'* | Scotland |
| *'We need better integration of services delivered by at local/regional central government levels.'* | Wales |
| *'A UK-wide portal could provide a single account structure for accessing information at different levels, including the ability to search and pay for data.'* | North East |
| *'A portal could provide a gateway to regional information, accessed by postcode. '* | North West |
| *'The provision of data, by all providers, in a standard searchable format would make it much easier to locate.'* | Yorkshire |
| *'How about a payment model which will enable businesses to get free information when they are researching an idea and pay for that data when/if they are commercially successful.'* | South East |

### 6.4 Developments would have the most positive impact on ensuring that business get the information they need in the future

Workshop groups were invited to list 3 things which would have the greatest impact on helping business to get access to information.

| **Which 3 developments which would have the most positive impact on ensuring that business get the information they need in the future** | **No. of workshop groups listing these** |
|---|---|
| A portal which provides searchable links to UK-wide information for business. | 12 |
| Greater integration of services providing business support and information. | 12 |
| More flexible publisher licences to subscription bases electronic resources | 10 |
| Online access to more free data/more data available via open access platforms | 6 |
| Business support and mentoring on a more personalised and localised basis | 5 |
| Better marketing of information services to increase their visibility | 5 |
| Universal high speed broadband | 3 |
| Educational establishments to train people in how use and assess information | 3 |
| Closer links between educational institutions and business | 3 |
| Business advisors to have greater knowledge of sources of information | 2 |
| Use of emerging web technology to delivering services in a greater variety of formats to meet the needs and preferences of customers | 2 |
| A reduced role for Business Link in offering business support and signposting | 2 |
| Funding of organisations providing business support to incentivise co-operation and not competition | 2 |
| More financial assistance for public libraries to enable them to purchase business information | 2 |

*Includes all developments listed by at least 2 groups*

**Observations**

There were 3 clear themes which arose from asking this question**.**

- The need for a central portal through which information sources could be accessed. There was a view from some delegates that this could be linked to the Business Link.Gov site.
- A need for publishers to develop delivery and business models which are more flexible and which match the needs of smaller business as well as their ability to pay. Through existing licences and the way that information is packaged they are effectively excluding the large potential SME audience from accessing data.
- There needs to be far greater integration of services to support business, and information services are part of this. Central to such an integration must be the management of the relationship with the customer.

| Sample of comments | Workshop |
|---|---|
| '*Customer relationships should be managed so that one individual remains the main contact point and does not simply refer people around to other places.*' | North West |

**6.6 The role of higher education in providing support for businesses**

Workshop groups were asked to discuss the future role of higher education in providing support for business. The question sought the views of the delegates on the role of institutions in providing support more widely than their role as providers of access to information.

| What is the role of higher education in providing support for businesses | No. of workshop groups listing these |
|---|---|
| To make the expertise held within institutions more accessible all parts of the non-academic community. | 11 |
| Training future entrepreneurs by providing courses on entrepreneurship and embedding business principles in a range of other courses. | 10 |
| To provide access to technical support and resources to the SME community | 10 |
| To provide access for business to information held in higher education libraries. | 5 |
| To provide a national network of centres of excellence based on expertise within the institution and region. | 5 |
| To increase the number of knowledge transfer partnerships. | 4 |
| Providing services to alumni entrepreneurs. | 4 |
| To increase the number of student placements in business. | 2 |
| To develop partnerships with business support organisations like Business Link. | 2 |

*Includes all roles/activities listed by at least 2 groups*

**Points raised**

- They have a major role to play in providing access to expertise and specialist knowledge and there is potential for this to occur on a UK-wide basis and not just based around regional networks.
- They have a major role to play in providing access to specialist technical; resources.
- The innovation voucher scheme is an excellent way of managing access to specialist expertise and resources.
- The major obstacle in the provision of access to specialist resources is the lower priority given to these types of activity within some institutions.
- There is potential for libraries within higher education institutions to provide access to business information for businesses. However, there are many obstacles to this. The main obstacles are restrictive publisher licenses and library staff and resources already being fully occupied serving fee-paying students.
- Many people in business have a perception that universities are elitist institutions and this may make them reluctant to approach them for help. However this may change with the increase in the number of entrepreneurs who have experienced higher education may help.

| A sample of comments made | Workshop |
|---|---|
| *'HE library resources are limited and fee-paying students will always be the top priority.'* | East of England |
| *'Universities need to become much better at raising awareness of how they can help business.'* | East Midlands |
| *'Universities need to look at how they operate if they are to provide services to business.'* | East Midlands |
| *'Need for better join up within institutions.'* | West Midlands |
| *'Index' innovation vouchers are a best practice example of enabling businesses to get access to expertise with universities.'* | West Midlands |
| *'Innovation voucher schemes should be extended.'* | North West |
| *'Public libraries are better placed to offer services to entrepreneurs than HE libraries as they have better local and regional contacts.'* | Scotland |
| *'There is potential for universities to be important local/regional hubs for information.',* | Scotland |
| *'EPIS (*The Edinburgh Pre-Incubator Scheme) *in Scotland is a good example of institutions working in partnership.'* | Scotland |
| *'Universities are viewed as a trusted brand.'* | Scotland |
| *'They have no real role in supporting the ordinary Joe.'* | Northern Ireland |
| *'HE has a role in educating and encouraging innovation and challenging existing mindsets.'* | Wales |
| *'Major barrier between universities and business is the image of these institutions existing in an ivory tower.'* | Wales |
| *'Business and community engagement activities are still not seen by many higher education institutions as having the same weight as teaching or research activities.'* | Wales |
| *'We need to create channels so that potential start-ups and SMEs can better access specialist expertise and resources in higher education.'* | South West |
| *'They need to make courses more relevant to the real world. '* | London |