Rights 4 Seniors

Needs Analysis for an Older Person's Rights- Based Website

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1. Abstract/Executive Summary

This study examines the information needs of older people and those who work with older people as regards the rights and entitlements of seniors in Northern Ireland. The findings will form the backbone to a new rights-reference website for the over 60s and those who interface with them.

Research carried out throughout Northern Ireland targeted these two audiences: (1) seniors over 60 and (2) those who work with older people such as advisers, social workers, volunteers and carers. Both qualitative and quantitative data has been gathered through questionnaires of both audiences and focus groups of seniors. This report will then found the basis for select interviews of professionals when the findings shall be examined and discussed. The complete study will then be used to develop a sitemap and content for inclusion in the website that Advice NI has commissioned to go live in March 2011.

2. Introduction

Advice NI and Atlantic Philanthropies sought to use its technology and social justice expertise to develop a wide range of web-based resources to support the economic and shared rights of older people in Northern Ireland. Based on research carried out by Advice NI, this study will inform the creation of a website regarding the entitlements due to the over 60s. Advice NI is also being guided in this project by partners from Access to Benefits (A2B), Age Northern Ireland (Age NI), Age Sector Platform, Belfast City Council, Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland (CARDI) and Engage with Age.

The website will be two-tiered: its back-end will exist as an essential tool for those who work with older people whilst the front-end will be designed as an easy-to-use reference for the over 60s. Content strategy, therefore, will dictate creating accessible subject-matter written in plain language to engage with the older person and subject-matter that is more information-rich to simplify the legislative framework and rules for those who interface with them. The website shall streamline and demystify these rights, rules and regulations throughout. After consultation with both audiences, it was decided that the site will be called Rights 4 Seniors and its web address http://www.rights4seniors.net/.

3. Background and Literature Review

The internet has significantly changed how we communicate with each other, how we work and how we access information. Policy-makers regard it as an enabler of social inclusion and it is becoming a key resource in the provision of social services. E-Government, or electronic governance, is now a stock phrase for how the authorities interact with citizens cheaply and with ease through the internet. Long before one British Prime Minister's speech on "Smarter Government"[1], his predecessor, Tony Blair and his e-envoy, Alex Hall, had unveiled the national e-government scheme to drag governance online and into the 21st Century. This was in April 2000 and was followed by the Transformational Government Scheme in November 2005, which was grounded on the premise that "the future of public services has to use technology to give citizens choice, with personalized services designed around their needs [and] not the needs of the provider"[2]. Older people above 60 years of age are traditionally more reliant on public services including housing, benefits and health care[3]. Therefore, with governmental push in favour of e-governance, older people's access to information regarding their entitlements, never mind their access to these very rights, is essential.

Two factors immediately impact upon this necessity. Firstly, as Northern Ireland's legislative framework can differ from the rest of Great Britain, the information and needs are province-specific. Secondly, the population of Northern Ireland is ageing. Figure 3.1 below, from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)[4], depicts the demographic predictions and shifts in the population of children (under the age of 16 years of age) in comparison with adults aged 65 and over. With the advances in medical science (amongst other factors) leading to longer life expectancy and a decrease in the birth-rate,

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[1] This speech was delivered by Gordon Brown at an event hosted by the Institute for Government and the Royal Society in London, 7th December 2009. The transcript of the speech is accessible at http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2009/12/speech-on-smarter-government-21633 [last accessed 30th July 2010]

[2] Tony Blair in the foreword to *Transformational Government: Enabled by Technology*, November 2005. Interestingly, most links to government sites for this strategy were broken but it is accessible at http://www.paisdigital.org/documentos/docsinnovacion/2005/Transformational_government.pdf [last accessed 30th July 2010]

[3] Source: Advice NI proposal to Atlantic Philanthropies

[4] Statistics Press Notice 2008-Based Population Predictions, from October 2009. Accessed at http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/population/projections/popproj08.pdf on 2nd August 2010.

the number of adults over 65 will rise quite sharply henceforth whilst the number of children under 16 will decrease after 2018. By 2028, NISRA predict that the population of adults over the age of 65 will overtake the number of children in Northern Ireland.

Figure 3.1: Children aged under 16 and adults aged 65 and over, actual and projected, 1971 – 2033 (non-zero y-axis).
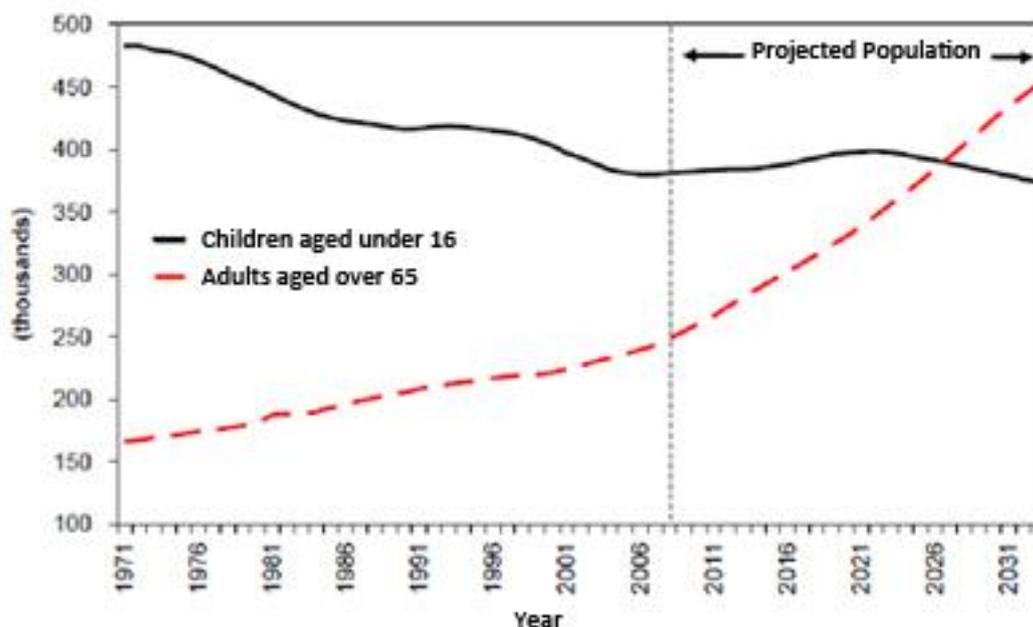
By 2009, internet usage had soared to such an extent that 37.4 million adults (76% of the United Kingdom's adult population) had accessed the internet in the three months prior to the study by the Office for National Statistics[1]. This is a massive leap from 26.8% adult users in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2000[2]. The largest increase in the proportion of those accessing the internet was in the oldest group. There was a 15 % increase in users aged 65+ in comparison with a 3% increase in usage amongst the 16 – 24 age group[3]. Nevertheless, as Figure 3.2 shows, if we examine the actual numbers of users, there is still a digital divide between those aged over 65 who use the internet and their younger counterparts.

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[1] Internet Access: Households and Individuals, August 2009, from the Office of National Statistics. http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/iahi0809.pdf [last accessed 2nd August 2010]
[2] World Bank, World Development Indicators, accessed via Google's public data: http://www.google.com/publicdata?ds=wb-wdi&met=it_net_user_p2&idim=country:GBR&dl=en&hl=en&q=internet+usage+statistics+uk#met=it_net_user_p2&idim=country:GBR:IRL [last accessed 2nd August 2010]
[3] Office of National Statistics as in Footnote 1 above.

Undoubtedly, some older people choose not to use the internet but there are many who are restricted by socio-economic factors.

Within rural and inner city poverty-stricken areas, those who have no internet access share a similar profile to those who experience disadvantage in other areas of life. As examined by Millward (2003) they tend to be people on a low income, the unemployed and older people. Not only are older people of especial concern because they can also be unemployed and/or on low income but they are also distinct as a social group that is less likely to be able to alter their socio-economic standing. Consequently, they are more vulnerable to the informational black holes created by a lack of access to the internet never mind a lack of comprehension regarding the myriad of regulations underpinning older people's rights and entitlements[1]. In stark terms, this new age of informational poverty has produced another level of deprivation and inequality to which older people are most prone.

Figure 3.2 Individuals' Use of the Internet
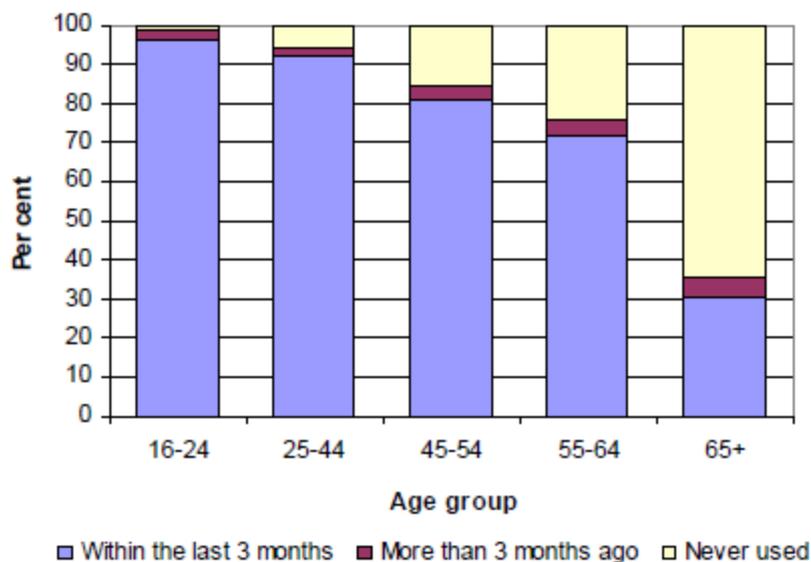
Internet Access: Households and Individuals (Office for National Statistics, 2009)

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[1] Zoe Anderson, A2B Access to Benefits for Older People, Summary of Findings of Workshops, September – December 2007.

In extensive research carried out by Advice NI with the support of its partners, Access to Benefits (A2B) and Age NI[1], in 2008, Emma Murphy analysed the training needs of advisers in the age sector of Northern Ireland. It also assessed the welfare needs of older people themselves if only because a gap in adviser training would inherently mean an informational gap in advice services provided to older people. The study[2] laid the groundwork for an accredited course[3] that empowered professionals throughout Northern Ireland who interfaced with older people. It is refreshed and kept up-to-date with current legislation and welfare needs. Indeed, as it is a resource that is easy-to-hand in Advice NI, it will form the backbone to this research and the consequent website.

The questionnaires and focus groups that Advice NI employed for data collection in the 2008 study targeted those who worked with older people with reference to the older people themselves. Indeed, each audience concurred on the important welfare issues which immediately informed the core topics that the course needed to teach:

Module 1: Age Awareness and Working with Older People

Module 2: Introduction to Older People's Benefits

Module 3: Understanding State Retirement Pension

Module 4: Health Rights and Services for Older People

Module 5: Community Care and Older People

Module 6: Housing and Older People

The central themes, rights and legislations offered the perfect building blocks for the further research of each audience in 2010. After completion, we can begin to construct this two-tiered website and populate it with relevant, targeted content. Indeed, its findings will inform course content for the next training cycle so that both nourish and complement each other.

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[1] Age NI at the time was two separate organisations, Help the Aged Northern Ireland and Age Concern Northern Ireland.

[2] Emma Murphy, Older Person Adviser Course, Needs Analysis Report 2008. http://www.adviceni.net/publications/PDF/OPAC%20Needs%20Analysis%20Report%202008.pdf (accessed 5th August 2010).

[3] This is now called Advantage: Accredited Training on Age Issues. Information can be accessed at http://www.adviceni.net/page_new.cfm/area/information/page/AgeIssues [5th August 2010].

Therefore, as a fully functioning website, this project will not only enable older people and those who interface with them on professional or personal bases to access a wide range of services, information and activities. It will also demystify the codified minefield of legislation that, more often than not, acts as a barrier to social justice for the older members of our community. To succeed, though, driven community promotion and training is absolutely vital to help bridge the digital divide. It is then that greater social interaction and access to information can begin to address wider societal issues of loneliness and isolation.

4. Research Methods

4.1 Introduction

This study sought, firstly, to envisage what information we required from any method of research we would choose to use. As the website will be expansive and multi-tiered, the research, by necessity, would have to have great reach and richness. Nevertheless, due to the short but intensive life-cycle for project set-up, S.M.A.R.T. principles had to be applied rigidly so that the research was:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Realistic
- Time-bound

Regardless of timeframe, though, the scale and inherent importance of the project demanded multi-method research that collected quantitative and qualitative data. To ensure transparency of the research design, this chapter ends with an analysis of the methods and strategy of exploration, namely:

- Questionnaires
- Focus Groups
- Semi-structured Interviews

4.2 Research Objectives

The research targeted its two main audiences: older people over the age of 60 (although 10% of the questionnaires from the age group 50-59 were included for qualitative study) and those who interface with them such as advisers, social workers and carers. Main areas under examination included internet experience, website content and web design to identify and assess:

- The key areas regarding the rights of older people that they themselves and those who work with them consider essential for inclusion in the website
- Any information that the audiences may find difficult to access
- Key content, even extraneous to the rights of older people, for site population
- Internet usage by older people
- Web design features/functions that would facilitate access and usability never mind encourage interest
- Feedback and participation for later stages of the project

4.3 Quantitative and Qualitative

Quantitative methods of research are commonly used in studies where classification and the construction of statistical models help explain what we observe. Thus, with a focus on facts, ideas can be tested and the data collected for a specific purpose. Questionnaires and structured interviews are two of the main methods of quantitative data collection and yet the parameters of this study demanded that we sought qualitative information too from our subjects using variations of the above methods.

Qualitative methods are best employed when researching problems focusing on human behaviour or variables that are complex, interwoven and difficult to measure. This form of data collection is more naturalistic and accepts pluralism rather than seeking consensus. It is flexible and unstructured, suffering little from retrospective distortion (Ghauri et al, 2002). The researcher becomes the instrument of data collection rather than using tools, equipment or controlled methods to gather information. For example, the sixteen focus groups we held across the province, canvassing over 200 older people from different backgrounds and regions, used the same skeleton structure for debate each time.

Nevertheless, the organic discussions and wealth of information collected owed more to the dynamism of the experienced facilitators[1] we employed to manage the groups as this author observed.

Therefore, as well as seeking exact, measurable information, the far-reaching questionnaire included questions that asked for the participant's views and opinions. Interviews were semi-structured as the interviewees' analyses, shaped by their life experiences as well as their values and beliefs, were essential. It was similar judgements and attitudes that enriched each focus group. Consequently, the data collected over the first trimester of the project was assessed quantitatively and qualitatively.

4.4 Questionnaires

Questionnaires can be defined as a "pre-formulated, written set of questions to which respondents record their own answers, usually within rather closely defined alternatives" (Sekaran, 2003, 236). One can cover an audience with vastly differing profiles and backgrounds, enabling them to complete the questions at their own convenience. This is no effortless research strategy, though, as "the field of questionnaire design is vast" (Cohen et al, 2005, 245). One must be sensitive to ethical issues, dichotomous questioning, operationalization and the practicalities of distribution before design is approachable. Therefore, at their most successful and effective, questionnaires are difficult to devise, administer, collect and interpret (Marchington et al, 2002). Even then, there is a low response rate associated with them and there is little opportunity for any researcher to probe or explore questions once answered. The richness of information and the reach that questionnaires attract make them difficult to ignore within any research strategy as long as they are developed diligently.

Two questionnaires (Appendices 1 and 2) were designed, one for each target audience. All of the original questions were based on information acquired from secondary sources and engineered to fulfil the envisaged objectives of the research. Nevertheless, the

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[1]Community Direct, Belfast, is the social economy enterprise of Women's Resource and Development Agency. Special and personal thanks should be extended to the Community Direct's Marketing and Business Development Worker, Ailish Cullen, for all of her work as well as to individual community facilitators.

originals were piloted on two from each target audience and on two colleagues within Advice NI. These pilots sought to eliminate any errors and to ensure the relevance or clarity of each question before release. It was admitted, though, that these questionnaires were lengthy and comprehensive due to the information-rich data that was required to discharge the original project successfully.

Both questionnaires were placed online using Survey Monkey[1]. Nevertheless, as the digital exclusion of older people was an informational gap that we hoped to assess, hard copies were distributed too. Cross-sectional support was canvassed from a wealth of individuals and organisations in order to reach the most isolated and disadvantaged within the target demographic. As well as individual polls, questionnaires were distributed and collected by carers, social workers, volunteers and community groups throughout Northern Ireland. It was envisaged that the study would be top-heavy in responses from women due to their greater participation in community-run activities and this proved the case. Therefore, to help address the balance between the sexes, older men in particular were canvassed in bars, hotels, barbers and betting shops in North and South Belfast. In the end, 132 older people from across the province completed the survey, including the First Minister, Peter Robinson. The final split between the sexes was close to 60% women and 40% men surveyed.

At the same time, those organisations, professionals and individuals who had already proved adept in reaching older people were being canvassed to complete the questionnaire designed for them particularly. The reach of this support is shown in Appendix 3. In total, 74 questionnaires were filled in from all over Northern Ireland by carers, social workers, third sector professionals and party political representatives amongst others.

4.5 Focus Groups

As a method of qualitative data collection, focus groups are "contrived settings, bringing together a specifically chosen sector of the population to discuss a particular given theme" (Cohen et al, 2005, 288). They are less a form of group interview than group interaction when discussing a topic supplied by the researcher. Hence, through participation in group discussion, the views of the individual will begin to emerge. In fact, the pursuant debate

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[1] http://www.surveymonkey.com/

may even predominate the researcher's agenda if not controlled. For the purpose of this study, though, they were constructive and practical due to the informative data that can be gathered from a large number of people in a short space of time.

Sixteen focus groups of older people were organised throughout Northern Ireland[1], facilitated by Community Direct. Recruitment, insofar as was possible, was representative of demographic sub-groups, if not the older population as a whole. Therefore, the sub-groups included men and women from urban and rural backgrounds; those who were employed, unemployed and retired; participants from different socio-economic backgrounds; and those from groups with additional needs who are most prone to marginalisation. Averaging more than 13 people per focus group, 212 older people participated in total.

The focus groups gave orientation to the study before any analysis of the questionnaires and helped develop themes and topics for the subsequent semi-structured interviews of the professionals. Therefore, the benefits of generating data from varying strata and sub-groups to the overall research were significant. The benefits to this author's personal understanding of the issues and opinions were immeasurable.

4.6 Semi-structured Interviews

Structured interviews with closed questions and fixed responses are easy to aggregate and analyse quantitatively. If the research demands a less mechanistic and more flexible response from the respondent, a part-qualitative, semi-structured interview should be devised. This enables participants "to raise and pursue issues and matters that might not have been included in a pre-devised schedule" (Cohen et al, 2005, 147). Nevertheless, semi-structured interviews are dependent on the honesty of the interviewee and the researcher's ability to control any potential bias.

As the questionnaires had already asked so much from the respondents who interface with older people, it was decided to engage with them in a different way rather than in a re-examination of the central issues or closed questioning regarding subscriptions. Instead, they were given time to study the first draft of the research and findings from the focus groups and questionnaires (minus their own final input which would be included in

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[1] East Belfast, Downpatrick, Bangor, Lisburn, Eglinton, Monkstown, Ballee, Larne, Portstewart, Craigavon, Newry and Mourne, Cookstown, Kesh, Magherafelt and Omagh.

this completed draft). They were then asked for their views regarding the study and further recommendations. This offered a perfect triangulation of the research methods employed and the personal development of the researcher prior to the end of the study and the beginning of the website design process. What was most valuable though was that it allowed us to target key stakeholders and professionals in specific areas that the study had underscored.

For example, within the wider subject areas such as Health or Community Care, the research also highlighted the likes of educational needs, isolation and transport. Therefore, it was considered apt to re-engage with educationalists, key providers of support to the vulnerable and community transport directors too.

4.7 Blogging III

Several weeks into the research, it became evident that the project required an online focal point until such a juncture that the website itself was live. A weblog was the obvious choice as it allowed both target audiences, co-workers and, indeed, funders chart the progress of the assignment and offer comment at any stage. Consequently, using the open source platform, Wordpress, and a unique domain (http://bloggingiii.com/), Blogging III – Blogging the Third – was created.

The blog has since been well received, averaging 25 visits per day. Not only did this aid the expansion of a contact database, but it also provided a perfect sounding board for findings, ideas and opinions. For example, after much heated discussion at every level regarding the semantics of age and ageing, the participants and Advice NI had finally whittled the choice of the name for the actual, live site down to two contenders[1]. An online poll was created and the final choice was thrown open to the regular audience of Blogging III and the contacts of the growing database who were directed there. 81 votes were cast and the final split was a close contest at 41 – 40. Further ideas and opinions were also welcomed and received.

Qualitative and quantitative data collection via the blog will continue throughout the project life cycle until the domain is amalgamated within Rights 4 Seniors.

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[1] Rights 4 Later Life was the other choice.

5. Findings/Discussion

5.1 Older Persons' Questionnaire

Of the 132 respondents, 58.3% (77) were women and 41.7% (55) were men. The vast majority came from Belfast and the Greater Belfast area (see Figure 5.1). Although the spread was in no way representative of demographics, it did illustrate the reach of the questionnaire across Northern Ireland. For example, 13 people responded from the Poynztpass area due to the author's contact of a particular group from that area but only 1 responded from Derry. Nevertheless, the questionnaire represented the sub-groups of urban and rural communities.

Figure 5.1 Questionnaire Spread

Location	Response count	Response % (nearest .1)
Armagh	2	1.5
Ballymena	2	1.5
Ballymoney	1	.8
Ballynahinch	1	.8
Ballywalter	1	.8
Bangor	22	16.7
Belfast	64	48.5
Beragh	1	.8
Carrickfergus	1	.8
Derry	1	.8
Donaghadee	1	.8
Enniskillen	1	.8
Greater Belfast	10	7.5
Holywood	1	.8
Killinchy	1	.8

Lisburn	2	1.5
Lurgan	1	.8
Millisle	1	.8
Newry	3	2.3
Portadown	1	.8
Poyntzpass	13	9.8
Portstewart	1	.8
Total	132	

The age breakdown of those surveyed is shown below in Figure 5.2. Most, 34.8% (n = 46), were aged 65-9.

Figure 5.2 Age Breakdown

Y axis = number of respondents

X axis = age bracket
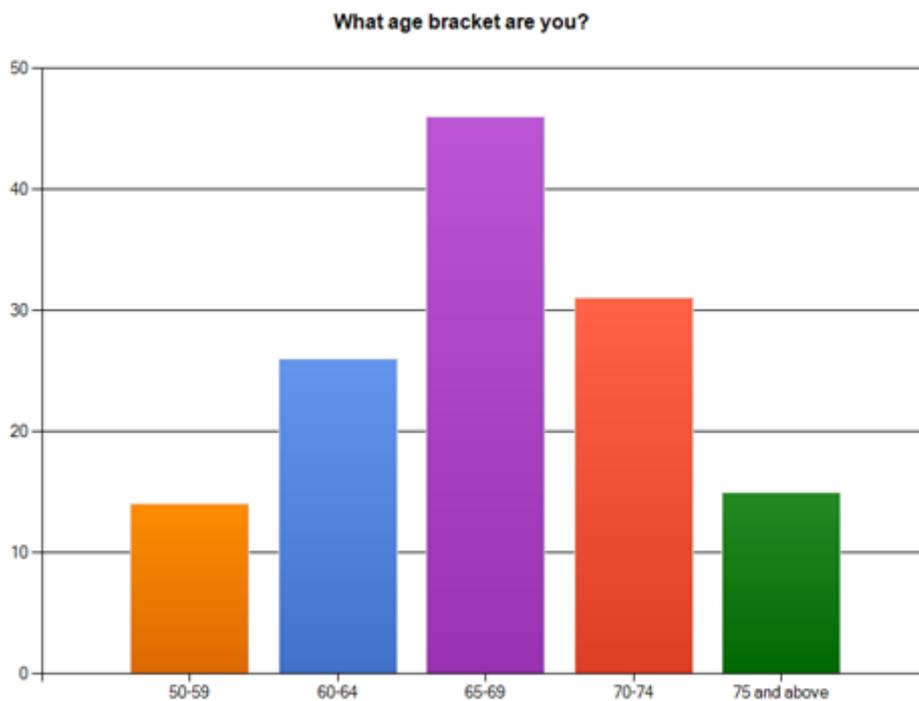
Nearly a third of respondents (n = 41) had no internet experience at all (Figure 5.3). More than half (53.8% or n = 71), though, had intermediate skills at least.

Figure 5.3 Internet Experience

Y axis = number of respondents

X axis = level of experience
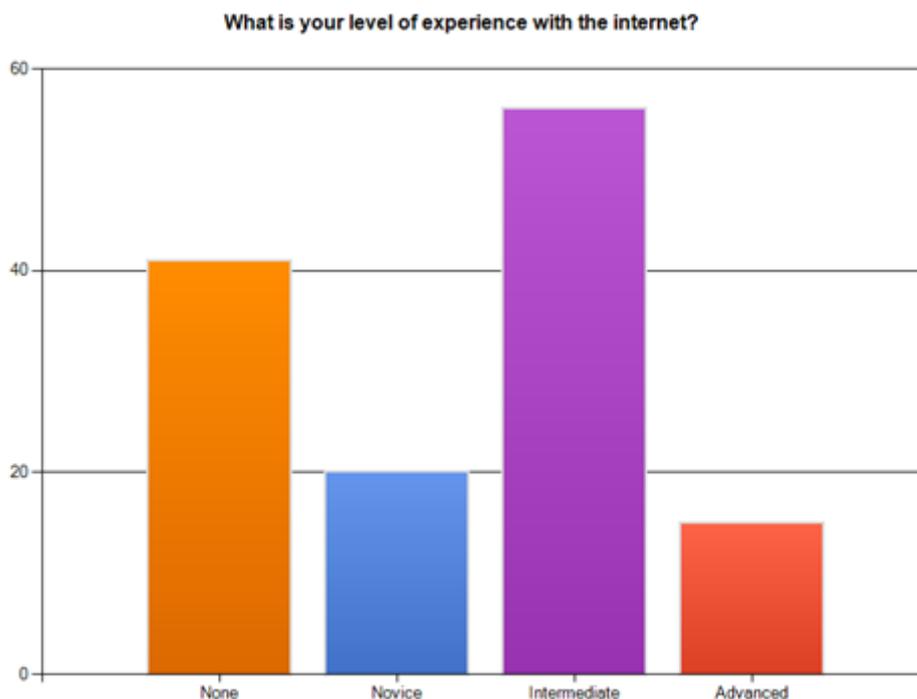
A cross tabulation of the age groups (Figure 5.3b) casts an interesting piece of information. All of the 50-59 year-olds have had internet experience and consider themselves users of intermediate skill at least. This may be expected for the youngest bracket of respondents as they are of working age and internet skills would be less prevalent amongst the older the cross-section. Indeed, only one of the fourteen of these accesses the internet weekly whilst the remainder use the internet daily. Nevertheless, five of the thirty one 70-74 year-olds were confident enough to record that they were advanced users when we may have expected less. The data collected from the oldest age group substantiates this expectation.

Figure 5.3(b)

Y axis = number of respondents

X axis = level of experience
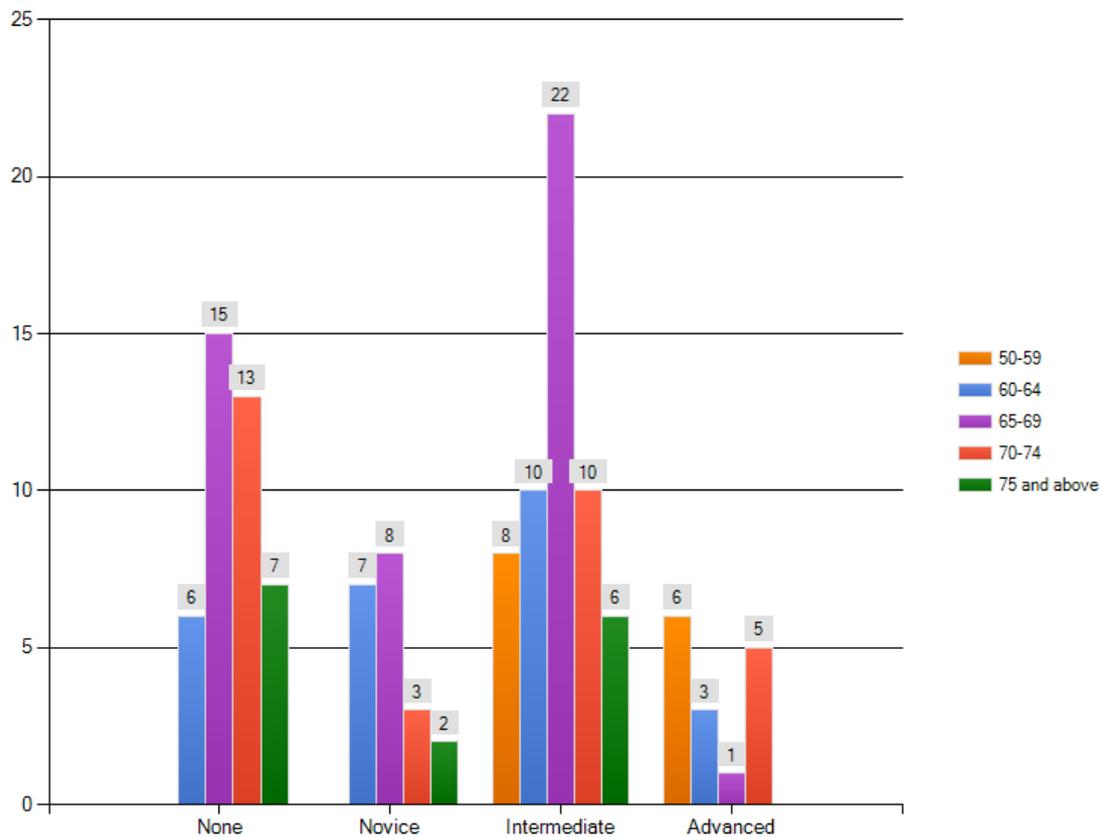
61.3% (n = 81) were using the internet weekly at least and, of those, 47.7% (n = 63) used the internet daily (Figure 5.4 below). Therefore, if the respondent had ready access to the technology, they were using it often. In fact, 72 of the respondents had internet access in their home. The library and the workplace also offered points of internet access for 12.1% (n = 16). Admittedly, in Figure 5.5, most of those who accessed the internet in the workplace fell in the 50-59 age bracket. Availability and proximity of access impacted on the frequency of usage for obvious reasons.

Figure 5.4 Frequency of Internet Usage

How often, if at all, do you access the internet?

47.7 % (63)

13.6 % (18)

2.3 % (3)

5.3 % (7)

31.1 % (41)

Never
Rarely
Monthly
Weekly
Daily
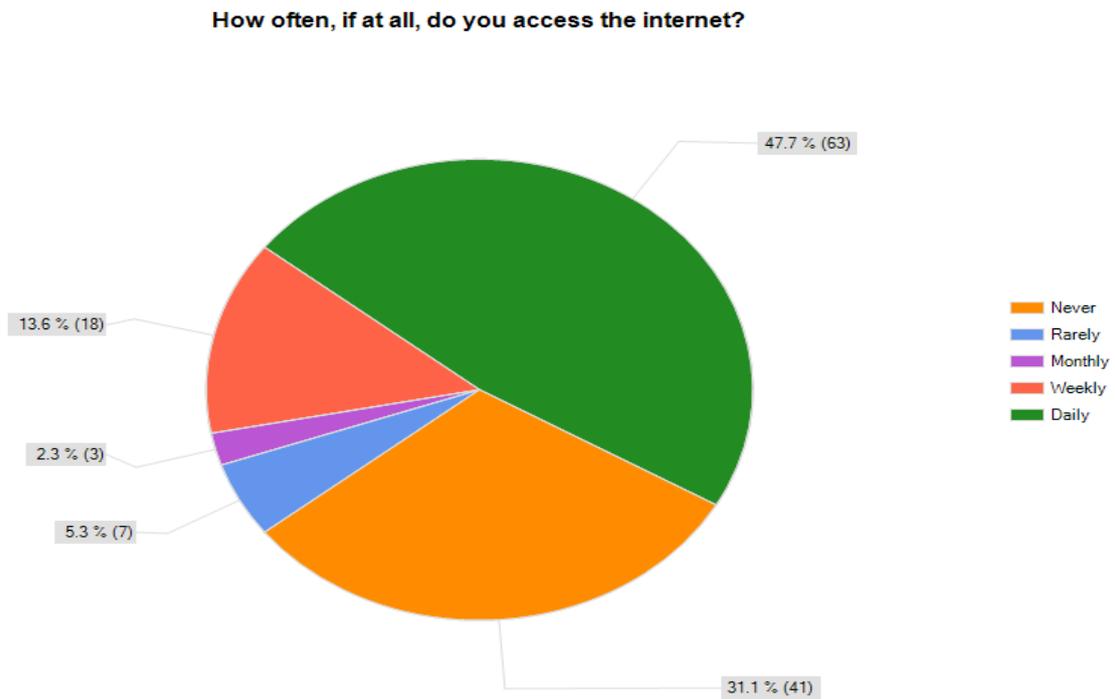
Figure 5.5 Location of Internet Access

Where, if at all, do you mainly access the internet?

Not applicable to me — 31.8 % (42)

At home — 54.5 % (72)

A relative's home — 0.8 % (1)

Community centre — 0.8 % (1)

Café —

Other (please write) — 12.1 % (16)
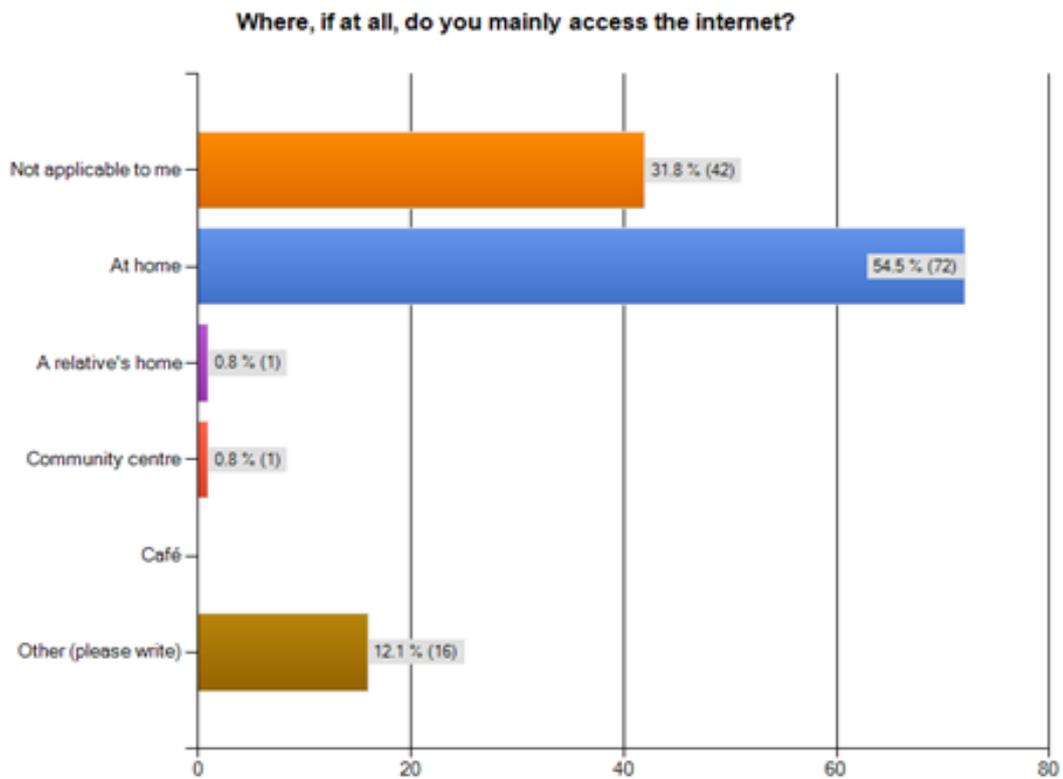
 Figure 5.6 shows that most of those canvassed used the internet to surf for topics of general or research interest. Only 24.2% (n = 32) used social networking for contact with people outside of the family circle but nearly a half (n = 60) used the internet to keep in contact with family. Within the "Other" tab, games-play and recipes are interestingly cited as purposes for accessing the internet.

Figure 5.6 Use of the Internet

For what purpose do you use the internet, if you use it at all (tick all that are applicable)?
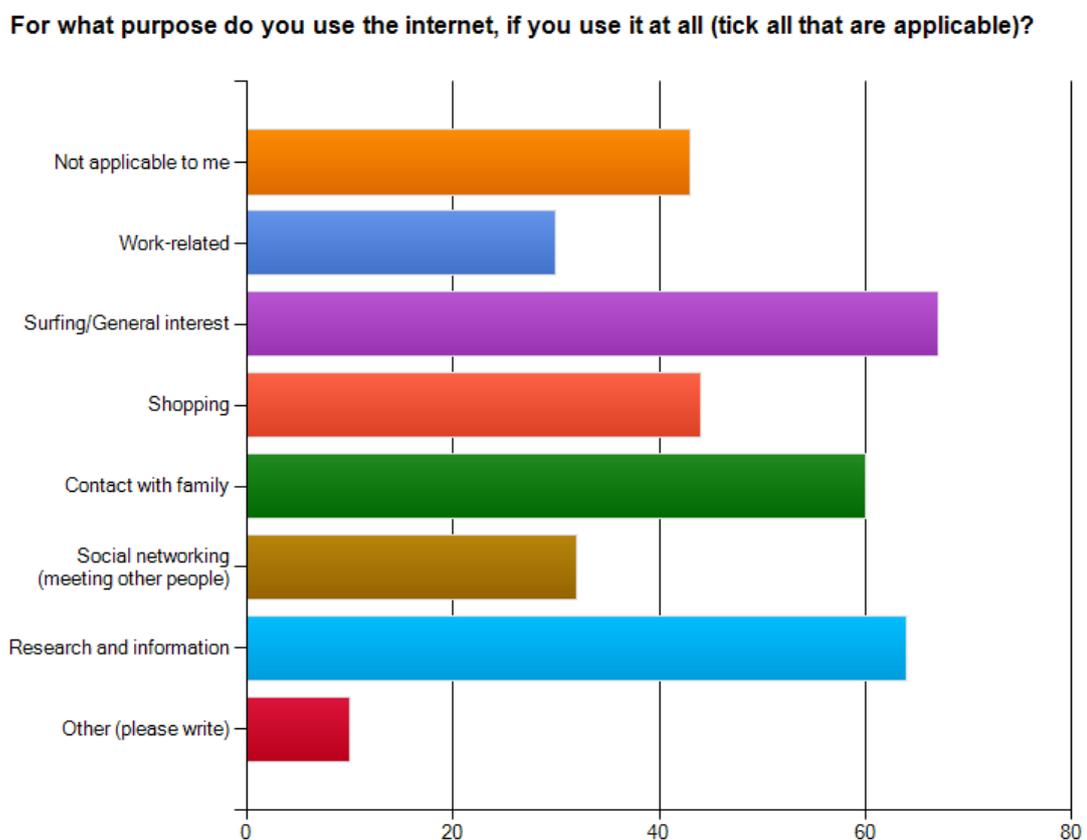
The questionnaire respondents were tasked to rank rights-based issues in order of importance to them. Based on all responses, rank of importance and frequency, a rating average was worked out within Survey Monkey's analytics tool. The smaller the average score equates to a ranking of greater importance. The base report is tabularized in Figure 5.7.

Figure 5.7 Ranking of Content

	Rating Average	Response Count	Placing
State Pension	4.19	124	2
Debt	8.79	87	13
Community Care	6.35	101	7
Basic Human Rights	7.56	95	10
Elder Abuse	8.36	86	12
Age Discrimination	8.05	93	11
Financial Security	5.67	102	4
Poverty	7.04	114	9
Benefits	5.39	121	3
Housing	6.79	105	8
Health	3.74	124	1
Isolation and Loneliness	6.32	118	6
Safety and Security	5.74	115	5

Figure 5.8 shows these values in a bar chart based on the rating average. In descending order of importance with the highest ranked (health) at the top, debt may have been at the bottom of the list for respondents but money worries were never far away. For inclusion within the website, they ranked a section covering their overall financial security fourth and poverty in between at ninth. This may be symptomatic of the recession that has bitten hard since Advice NI's extensive research for the Older Person's Adviser Course (Murphy, 2008) as financial planning then rated the least important in a long list.

It would be foolhardy to dismiss the impact of elder abuse, age discrimination and the abasement of basic human rights on the respondents, though, just because they may have ranked these topics less important. As with any form of discrimination, rights violation

or abuse, the effect on the victim can be cataclysmic. Nevertheless, if we are not party or witness to these, we may not register their tragic significance.

Figure 5.8 Rights-Based Content for Inclusion (in order of importance)

X axis = average ranked score
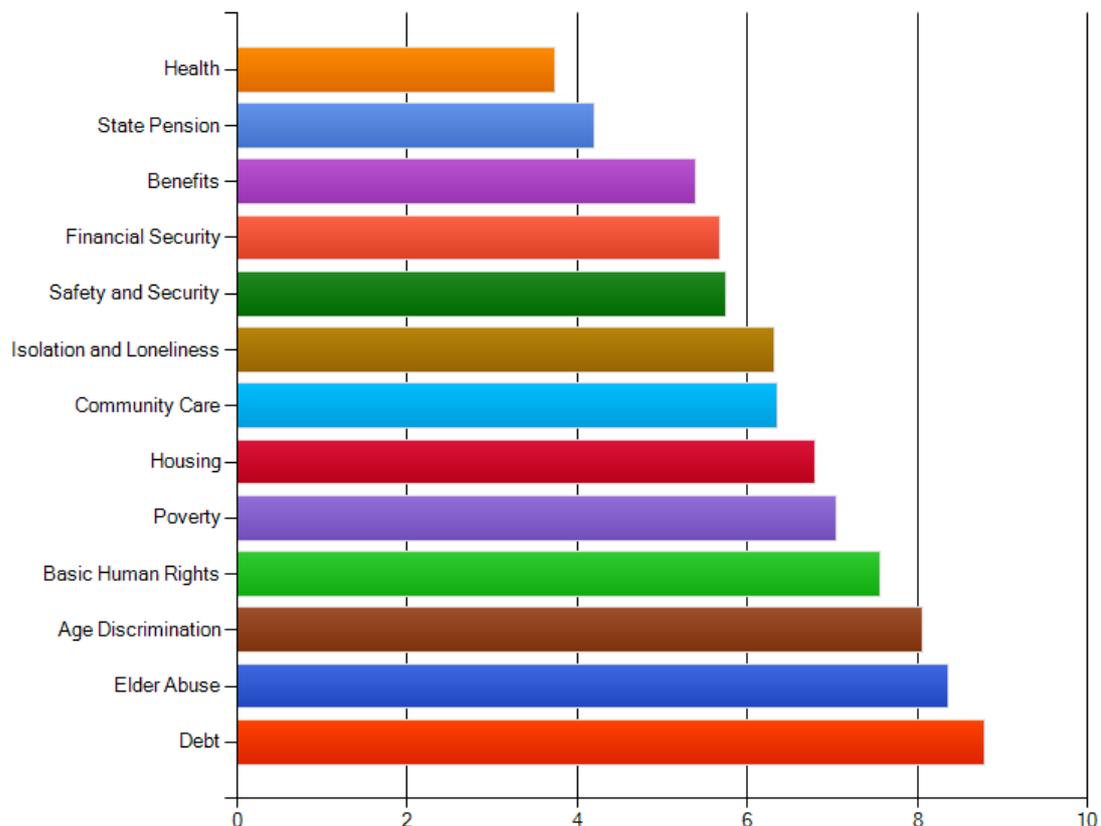
For example, Age NI and the Alzheimer's Society have managed the Uniting against Elder Abuse project in partnership to raise awareness and promote understanding of the risk. To this end, they heralded June 15th 2010 as Elder Abuse Awareness Day. Advocacy Manager for the Alzheimer's Society, Marian Cinnamond, warned the public that "elder abuse is under-reported... [and] two years into the project we are barely scratching the surface of need"[1]. Caryl Williamson, Senior Advocate with Age NI said:

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[1] http://www.ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland/latest-press/archive/elder-abuse-awareness-day/?paging=false, accessed 19th August 2010

"There is little formal contact between statutory agencies and services and support for those reporting elder abuse is often uncoordinated and fragmented. This is in marked contrast to the approach taken in the protection of children."[1]

CARDI also have also heightened public awareness of the issue, gathering publications, research and news items from across Europe. Nicola Donnelly, the organisation's Communication's Officer, writes that "elder abuse is often an uncomfortable subject matter for some but as our population ages it is imperative that it be brought out into the open and that we ensure all older people are treated with respect and dignity"[2]. It is after all a basic tenet of human rights for older people that they are allowed "to lead a life of dignity and independence"[3].

Respondents in 2010 again rank information about their pension and benefits entitlements high in order of importance. Community care and housing rights figure too but older people who responded would like to know more information about their safety and security. They also believe that isolation and loneliness is a topic they would like tackled online and this is reflected in recent research by Engage with Age (EWA). "Gazing at the 4 Walls"[4] highlighted the debilitating effects of social exclusion on the older members of our community and the barriers to their inclusion. This research therefore bears out the relevance of EWA's study.

The older people were then asked whether there were other issues that had not been covered for ranking and 43 out of the 132 respondents replied. A single number for age-related government queries and a list of contact numbers in case of emergency were ideas that were mooted. Some issues such as health aftercare and sheltered housing would be covered within the main subject areas above. Many were individual or minority issues that, whilst still very important, affected the thoughts of few within the study. Therefore, the rights of LGBT[5] in later life or the right to die with dignity would provide very interesting

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[1] http://www.ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland/latest-press/archive/elder-abuse-awareness-day/?paging=false, accessed 19th August 2010

[2] Opening People's Eyes to the Issue of Elder Abuse, online article by Nicola Donnelly. Accessed at http://www.cardi.ie/news/openingpeopleseyestotheissueofelderabuse on19th August 2010

[3] Article 25 of the Charter Of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, accessed at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf on 19th August 2010

[4] Ibid

[5] Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender.

and thought-provoking study once the website is up-and-running. Nevertheless, transport and access to education featured amongst most of the comments populating this section, whilst wills, will-making and inheritance were to the forefront of the minds of a sizeable few (n = 5). In a subsequent question, though, not one of the respondents admitted that they had trouble accessing information regarding issues important to them.

Sixty nine people recorded their opinion that the frontend of the website should include something more than the rights and entitlements of older people. This section, as above, will prove a rich resource if only to engage the audience in different ways other than fulfilment of a particular need for rights-based information. Social interactivity and community-specific information were ideas that were floated by many of these respondents. Some requested a directory of reputable tradesmen in their area and others sought links at least to help-lines, supports groups and local recreational classes. Again, it was evident that the respondents were actively seeking to continue to add value to society and develop their own skills. Several requested information and access to further education, campaigning and volunteering opportunities. Just as many believed that the website would offer the perfect platform to offer concessions to older people from local businesses, restaurants and services.

As expected, most of the respondents trusted other media such as television, radio and newspapers as channels for the distribution of information they could trust but then again this survey included nearly a third (n = 41) who had no internet experience whatsoever. About 36% were wary of the internet to varying degrees. We were just as interested to survey our participants' views on how we could actively combat any perceived lack of trustworthiness. The reputation and past history of the organisation that was providing the information was the key it seemed for most, whilst many believed that if the site was government-tested and given a seal of approval that would suffice. Those who may have had little experience of the internet as an information provider sought training to bridge this lack of trust. Some of those with internet experience even demanded confidence in the backend security of the site. Several agreed that the clarity and simplicity of the language employed within the site would lead to greater trust. They argued that jargon and acronyms created distance and could lead to ambiguity.

It was essential to target those who had internet experience specifically (responses: n = 62) to assess the types of websites that interested them. This would help inform the design process at a later stage of the project although the usability testing of the beta version of the site would have a majority make-up of people with little or no internet experience. Google (www.google.com) and Yahoo (www.yahoo.com) were the search engines most used. News and current affairs sites, such as the BBC site (www.bbc.co.uk) were amongst the most popular. Shopping, price comparison and holiday booking sites are mainstays too. The respondents were using the internet for online banking, information (health, government and ancestry sites featured) and keeping in contact with family. Choices also reflected personal interests in the likes of crafts or gardening. Many also showed their loyalty to the websites of the likes of Age Sector Platform (http://www.agesectorplatform.org/) and Age NI (http://www.ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland/).

As Figure 5.9 below shows, the information that sites provide and the personal interests of the participant are the main reasons for visiting and re-visiting a favourite. Ease-of-use is still important to a third of the participants (n = 33) but perhaps the aesthetics of the site's 'look' should not suffer (n = 12). Other reasons featured included the security of the sites and the added value in bargain-hunting.

These opinions were again reinforced when the participants were asked what would entice them to stay on or return to a particular website. From the sixty two responses, the vast majority can be summarised thus (ranked in order with the most popular choice first):

- Ease-of-use and navigation
- Accuracy, timeliness and value of information
- Plain and simple use of language
- Bargains, news and activities
- Security of site

Nevertheless, no respondents proffered ideas as to how we could make the website more accessible, usable or engaging for them.

Figure 5.9 Reasons for Visiting and Re-Visiting Websites

X axis = number of respondents

Why are they your most visited/favourite websites (tick each that apply if applicable)?
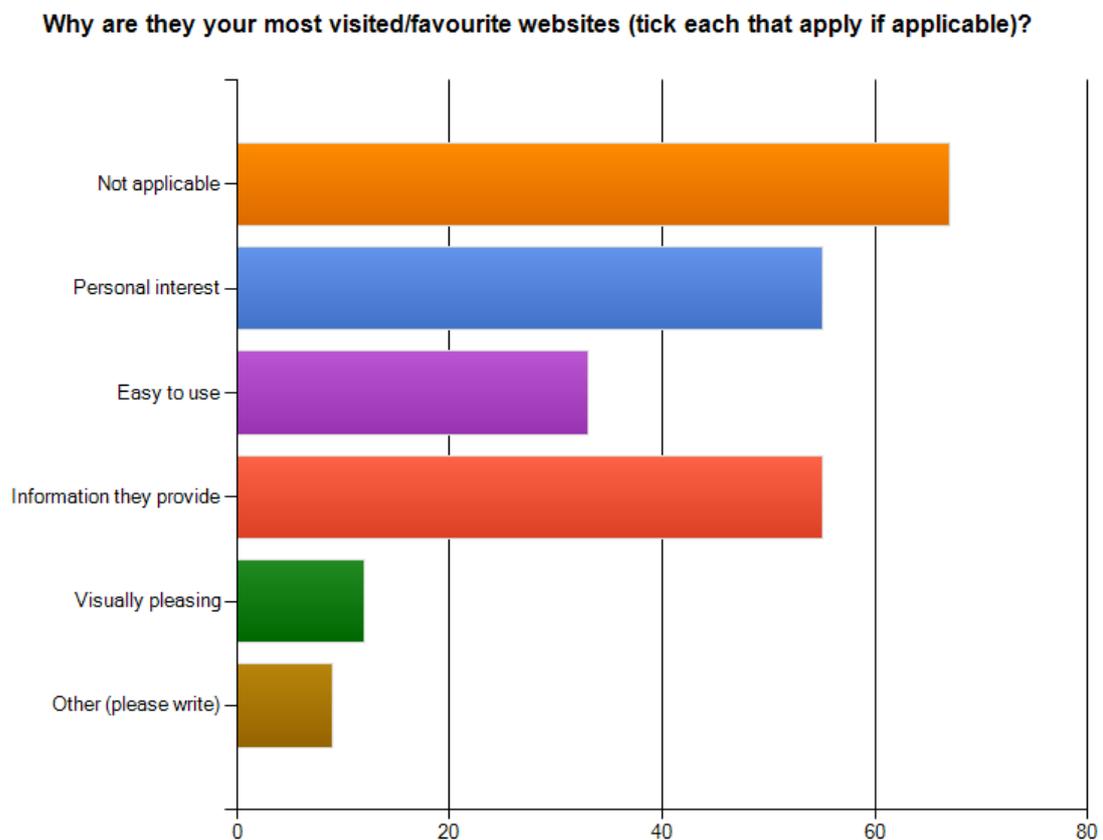
Interestingly, there was an even split of participants who wanted and did not want further training or knowledge of the internet. Some with no experience obviously chose not to have any experience of the internet whilst some of those who had experience felt they were gaining enough on their own. Of those who wished for further internet skills, the vast majority (53 out of 68) would prefer less formal, more fun instruction. Thankfully, over 36% (n = 48) signed up to help with the usability studies at a later stage of the project so there are many willing champions from which to choose.

5.1.1 Focus Groups

With the support of Community Direct and their community facilitators, Advice NI also held sixteen older persons' focus groups throughout Northern Ireland. The study intentionally canvassed participants from both densely populated areas such as Belfast and those from rural areas like Eglinton, Co. Derry. The geographical spread of the groups is shown below in Figure 5.10.

Figure 5.10 Focus Group Location, Numbers and Female/Male Breakdown

Location	Numbers	Female/Male
Oasis Centre, East Belfast, Co. Antrim	10	8/2
Safe and Well Senior Citizens, Downpatrick, Co. Down	33	29/4
Men's Group, Bangor, Co. Down	15	0/15
Atlas Women's Centre, Lisburn, Co. Down	6	6/0
Eglinton Community Centre, Eglinton, Co. Londonderry	9	9/0
Monkstown Resource Centre, Monkstown, Co. Antrim	10	10/0
Ballee Senior Citizens, Ballymena, Co. Antrim	5	5/0
Larne Community Development, Larne, Co. Antrim	12	7/5
Causeway U3A[1], Portstewart, Co. Derry	18	14/4
Craigavon Community Network, Craigavon, Co. Armagh	10	5/5
Newry and Mourne U3A, Kilkeel, Co. Down	12	11/1
Cookstown Age Concern, Cookstown, Co. Tyrone	10	7/3
Crossmaglen U3A, Crossmaglen, Co. Armagh	25	24/1
Kesh, Co. Fermanagh	9	8/1
Magherafelt, Co. Londonderry	11	10/1
Omagh, Co. Tyrone	17	17/0
	212	170/42

212 older people were canvassed during the focus groups although we recognised early on that this section of the study would be top-heavy in female representation. The reason for this is that we were utilizing the community networks and, traditionally for this

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[1] University of the Third Age (U3A)

demographic, more women than men prevail of these groups, facilities and services[1]. Therefore, men's groups specifically were targeted for inclusion. In the end, men made up 20% of the focus group participants.

In groups, the participants were very open about debt and poverty being one of the main issues affecting older people in Northern Ireland at the moment. Respondents for the questionnaire were more reticent talking about their own impoverishment as being an issue. Instead they ranked proactive financial planning being important to them. Also, health concerns weighed heavy on the participants of all the focus groups. At times it seemed they were even more concerned about the immediacy of their own ailments and mortality rather than their entitlements. Therefore, most of the focus groups debated health as a lifestyle issue as well as a question of entitlement. This indicates that content strategy for this essential topic may also include information on healthy living, health products or even life insurance. An immediate example would be the health section promoted by the American Association of Retired Persons (http://www.aarp.org/health/) which was a favourite site of several respondents in each of this study's questionnaires.

Each focus group debated pensions and benefits as well as their entitlement to both. These were the main topics throughout many of the questions. This invariably led to discussion of how little if anything was left at the end of the week for food and heating. In Bangor and East Belfast the groups even talked frankly about fuel poverty and the choice of heating or eating. Though these groups were meeting in late spring to early summer, it was quite chilling to think how the previous winter, which was very cold, was still stark in their minds.

Issues of personal safety and security were pronounced in focus groups from urban areas such as Belfast, Larne and Monkstown (although the Causeway U3A group in Portstewart and the senior citizens of Flying Horse in Downpatrick mooted their concerns above most other issues too). Many of those canvassed felt that they and/or their neighbours within a similar demographic felt lonely and isolated. In both rural and urban areas, this was compounded by transport problems. Services were too expensive, they ran infrequently or had been discontinued altogether. For example, an older person in a rural

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[1] It should also be noted for future studies that many of the community groups for older people meet less frequently over the summer months too.

area that is not on a bus route may find it difficult to travel around if they do not have their own mode of transport. Similarly, as was the case so often in the focus groups, older people may live in a city but, if they are in between major bus routes, they too will be burdened with transport difficulties. In rural areas, the closure of the local post office was a bugbear whilst the closure of local libraries affected those from urban areas. Mobility problems, endemic with ageing, aggravate this issue of transport further and many focus groups highlighted this.

Community care and housing entitlements featured in many discussions but housing repairs, the handyman provision and reputable tradesmen were discussed more often. Age discrimination and access to education were topics raised by certain group members.

Otherwise, local and personal issues featured in each as matters of importance to the participants. In Eglinton the removal of Foyle's out-of-hours medical service was as important there as the removal of the accident and emergency unit in Whiteabbey hospital to the Monkstown group. The price of television licensing fees was as much of a concern for some as anti-social behaviour for others.

The focus groups were then asked to think about their specific rights as older people as well as the information they would seek. These can be easily summarised below:

Rights and Entitlements	*Information*
Benefits	Local Government Contacts
Pensions	Advice Contacts
Health	Health/GP/Pharmacy Contacts
Financial (Debt, Poverty & Planning)	Support Groups
Access to Education and Employment	Travel Insurance
Transport	Form-Filling Help
Wills and Inheritance	General Legal
Basic Human Rights	
Age Discrimination	

It is a great tribute to the third sector and the hard-working community groups on the ground that they are the main channel of such information to most of the participants of this part of the study. Admittedly, this may be coloured by the fact that these discussions were organised with the help of the community network. Older people who are involved in community activities and groups in urban and rural areas are at immediate advantage to those who are not. Aside from the social aspect and the well-being this promotes, the community networks provide key information and support. Those who are not involved are at greater risk of exclusion and isolation if they cannot rely on family or neighbours. They may miss vital information that could improve their quality of life or, if they are in need, provide sustenance or advice. Otherwise, they would have to be proactive in seeking that guidance from the likes of Advice NI or the Citizens' Advice Bureau because the passive channels of information, from television, mail drop or newspaper, are not as useful by far. As for the internet as an information provider, only a third of the groups (and then only a proportion of these people), searched online for what they required.

If it was not for the community groups or the network of friends and family, the participants admitted that they still had or would have problems accessing information they required. Many had problems understanding and completing forms correctly. The language used in these and, indeed, informational leaflets/packs was very difficult to comprehend. Jargon and "civil service language" as it was described in a couple of groups had to be simplified and unambiguous. Language was again a barrier for many of the groups when telephoning for information. If they were lucky enough to get through to the correct department for relevant information (never mind navigate the various options), they sometimes had problems understanding the different dialects and/or accents of the person on the end of the line. Most preferred face-to-face contact or, at least, a local operator who they could understand and who could understand them.

Accessing information was also costly. Getting into and around town can be time-consuming for those in outlying regions if they are able to get an appointment for advice or informational services. Telephone bills and the television licence are expensive. Buying a computer with internet access is dear too and, if you consider a basic pension, even buying a daily newspaper is pricey. Participants in the city focus groups reflected on the closure of libraries as these were where they could read the newspapers and go online free-of-charge.

Indeed, many saw their lack of experience with computers and the web would be a barrier even if they were able to access the technology. Overall too, many of the focus groups openly talked of how their innate pride or embarrassment prevented them from either accessing the information, asking for clarification when they are experiencing difficulty in comprehension or even seeking advice in the first instance. Such emotions, even though they are very human ones, prove to be barriers throughout this study.

Across the board, the focus groups were quite clear as to how information could be made more accessible:

- Clear, concise and jargon-free information
- Joined-up Government – greater respect/customer service especially for the less able
- One contact point for older people
- Public accessibility to internet and newspapers
- Free-phone numbers and gratis television licence earlier
- Better help with form-filling
- More funding for the charities and community groups

Even though lack of experience in internet technology inhibited most of the focus group members and may have lead to a lack of trust in the web as an information provider, our participants reasoned that faith could be built or restored. If the project was being run and/or supported by organisations that they trusted, they would be inclined to trust the information. Again, agreeing with the findings of the questionnaires, a government stamp of approval would encourage many to believe the information within the website. As Advice NI is a second tier organisation whose members would be better known in each community, it was agreed that the support of the likes of Age NI and Belfast City Council was essential as this gave credence to the information. The site would then give Advice NI the opportunity to raise awareness of its work in partnership. Nevertheless, a contact number, email service or a live chat facility should be provided if there are any questions outstanding. Furthermore, it was also felt that the content had to be clear, contemporary and correct or there would be an immediate and perhaps irreparable breakdown of believability. Finally, the participants in

many of the groups agreed that the less they had to fill in personal information, the better as they would have to be assured of site safety and security.

The participants agreed that what makes general information accessible can be applied to the website to ensure that it is usable for older people. Therefore, easy to use designs, clear language and highly-visible signposting are essential. Advice NI and the web design company should also be sensitive to the needs of those who are less able. To be compliant with current legislation, options should exist for the re-sizing of fonts, for text-to-speech content and for control without a mouse (which some participants dislike or had trouble using) to name but a few. Furthermore, training and experience was again mooted in each group meeting as being the key to bridging this digital divide.

Even those with little or no experience of the internet were able to offer functional, if not inspirational, ideas to entice new visitors and keep regular visitors engaged:

- Vouchers/offers for local shops, restaurants and businesses
- Quizzes and prize giveaways
- Recipes (and cooking for one)
- Platform for debate and social networking
- Jokes and fun section
- Email contact to answer queries
- Continued promotion and company sponsorship
- Community/church notice board
- Training/classes in specific areas of interest

The groups were able to offer ideas for other content that be of interest to them:

- Current affairs and up-to-date local/relevant news
- A list of local, reputable tradesmen
- Holidays, outings and travelling insurance
- Legal advice
- A list of the political representatives and their contact details
- Health, well-being and leisure section
- Volunteering opportunities

These meetings also stirred up lively debate around ideas for promoting and marketing the site:

- Media (television, radio, newspapers – local and national)
- Community and church network
- Older person champion
- Posters, leaflets mail-shoots
- Shopping centres, doctor surgeries and libraries
- Continued consultation with peer groups
- Training

The Magherafelt seniors were kind enough to offer their services again at the launch of the site as long as long as lunch was provided for all those participants who helped with the focus groups.

5.2 Those who work with or care for older people

Seventy four completed questionnaires were received from respondents who interface with the older members of our community. The participants represented concerns (see Appendix 3 Supporting Organisations and Research Reach) from all over Northern Ireland and one from Dublin, representing the support Advice NI has had in the project from CARDI. For obvious reasons, the majority of these were organisations situated in urban centres such as Belfast, Londonderry and Newry. Nevertheless, the study also attracted input from offices in smaller towns such as Moneymore, Magherafelt and Dungiven.

All levels of the age sector and beyond, from directors and senior advocates to project co-ordinators and Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), were represented. A generic breakdown of the roles that the participants fulfil is detailed below:

- Advisers
- Social Workers
- Health Workers
- Community Workers

- Carers

- Advocates

- Educators

- Elected Representatives

Due to the occupational standing of the respondents and their obvious awareness of age issues, the questionnaires were information-rich.

When asked to rank the importance and relevance of informational needs within the age sector in Northern Ireland, those who work with older people agreed that health rights are of the utmost importance (Figure 5.10 below). They did not believe that pension entitlements (position 6 here against position 2 in the older person's questionnaire) need examined ahead of community care (position 3 here against 7 in the older person's questionnaire) but they agreed that the myriad of rules that make up the benefits (position 2 here against 3 in the older person's questionnaire) system will need primary placement on the site. Interestingly, this emphasis mirrors the Advice NI study for the older person's adviser course (Murphy, 2008).

The mean positioning of the impact of poverty (position 5 here and 9 in the older person's questionnaire) and the importance of financial planning (position 9 here and 5 in the older person's questionnaire) were the same although the rankings were in opposite positions. It could be argued (note the emphasis of 'pride' within the older persons' focus groups) that the older people who responded to the questionnaire would be pro-active and talk about the importance of their financial planning rather than record passively the deprivation of their own position. Those who interface with the older population do not hold back and instead talk of the 'poverty' of the position of the older members of our society.

Overall, in this part of the study, the top nine choices made by the older people and those who work with them were similarly positioned. In the latter questionnaire, the average scores were so close that little separated the importance of community care in third position and financial security in ninth position (the difference in average ranking for seven topics was a mere 0.72 points). The study in 2010 was closely reflects Advice NI's research in 2008 save for one key area. Financial planning was least important in comparison with other

areas in 2008 whilst the impact the recession over the intervening period has made the issue of poverty rise significantly.

Figure 5.11 Rights-Based Content for Inclusion (in order of importance)

X axis = average ranked score
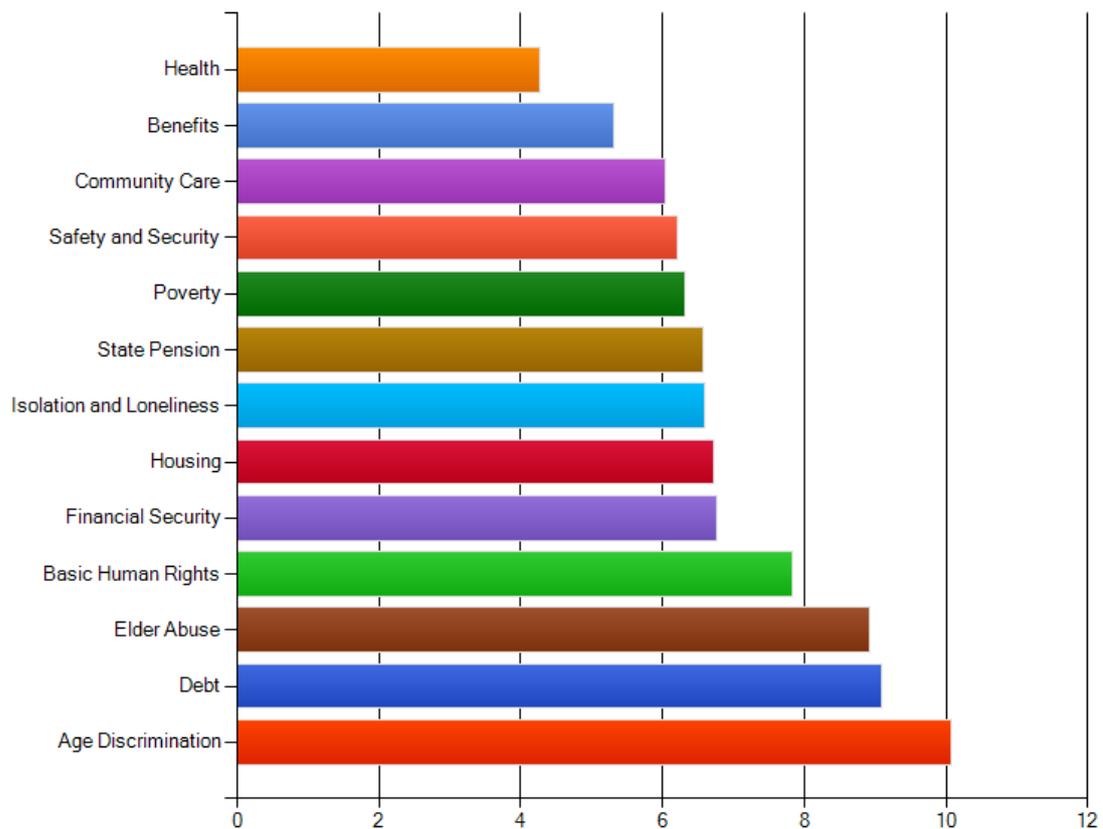
Over a third of respondents (n = 26) believed that there are other important rights-based issues affecting older people that the website should include. Many reflected single issue significance and the particular thrust of individual organisations such as adult vulnerability, fuel poverty and consumer rights. All represented key areas for further study once the site is live and again a section for emergency contacts was requested.

The importance of transport entitlements and the legalities of inheritance and wills were deemed very important by those who responded within this section. This mirrored the views of those who responded in the same section of the older person's questionnaire. This

part of the study also emphasized how the quality of life for older people can be improved positively by their continued engagement in society through voluntary services and/or lifelong learning. There was a marked difference, though, recognising not only the importance of carers but also the role played by older people themselves as carers. In an ageing society it is indeed essential to flag this. Research[1] by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) in Northern Ireland discovered that two thirds of carers surveyed were aged 55 or over.

Aside from very specific problem areas, the respondents of this part of the study were able to offer very helpful general advice. It was difficult for a couple of thirty respondents to access individual health and social services trust policies regarding community care or contact the correct person. Broadly, though, they raised these barriers to the access of relevant information:

- No centralised point of information
- Difficult to pinpoint relevant contact or service provider
- Difficulty in accessing information that is up-to-date or Northern Ireland-specific

The relevance of a holistic, older person's rights-based website is apparent. Nevertheless, it is imperative that it is maintained each working day and has links to relevant services or contacts for Northern Ireland.

Most of the respondents of this questionnaire also believed that the website could offer much more than simply exist as a rights reference. The vast majority of those who responded to this question (n = 40) realised the potential of the website for social networking and community fora. It then offered a perfect platform for advocacy and further research from its visitors to test or help change social policy. It need not duplicate content either, but signpost visitors to sites, contact or services already being managed admirably by professional organisations throughout Northern Ireland.

To overcome the perceived lack of trust that older people may have for the internet as an information channel (see Section 5.1.1 above), the forty three respondents were able to offer advice that concurred with the senior participants:

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[1] *Survey of Carers of Older People in Northern Ireland* (2006) at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/nicarerreport.pdf. Last accessed on 11th August 2010.

- Education, training and encouragement

- Government approval

- Support from respected organisations

- Inclusion of up-to-date and relevant information written in plain language

- Site security

- Accessibility and usability would be the key

- Case-studies, personal stories and local information

- Promotion, marketing and sponsorship

Again, the respondents visited the same sort of websites most often, with Google and Yahoo as the search engines of choice:

- News and current affairs

- Shopping, holiday booking and price comparison websites

- Online banking

- General, occupational and personal interest

- In-house loyalty to work websites

- Social networking and contact

This hunger for information, whether for personal or occupational use, is reflected in Figure 5.12 below. 87.8% of those who responded sought information from their favourite sites. 44.9% admitted that they visited these for personal interest whilst 16% (within the 'other' responses) said they used them as a work tools.

What would entice these set of respondents to stay or return to the site is the same as above for the older people:

- Ease-of-use and navigation

- Accuracy, timeliness and value of information

- Plain and simple use of language

- Bargains, news and activities

- Security of site

Figure 5.12 Reasons for return visits to websites

Why are they your most visited/favourite websites (tick each that apply if applicable)?

Reason	Percentage
Personal interest	44.9 %
Easy to use	61.2 %
Information they provide	87.8 %
Visually pleasing	24.5 %
Other (please write)	20.4 %
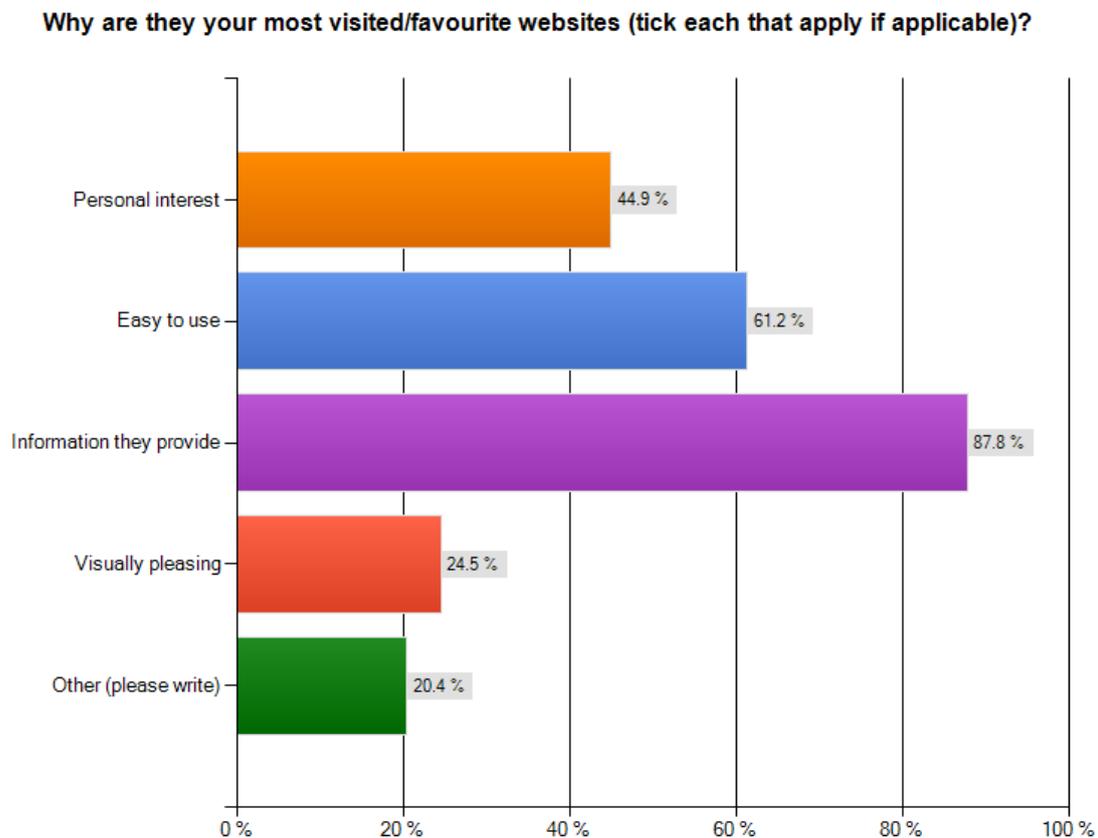
Indeed, these same values and content strategies will make the site more usable and accessible to older people specifically. Large font and greater amounts of white spacing ought to be offered too. Signposting and linkage should be relevant and easy to find. Obviously, age-specific training, workshops and access to the very computers themselves would aid too, our respondents believed.

Most also agreed that interactive guides, e-newsletters and an email service for advice would aid their own work with older people. They also sought bulletin boards and fora for debate and problem-solving. In the final section, they also recorded how printable information packs and newsletters could be useful for them to bring to those people who did not have internet access.

5.2 Semi-Structured Interviews with the Professionals

With a first draft of the research in hand, we re-engaged key individuals to seek their professional opinion of the study at that juncture and to inform it further. It also allowed us

to target stakeholders who had particular professional interest in a specific field within Northern Ireland's age sector.

We conducted a mini-focus group of key Age NI personnel from director to adviser level to pilot the questions and the feedback from this resulted in the semi-structured interview of Appendix 4. Then, helped once more by Community Direct, we interviewed sixteen stakeholders from throughout the age sector. Whilst maintaining the anonymity of the individual, the reach of the organisations they represent and the focus of their particular service provision have been recorded in Figure 5.13 below.

Figure 5.13 Reach of Semi-Structured Interviews and

Area of Focus for the Interviewee's Organisation	Position Held by Interviewee
Mini-focus of Age NI professionals with generic focus of age issues	Director | Senior Manager | Adviser
Long-term unemployment	Adviser
Long-term unemployment	Adviser
Equality rights	Legal expert
Education, training and development	Development Officer
Community support for elderly and vulnerable	Director
Community development	Development Officer
Community development and health	Development Officer
Community development and health	Development Officer
Health promotion and community development	Senior Manager
Project and community development for seniors	Project Manager
Integrated community care and health	Senior Manager
Senior citizens forum	Senior Manager
Community transport	Director
Community transport	Director
Research, strategy and development	Research Officer
Benefit uptake	Policy Officer

Advice NI assured all of the interviewees that their honest input at this stage could impact upon the overall success of the study. As these were professionals in their respective fields, many of whom with specialized interests, we were certain that honest answers were given. The depth of answers and the similarities with the independent questioning by the Community Direct team attests to this too.

The first draft of the research was very well received and interviewees considered this a comprehensive study of the key issues affecting older people and those who work with them. Any perceived need for further exploration of topic areas, such as employment, education or age discrimination, for example, represented the particular focus of the interviewee. Indeed, pages will be created within Rights for Seniors to reflect these various foci too. As always, the "hard-to-reach" and the socially excluded members of our community were to the fore of the discussions.

Due to demographic shifts, perceived generational attitudes and the negative impact of a global recession, the professionals have noted a change of profile amongst older people seeking advice. They believed there are more "younger-older-people" aged between 50-60 and more professionals seeking advice now too. Nevertheless, they believed that this younger bracket is more aware about their own rights and less averse to seeking help.

The ethnicity of advice seekers has changed too as society has enjoyed greater diversity. More people are co-habiting or register civil partnerships, again representing shifts in modern society. Interviewees have also recorded blended households shared by step-brothers and step-sisters. Also, as society ages, there are more homes with three or four generations of the same family living under the same roof.

As for the future, trends will be very much dependent upon an ageing population and prevailing economic conditions they believe. Age discrimination and employment rights will come to the fore due to the raising of the retirement age and the right to work. As society will have less money but greater needs, older people may face hardship unless they have had accrued substantial savings to fund retirement. Instead, personal debt in old age may be the norm. The whole health, social and community care system will be under strain. Social housing needs will increase and adaptation requirements will be augmented by ageing housing stock. With such negative and damaging impacts upon older people expected, it is little wonder that the professionals we interviewed predicted increased morbidity, ill health and mental health problems for future generations.

With an increased need for their advice services but a reduction in their funds, the professionals predicted that the staff of the sector will be under enormous stresses. There will be less of them due to staffing costs and yet they will have to deal with more requests for advice and more complex problems. Not only did they fear for job security but, more importantly to them, they feared that reduced capacity would mean advisers will not be able fulfil the demand for professional services. From their experience, older people

preferred face-to-face meetings or a chat over the telephone, even though email requests for advice were on the increase and were proving successful. These were all time-consuming and yet were required if service-needs were to be met. As for a separate email service, staffing costs and indemnity were the greatest barriers to it successful provision.

Regarding the actual Rights 4 Seniors website, the professionals we interviewed would subscribe to the backend of the website for its legalistic and policy pages if:

- The information was quality and accurate
- The information was up-to-date
- The pages were clear and easy to navigate

Nevertheless, although most would have paid for the service, some admitted that the cost of a subscription would have to be scrutinized to assess whether the organisation could afford it or, indeed, the backend information was of value. Interestingly, several of the interviewees queried the business model of paid subscriptions as they feared the information:

- Needed by older people may not be accessible
- In the backend may already be accessible by the professionals elsewhere

This re-emphasized that the genesis of this project was social justice. It was being funded, created and managed to address the informational needs of older person and professional alike.

The interviewees generally welcomed the planned interactivity of the website, including its use of social media, blogs and fora. Several though cautioned that these tools should not detract from the rights-based information. They feared that the website would be gimmicky when it should remain a solid rights-reference.

All of the interviewees were very interested in the feasibility of a single portal for the whole of Northern Ireland's age sector. This fitted snugly with certain organisational strategic plans. Indeed, in an age of collaboration and partnership, it was agreed that such a single platform would give the age sector a stronger voice. Nevertheless, even at this early stage, most queried the portal's expected functionality and ownership[1].

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[1] The Rights 4 Seniors project, on behalf of Atlantic Philanthropies, funded an independent portal feasibility study by Stratagem, a well-known consultancy and lobbying group. This was due to begin in April 201 and finish in July 2011.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

With the continual help of our steering group and supporting organisations (see Appendix 3), each research method mined a wealth of information and reached across the North of Ireland. Responses from both audiences will now inform the content and design process of this important project funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies and managed by Advice NI. As well as pinpointing the needs of those who work with older people, this study also sought to give the older people themselves a voice. Indeed, much of the site's frontend functionality will attest to this.

This study has proven that there is a definite need for a one-stop-shop for information regarding older people's rights in Northern Ireland. At the very least it can offer highly visible signposts or links to the invaluable and laudable efforts of organisations within the age sector here. Both audiences have emphasised this throughout. There is also still a need to engage with and empower the older members of our community and those whose life revolves around supporting them. This site will offer a platform or focus for advocacy and campaigning with one voice.

We must be ever-mindful, though. It is true that a digital divide is evident in the over 60s but this is closing. Nevertheless, it is still very worrying that the most isolated and marginalised members of our society, the ones that might just be the most in need of advice or information, may not have ready access to help. Our first task was to research content strategy and design for Rights 4 Seniors. Our next task will be to reach even those on the margins.

6.2 Recommendations

Both audiences agreed on the most important issues regarding older peoples' rights in Northern Ireland. These core issues will assume prominence on the index page of Rights 4 Seniors thus (with Retirement Planning being developed in the following year of the project):

- Health
- Pension

- Benefits

- Community Care

- Housing

- Retirement Planning

This concurred with Advice NI's previous study (Murphy, 2008) but also includes the impact of a worldwide recession in the interim period. This has had a tangible effect on the finances, opinions and fears of all of the respondents. Other important issues that the respondents and participants raised are below:

- Isolation & Loneliness

- Safety & Security

- Transport

- Carers

- Wills & Inheritance

Then, to a lesser extent:

- Age Discrimination

- Education

- Elder Abuse

- Consumer Rights

Obviously, the mountain of information that needs included demands a well-planned content strategy and accessible design. Indeed, this is compounded by the multi-tiered audience that the interface services. Therefore, the sitemap will be broad and shallow rather than narrow and deep so that the visitor does not have to "click through" too many times to get to the information. For example, a chapter within Pension Rights may look like this:

- ➢ Additional State Pension
  - ➢ Introduction to Additional State Pension
  - ➢ Calculating Additional State Pension
  - ➢ Credits for State Second Pension

➤ Contracting Out

➤ Inheriting Additional State Pension

It should not be mapped in such a way that increases the chance of the visitor opening an incorrect page:

➤ Additional State Pension

    ➤ Introduction to Additional State Pension

        • Calculating Additional State Pension

            o Inheriting Additional State Pension

                ▪ Contracting out

        • Credits for State Second Pension

The design should be compliant with the high principles of web accessibility and potential design companies will be marked on their previous standards and portfolio. Current Disability Discrimination law demands that anyway. Advice NI will be carrying out usability studies at various stages of the design of the site so that feedback is ongoing. Nevertheless, we are conscious that the aesthetics or feel of the site need not suffer as a consequence of having high accessibility demands.

As the site will be information-rich and each audience rightly demands accuracy, the rectitude of this content will be essential. Otherwise, audiences will drift away and newcomers will be hard-pressed to trust the site. Therefore, maintaining the rights-based information will be a daily procedure. This work will dovetail with Advice NI's Advantage: Accredited Training in Age Issues, as e-learning and course content, taught online and face-to-face, needs up-dated too. All further work and research carried out by Advice NI in age issues will complement each strand.

The functionality of the site need not suffer either. Modules will be created to engage a visitor and encourage a return visit. Quizzes and puzzles will occupy those at the frontend. E-newsletters, message boards and printable information packs will be created as support too. Similarly, the content will embrace information that is related to age issues in general and not just the specifics of older people's rights in Northern Ireland. Sample magazine-style pieces include lifestyle choices, volunteering opportunities and community

updates. On offer too will be money-off vouchers and prize giveaways supporting local businesses, restaurants and shops. A content management system (CMS) that can accommodate and realise these is therefore a must.

The validity of the content and the security of the site are immediate key performance indicators. To help sustain Rights 4 Seniors for the future, the support of relevant organisations throughout Northern Ireland will be essential. Thankfully, though, many of the most important and recognisable are already guiding the project in our steering group. At a later stage, organisations in the private sector will also be encouraged to lend their support too. Financial backing through sponsorship and/or advertising will help generate a revenue stream to help Rights 4 Seniors pay for itself. Ideally, it will survive with a minimum of funding and continue to provide essential advice at a time when it is most needed.

A subscription business model had been planned to part-fund the website as its sustainability was crucial. Nevertheless, the research reminded us of the need to provide as much information as possible to older people – those who need it most. The whole premise for the website was social justice so it would be self-defeating if information was retained to be priced. Nevertheless, it was still deemed relevant to create a backend website for those who work with older people in Northern Ireland. Information such as training or legislative framework pages would not need to be accessed by the older person. If they wanted to access this second tier of information, though, they could register with their name and email details. Accessibility to every corner of Rights 4 Seniors would be absolutely free-of-charge to everyone.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 Questionnaire for the Older Person

By filling in this questionnaire, you are enabling us to gather and record your views with greater ease. Thank you very much for your time.

You may feel that certain questions do not apply to you as you may not have any or much experience of the internet. Do not worry, though, as by answering "Not applicable to me" it is still very important to us that this information is gathered. Nevertheless, do not be afraid to answer a question with an opinion, regardless of your level of experience of the internet.

Section 1: Contact

1.1. Organisation/Group Name if applicable:

_____

1.2. Contact Details (age bracket 60-64, 65-69, 70-74, 75+ required but other information can be left blank):

Contact Name: Age:	Address: Email: Telephone:

Section 2: Experience with the Web

2.1. What is your level of experience with the internet?

☐ None   ☐ Novice   ☐ Intermediate   ☐ Advanced

2.2. How often, if at all, do you access the internet?

☐ Never   ☐ Rarely   ☐ Monthly   ☐ Weekly   ☐ Daily

2.3. Where, if at all, do you mainly access the internet?

☐ Not applicable to me   ☐ At home   ☐ A relative's home   ☐ Community centre   ☐ Café

☐ Other (please write) _____

2.4. For what purpose do you use the internet, if you use it at all (tick all that are applicable)?

☐ Not applicable to me   ☐ Work-related   ☐ Surfing/General interest   ☐ Shopping

☐ Contact with family   ☐ Social networking (meeting other people)   ☐ Research & Information

☐ Other (please write) _____

Section 3: Content of Website

3.1. Please rank the following 13 topics in order of importance for inclusion in the older person's rights-based website. Please use a different number (1-13) for each topic.

Topic	Order of Importance (1 most important; 13 least important)
State Pension	
Debt	
Community Care	
Basic Human Rights	
Elder Abuse	
Age Discrimination	
Financial Security	
Poverty	
Benefits	
Housing	
Health	
Isolation and Loneliness	
Safety and Security	

3.2. If you believe that other rights-based issues concerning older people should be included on the site, please list them below in order of importance. Please use a different number (1-7) for each topic. If you strongly believe that they should be positioned in the above list please note its rank number in the next column.

Topic	Order of Importance Here (1 most important; 7 least important)	I believe that this topic is so important that it should be ranked above at number:

3.3. This website will focus on the older people's rights but do you think that it should eventually include other information relevant or of interest to older people? ☐ Yes ☐ No

3.4. If yes to the above, what information do you think should be included? ☐ Not applicable to me

Please write: _____
_____
_____
_____

3.5. What information do you have trouble accessing regarding the issues important to older people (it may be helpful to use the list above in 3.1.)?

_____
_____
_____

3.6. If you were seeking information, how much would you trust the following media (please rank each with a number 1-4. 1 is trust them a lot and 4 is not at all)

☐ Radio   ☐ Television   ☐ Newspaper   ☐ Internet

3.7. Please write below what would make you more trusting of the information you find on the internet (if applicable).   ☐ Not applicable to me

_____
_____
_____

Section 4: Website Design

We would like to design a website which is appealing to older people

4.1. What are your 3 most visited/favourite websites (if applicable)?   ☐ Not applicable to me

_____
_____
_____

4.2. Why are they your most visited/favourite websites (tick each that apply if applicable)?

☐ Not applicable   ☐ Personal Interest   ☐ Easy to Use   ☐ Information it provides   ☐ Visually pleasing

☐ Other (please write) _____
_____
_____

4.3. What would entice you to stay on or return to a particular website?   ☐ Not applicable

_____
_____
_____
_____

4.4. How can we make our website more accessible or usable for other older people?

_____
_____
_____
_____

_____
_____
_____

Section 5: Further Comments

5.1. Would you like to further your interest/knowledge/experience of the internet? ☐ Yes ☐ No

5.2. If you would like to further your interest/knowledge/experience of the internet, how would you prefer to learn? Would you prefer your training to be: ☐ Not applicable to me

☐ Formal (e. g. in class, accredited, examined) ☐ Informal (community groups, less structured, fun)

☐ Other (please write):_____

5.3. Just as your input at this research stage has been invaluable, you can help us again at a later phase in the project.

Regardless of your experience of the internet, would you like to help us to test the website's functions and uses when we have a working model? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe

5.4. Please write any further comments you may have below. For example:

- **Have we missed any vital information?**

- **Do you have any bright ideas or new initiatives to promote the website to older people?**

- **Any other feedback regarding the focus group or questionnaire?**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Once more, thank you very much for your invaluable time and contribution. The Advice NI team.

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Appendix 2 Questionnaire for those who Interface with Older People

By filling in this questionnaire, you are enabling us to gather and record your views with greater ease. The closing date for receipt of the questionnaires will be Friday 4th June 2010.

 Thank you very much for your time.

Section 1: Contact

1.1. Contact Details:

Contact Name:	**Address:**
Organisation:	**Email:**
Your role in working with older people:	**Telephone:**

Section 2: Content of Website

2.1. Please rank the following 13 topics in order of importance for inclusion in the older person's rights-based website. Please use a different number (1-13) for each topic.

Topic	Order of Importance (1 most important; 13 least important)
State Pension	
Debt	
Community Care	
Basic Human Rights	
Elder Abuse	
Age Discrimination	
Financial Security	
Poverty	
Benefits	
Housing	
Health	
Isolation and Loneliness	
Safety and Security	

2.2. If you believe that other rights-based issues concerning older people should be included on the site, please list them below in order of importance. Please use a different number (1-6) for

each topic. If you strongly believe that they should be positioned in the above list please note its rank number in the next column.

Topic	Order of Importance Here (1 most important; 6 least important)	I believe that this topic is so important that it should be ranked above at number:

2.3. What information do you have trouble accessing regarding the issues important to older people (it may be helpful to use the list above in 2.1.)?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2.4. This website will focus on the older people's rights but do you think that it should eventually include other information relevant or of interest to older people? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2.5. If yes to the above, what information do you think should be included? ☐ Not applicable

Please write: _____
_____
_____
_____

2.6. What other content/information, that could be included on the website, would help you in your work with older people?

Please write: _____
_____
_____

2.7. An older person may have more trust in the information they get from a newspaper or from the television than they would from the internet. Please write below how we may make them more trusting of the information we would place on this website.

_____
_____
_____
_____

Section 3: Website Design

We would like to design a website which is appealing to older people and those who work with older people.

3.1. What are your 3 most visited/favourite websites?

_____
_____
_____

3.2. Why are they your most visited/favourite website (tick each that apply)?

☐ Personal Interest   ☐ Easy to Use   ☐ Information it provides   ☐ Visually pleasing

☐ Other (please write) _____

_____
_____
_____
_____

3.3. What would entice you to stay on or return to a particular website?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3.4. How can we make our website more accessible or usable for older people?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3.5. What other online tools would help you in your work with older people (please tick all that apply)?

☐ None   ☐ Interactive guides   ☐ Newsletters   ☐ Email service for advice

☐ Others (please write) _____

_____
_____
_____
_____

Section 4: Further Comments

Your input at this research stage has been invaluable already. You can assist us further at a later phase in the project and continue your contribution to the older person's rights-based website.

4.1. Would you like to take part in a short interview or focus group regarding this project at a time that is convenient for you?　☐ Yes　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

If yes, please leave details as to how we may contact you: _____

_____

4.2. Regardless of your experience of the internet, would you like to help us test the website's functions and uses when we have a working model?　　☐ Yes　　　☐ No　　☐ Maybe

If yes, please leave details as to how we may contact you: _____

4.3. Would you or your organisation be prepared to subscribe to that part of the website designed specifically for professionals who are working with older people?　　☐ Yes　　☐ No　☐ Maybe

☐ Comment (please write) _____

_____

_____

4.4. Please write any further comments you may have below. For example:

- **Have we missed any vital information?**

- **Do you have any bright ideas or new initiatives to promote the website to older people or those that work with them?**

- **Any other feedback regarding the focus group or questionnaire?**

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4.5. If you would like to see a report of the results of this study and be kept informed of the progress of project, please leave an email contact below.

_____

Once more, thank you very much for your invaluable time and contribution. The Advice NI team.

Appendix 3 Supporting Organisations and Research Reach

- Access to Benefits (A2B)
- Age NI
- Age Sector Platform
- Alzheimer's Society
- Ardnaskea Court Tenants' Group
- Association of Talking Newspapers NI (RNIB)
- Benedy Community Association
- Causeway Women's Aid
- Centre for Ageing Research and Development (CARDI)
- Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB)
- Coleraine Council
- Community Transport Association
- Craigavon Community Safety Partnership
- Derg Valley Care
- Disability Action
- Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)
- Easilift Community Transport
- East Down Rural Community Network
- Education and Development
- Engage with Age
- Forever Young Club
- GEMS NI
- Good Morning Network
- Greater Turf Lodge Residents Advice Service
- Forum for Action on Drug Abuse (FASA)
- Lagan Valley Rural Transport
- Magherafelt District Advice Centre
- Magherafelt Advice Services
- Mindwise
- NI Housing Executive

- North & West Housing

- North Belfast Senior Citizen's Forum

- Parkinson's UK

- Social and Democratic Labour Party

- Sinn Féin

- Tar Isteach

- The Aileen McCann Foundation

- Ulster Unionist Party

- Unltd

- University of the Third Age

- Unison

- Workers' Educational Association

Appendix 4 Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Professionals

1. Begin with a brief overview of their questionnaire (if they answered one and this isn't intrusive). Ask them their views of the findings and recommendations. Ask do they have anything else they would like to add that they may not have inputted at the time?

2. Has the profile of the older person coming to you for help/advice/support changed over the last few years?
   For example, many advisers say that the recession has led to many "professional" older people seeking advice/help?
   Do they prefer face-to-face contact, email contact or telephone?

3. What do they foresee are the trends regarding the needs of old people or the issues that may affect them 5 or 10 years from now? For example, money advisers 5 years ago may have noticed the increase of bankruptcies or debt calls before the banks themselves read any of the warning signs.

4. Advice NI intends that the website will have two tiers as such. The front-end will be public-facing designed for the older person themselves. The back-end will be created for advisers, social workers and organisations who work with older people. It will be more information-rich and in-depth (for example, regarding the legalistic side).

   What would entice you and/or your organisation to subscribe to the back-end website directed at those who work with older people? (Note this is a difficult question for anyone to answer without costs, offers, information, and actual site being evident).

   What problems, if any, do you foresee with a two-tier website being created?

   For example, certain people may want highly technical information that a front-end application does not supply. If a subscription is charged then it could be said that certain information is being withheld as it is being paid for by others.

5. The interactivity of the site will be essential. What media would facilitate this?
   For example, do you use message boards, rss feeds, e-groups, pod-casts be useful information/networking tools.

6. Would you/your communication office/your organisation be willing to contribute to an e-bulletin?

7. Would you consider an email advice service be it for older people or those who work with them essential or viable?
   Please expand – for example will it be used by the professional and/or older person?
   Do people feel comfortable asking a professional or other professionals for advice?

8. Advice NI will be carrying out a consultancy into the viability of a single Northern Ireland age sector portal with all the organisations' information and websites under one umbrella. Do you think this is viable?
   Would their organisation buy into it?
   What problems would they perceive would arise from it?

9. Your opinions may lead to further analysis of the research: As far as the first draft of the report is concerned, are there any areas that should be revisited or re-examined? For example, due to the timeframe/resources of the project, have we overlooked any keys areas/topics/angles that the questionnaires/focus groups/report did not cover?
   How can we advance/further this research if we are able to conduct studies within the age sector again?
   For example, not many older people use social networking platforms such as Facebook. Nevertheless, the growth in the numbers of older people accessing the internet since 2000 has been massive. It can be expected that older people will begin to use these more and more.

10. Do you have any further comments? Is there anything that we haven't touched upon which you think it important to mention?

If you would like any further information on this project you can visit the live blog, Blogging the Third, at www.bloggingiii.com. Otherwise, contact:

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