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Citizens **Information** Board  
*information · advice · advocacy*



# Volunteering in Citizens Information Services

The role and contribution of volunteers



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Research conducted by  
Geraldine Prizeman, Andrew O'Regan, Freda Donoghue and Siobhan McGee

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Centre for Nonprofit Management  
School of Business  
Trinity College  
Dublin

## Members of the Steering Group

Eamonn Burgess (Volunteer in Wicklow CIS and NACIS Board Member)  
Michael Browne (Consultant Researcher)  
Cathy Gerrard (Information Executive)  
Linda Gilroy (Area Executive)  
John Long (Regional Manager)  
Teresa McCourt (Development Manager, Westmeath CIS)  
Geraldyn McGarry (Chair) (Manager of Information Publications and Social Policy)  
Margaret Zheng (Administrator)

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

In early 2009 the Citizens Information Board (CIB) commissioned research on the role and contribution of volunteers in Citizens Information Services (CISs). The aim of the research was to profile volunteers in CISs and to inform CIB and CIS strategic thinking in relation to the use of volunteers. A team of researchers from the Centre for Nonprofit Management at Trinity College Dublin were commissioned to carry out the research.

The primary function of the Citizens Information Board (CIB) is the provision of information, advice and advocacy services to the public. Under the legislation<sup>1</sup>, the mandate of the Citizens Information Board is:

- » To ensure that individuals have access to accurate, comprehensive and clear information relating to public and social services
- » To assist and support individuals, in particular those with disabilities, in identifying and understanding their needs and options
- » To promote greater accessibility, co-ordination and public awareness of social services

- » To support, promote and develop the provision of information on the effectiveness of current social policy and services and to highlight issues which are of concern to users of those services
- » To support the provision of, or directly provide advocacy services for people with a disability
- » To support the provision of the Money Advice and Budgeting<sup>2</sup> Service (MABS)

The services provided by CIB act as an important bridge between the citizen, and public and social services. CIB is funded by the Department of Social Protection to carry out this mandate. CIB delivers on its remit via direct provision, by supporting a network of delivery partners and by funding targeted projects.

It delivers information directly to the public via web-based information (citizensinformation.ie, microsites, assistireland.ie), periodicals and other publications. The Citizens Information Board provides direct funding and core developmental supports to:

- » The network of 42 Citizens Information Services (CISs)
- » The Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS)
- » The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)

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1 The Comhairle Act 2000, the Citizens Information Act 2007, and the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008.

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2 In 2009 the Board was assigned responsibility for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS).

- » Advocacy pilot projects for people with disabilities in the community and voluntary sector
- » The Sign Language Interpreting Service (SLIS)

The Citizens Information Board also delivers on its remit through targeted project funding, where services are provided by a third party or partnership of organisations.

In particular CIB carries out its information provision role through a three-channel approach: the Citizens Information website (citizensinformation.ie), the Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS); and the nationwide network of Citizens Information Services (CIS).

## Context of research

Information, advice and advocacy are delivered to members of the public through 42 Citizen Information Services, comprising 110 Citizens Information Centres and 152 outreach services (262 locations in total). In 2009, there were 685,778 CIS users. All CISs have information workers<sup>3</sup> (paid or volunteer) whose function is to provide relevant information to the public, interpret it when necessary and make representation with or on behalf of clients as appropriate. There are over 1,000 CIS volunteers providing some 2,700 hours of direct service to the public weekly<sup>4</sup>. This represents one third of the hours delivered by the service. The number of volunteers working in the service increased by 8% in 2009. CISs also engage in social policy work by identifying situations arising from queries and highlighting issues which are of concern to users of State services.

3 In general we use the term information provider to describe CIS staff – paid or volunteer – who provide information to the public. In this report we use the term paid staff when we wish to distinguish between paid and volunteer information providers.

4 In 2009 there were 1,175 volunteers in Citizens Information Services providing the equivalent of 107.28 whole-time equivalent posts. There were 104.5 whole-time equivalent paid information officer posts and 97 whole-time equivalent scheme workers (Community Employment, Jobs Initiative and other job scheme workers).

CISs are organised and developed around local voluntary Boards of Management and there is a significant volunteer involvement in CIS Boards of Management around the country.

The present study focuses only on the role of volunteers in day-to-day delivery of information, advice and advocacy services, not on volunteer Board Members although some volunteers perform both roles.

## Methodology

At the outset this study had two key objectives. Firstly, CIB were interested in obtaining an overview of the current deployment of volunteers in CISs as well as a profile of CIS volunteers. Secondly, CIB required research that would address a number of objectives including:

- » Identifying the advantages and disadvantages of volunteer information providers
- » Identifying the blocks/barriers to recruiting and retaining volunteers;
- » Exploring how volunteering could be developed and enhanced to support the CIB three-channel approach
- » Proposing initiatives to enhance recruitment and support of volunteers in CISs
- » Setting out guidelines for matching the skills of volunteers to the different aspects of the service, that is, information, advice, advocacy and social policy work
- » Identifying training and other supports required to implement an agreed volunteer strategy
- » Informing Citizen Information Board and CIS strategic thinking in relation to the use of volunteers and making recommendations arising from the findings

Based on the objectives of the study a multi-stage, multi-method approach was utilised for the research project. The research was divided into the following stages:

**Stage I: Secondary Research: Literature Review:** Compilation of existing data and literature from a volunteering perspective in order to locate the research within the general context of research conducted to date as well as the policy framework for voluntary activity in Ireland.

**Stage II: Quantitative Element:** This involved a nationwide online survey of volunteers in the CIS in order to present an overview of the deployment of volunteers in the service and to provide a profile of those volunteers.

**Stage III: Qualitative Element:** Focus group discussions with CIS Development Managers, paid staff and volunteers in order to explore the role and contribution of volunteers from all perspectives and to further tease out the topic areas addressed in the online survey. In addition interviews with identified key stakeholders and informants were also carried out.

## Stage I: Secondary Research: Literature Review

Most definitions of volunteering include these elements: a commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society, local communities and other causes that is undertaken of a person's free will without payment. In Ireland research shows that volunteering can also encompass the idea of membership of a group. Therefore definitions of volunteering should also reflect the different types of organisations in which volunteers are engaged. The importance of volunteering for social services organisations is noted in the report. Since volunteers can represent both a community and an organisation they can serve as an important link between organisations and communities. Volunteering, therefore, is important as a means of expression for individuals, social groups and communities. The rise of rights organisations and communities of interest have been important domains for self-expression as well as for advocacy and challenging social norms.

Volunteering can address social needs and reflect social norms. Even though the nature of volunteering and how it is exhibited may change over time (for example, the traditional value system of charity which informed voluntary action in Ireland) an individual's and community's

need for self-expression is a significant aspect of volunteering that does not change over time.

Recent literature on volunteering has divided volunteering styles (including motivations for volunteering) into two main strands:

- 1) Identification with communities of interest – this is a collective style of volunteering where volunteers have a strong sense of personal responsibility to their community and are primarily concerned with 'giving back' to the community'. In the past CIS volunteers emerged from a strong community ethos.
- 2) The need for individual expression, often called the 'reflexive' mode – this style of volunteering is more personal and individual and volunteers are seeking to learn something or make some gain for themselves through volunteering.

Research also shows that the profile of volunteers is changing and volunteers may be engaging in short bursts of voluntary activity, rather than signing up to an organisation for life (NCV 2002). In addition an emerging trend of a reflexive style of volunteering can be seen, which may present a challenge for community-based organisations like CISs.

## Evolution of the Citizens Information Service

During the late 1960s the need for the public to have easily accessible information on entitlement and services was recognised. Some voluntary bodies responded to this need by developing their own information services. Muintir na Tire was involved in the setting up of the first community information centres which were in Carlow and Tipperary. Cork was established through a different process as a Citizens Advice Bureau shortly afterwards.

The National Social Service Council<sup>5</sup>, established in 1971, took on the role of promoting and developing a network of voluntary information services. In 1974 the Government requested the National Social Service Council to act as the

5 The organisation was later renamed the National Social Service Board. In 2000 it was merged with the National Rehabilitation Board to form Comhairle which was renamed the Citizens Information Board in 2007.

central body for the development of Community Information Centres (later renamed Citizens Information Centres (CICs)). The CIC from the outset was modelled very closely on the Citizens Advice Bureau in the UK. The structures, emphasis on community representation and reliance on volunteers were similar. Later a significant development was the emergence of full-time county-wide key Citizens Information Centres which then evolved into Citizens Information Services (CISs). Each CIS covered a geographical region and consisted of a number of Citizens Information Centres (CICs). This model is still in use today.

During the 1990s, as part of the development of full-time services, the National Social Service Board identified the need to fund the deployment of paid staff in CISs to work side by side with volunteers on the basis that information provision was becoming more complex and demanding and that volunteers working only a small number of hours a week could not be expected to keep pace with a changing context. Funding was initially provided for the employment of development managers and subsequently for paid information workers. CISs also began to recruit staff under CE and Jobs Initiative schemes. Some CISs developed without involving volunteers in information provision while others retained some volunteers and others a strong complement of volunteers.

### **The structure of Citizens Information Services today**

The Citizens Information Service today is staffed by paid staff, volunteers and scheme workers. The day-to-day running of each service is the responsibility of Development Managers who report to voluntary Boards of Management. Across the Service volunteers deliver, on average, three hours service each per week. This means that the 1,175 volunteers currently working in the Service deliver roughly one third of the total hours delivered by the Service (with another two thirds delivered by paid staff and scheme workers). At the same time they represent over 75% of the staff of the Service. Clearly there is a resource implication for management and training of these numbers of volunteers. However there is also considerable variation in the use of volunteers across CISs

with some relying almost wholly on paid staff and scheme workers, and other using a very large complement of volunteers to deliver services.

In conclusion voluntary action and volunteering have played a core role in the historical development of the service. This voluntary action has had a strong local identity in many instances and the varied origins of CISs have given rise to variations in practice and culture across the service.

### **Comparative models**

This chapter also looks at citizens' information services in Northern Ireland and across the United Kingdom. Looking across these models we can see that culturally and historically the emergence of information services in the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland and Scotland differ to the emergence of the services in Ireland. However there are a number of specific practices around the role and contribution made by volunteers in those information services which could provide useful models for the CIS to consider in the development of volunteers in the service. For example, in Ireland volunteers play three key roles in the service while in the UK, NI and Scotland many more roles where volunteers make a contribution were identified. CIB and the CIS could explore other possible roles that volunteers could play in the service and become more innovative about their use of volunteers in the overall service.

### **Stage II: Key Findings – Quantitative Online Survey**

This is the first large-scale survey of volunteers to be undertaken by the Citizens Information Board. In total 437 (over 40%) volunteers completed a comprehensive online questionnaire about the role and contribution of volunteers in the CIS.

The survey of volunteers has produced data on the demographic make-up of the CIS volunteer cohort, their experience of volunteering in the CIS, their perception of their role and functioning, and their engagement with the various elements of the training programme. Below is a summary of the key findings from the survey.

### Profile of CIS volunteers

The findings suggest that volunteers are more likely to be Irish, female, married and aged 45 years or older. This profile generally matches the profile of volunteers found in Census 2006 (volunteers are generally from the professional and middle classes, and from those aged 35 and older). However the percentage of women working as volunteers in the Citizens Information Service (78%) differs from the national profile which is split evenly between men and women.

Volunteers have been living in their locality for more than 11 years (over 77%), tend to be either retired or working full-time in the home (50% retired and 20% working in the home) and have professional or third-level qualifications. More than half the volunteers in the CIS have been volunteering on a weekly basis for up five years giving between three and five hours per week. Twenty-eight percent have volunteered for 6-14 years and almost 20% have volunteered for 15 years or more.

The majority of volunteers (90.9%) were of Irish nationality and the remainder were non-Irish nationals. This breakdown reflects the population as a whole based on the most recent data available from the Central Statistics Office. Few have dependent children, probably due to the age profile (just over 20%), and the vast majority do not have any special needs (over 95%).

### Training and information provision

In general volunteers were satisfied with the induction and training they received in the CIS. However only 16% per cent of volunteers in the service had completed FETAC accredited training so there appears to be a large number of volunteers who are not trained to FETAC levels of accreditation. (This may be partially explained by the time commitment required to do the training compared to the number of hours worked by an average volunteer. In addition longer-serving volunteers tend to be less interested in accreditation and some volunteers already offer expertise in a particular area such as the law and do not seek further accreditation.) In addition to formal training, the most common forms of support that volunteers received were 'working as a pair with a more experienced person' and 'newsletters and other communication methods'.

Volunteer information providers stated that they were most knowledgeable about 'information provision' and the 'provision of advice' aspects of the service. They indicated that they were less knowledgeable about the 'social policy feedback' and 'provision of advocacy' aspects. Looking at the information sources that volunteer information providers use, the most common included the Citizens Information website and relevant government publications and websites. The volunteers stated that they found it easy to access information on the Citizens Information website and were happy to use this source. According to the volunteers the most important support in helping them to answer customers queries were CIS paid staff, other volunteers and specialist support from voluntary agencies.

### Attitudes to their role and the Citizens Information Service

Respondents were also asked a number of attitudinal questions about their perception of their role and the work of the service.

The CIS volunteers who took part in this study saw their role as one of connecting the local community with the services provided by the CIS and stated that their belief in the importance of the work carried out by the CIS was a key factor in their decision to become a volunteer. Volunteers in this study indicated that, if they were unhappy with any aspect of their work in the CIS, there was someone they could talk to. They also believed that they were kept informed about developments in their CIS. On the other hand, many had never been in touch with CIB in Dublin as they felt they did not need to in order to carry out their work in their CIS.

The volunteers felt their contribution was valued by all – customers, paid staff and other volunteers. Finally, they also stated that the CIS would not be able to continue to operate fully without volunteers, that they felt that a strong community ethos would continue to influence the work of the CIS and that the CIS would need to play a greater role in supporting marginalised groups, such as people with language problems and people with intellectual disabilities.

## Stage III: Key Findings – Qualitative research

As stated earlier, focus group discussions with volunteers and paid staff (eight in total) and key informant face-to-face interviews (10 in total) were also conducted. The focus group work has enabled a deeper exploration of issues regarding:

- i) The role and functioning of volunteers within the CIS
- ii) Their relevance in the context of the challenges of increasing service demand and information complexity now facing the CIS
- iii) The possible shape and management of the volunteer contribution to the future delivery of a national CIS.

The views expressed in the focus groups are both subjective and particular and may, or may not, reflect accurately, either views held more widely within the Citizen's Information Service or the empirical reality across the Service. What this qualitative work does offer is a sense of the range and depth of perceptions regarding the present functioning and future possibilities of volunteers within the Service. Where generalisations were expressed by participants in focus groups they were inevitably accompanied by caveats regarding variation across individual CICs. The main lines of distinction drawn were:

- i) Between volunteer-led CICs and those led by paid staff
- ii) Between CICs originating within the community (often prior to the establishment of a CIS) and those originating outside the community and placed within it
- iii) Between urban and rural CICs

Despite differences in how services are delivered and of culture in different CISs volunteers, paid staff and development managers were all insistent that from a client's perspective volunteer-based information provision should be indistinguishable from that provided by

paid staff<sup>6</sup>. Within the volunteer focus groups the model of combined volunteer and paid information officers was argued to be a valuable delivery model, and one that was preferable to the volunteer only model.

### Key findings of the qualitative research

Key findings included:

- » A deep commitment on the part of the volunteers and staff of the CISs, and of the staff of CIB, to the provision of a quality information and advice service at the point of need.
- » A clear and articulated commitment by CIB to the centrality of the volunteer contribution in the local delivery of Citizens Information and advice services.
- » A shared concern across the Citizens Information Service with the quality and consistency of service provision and with how best to achieve and maintain improvements in service provision.
- » A very good relationship that typically exists between volunteers and paid staff within the CISs.
- » A widespread view regarding the particular value and effectiveness of a mixed volunteer and paid staff model of information and advice delivery at local level.
- » A broad recognition that information and advice provision is becoming increasingly complex and varied, that the demand for services is increasing, and, that under these conditions, the present approach to volunteer recruitment, development, and role performance may not be enough.
- » A growing recognition that increased unemployment levels in Ireland has potentially generated a large new pool of possible volunteers for the service.

Such common ground offers a firm basis for addressing the future development of the role of volunteers within the Citizens Information Service.

6 There is no basis from this research for any distinction between the quality of information provision by volunteers and paid information staff.

The focus group discussions also identified some issues to be addressed:

- 1) There are tensions in the relationships between CIB and CISs. These tensions appear to have their origins in the historical development of the various elements of the Citizens Information Service and in the identification of individuals with their local service. These tensions may also relate to an anti-managerialism which can occur in voluntary organisations. Some volunteers show a lack of awareness of how the three Citizens Information delivery strands (website, telephone service and CISs) make up a single response to the national requirement for the provision of information, advice and advocacy.
- 2) There are organisational issues across the service which relate to the inter-play of statutory responsibilities on the part of CIB, historical independence on the part of CISs, and the funding relationship between CIB and the CISs. For example many staff and volunteers are unclear as to whether it is the CIB role to support volunteers in any direct way or whether it is a function of the local CIS with backup resources from CIB.
- 3) There are challenges and concerns in relation to developing and ensuring consistent and uniform levels of service provision across the Service. These concerns are heightened in the face of increased demand, both quantitatively and qualitatively, for information and advice services during the current economic downturn. At present there is no systematic means of measuring the quality of information provision within and throughout the service. In addition the provision of advocacy by volunteers is regarded differently by different CISs.
- 4) These issues (1-3 above) invariably impact on the experience of volunteers within the service and their perception of their relationship with CIB.

## Recommendations

Under the leadership of the Citizens Information Board, the Citizens Information Service has developed into a well regarded national service. The extensive network of CISs is united by a commitment to service delivery and ongoing development. This work is strongly supported by the volunteers in the service, and in some instances is dependant on volunteers for delivery.

The environment in which the Citizens Information Service operates is very dynamic. The present economic recession, as well as the previous economic boom, has given rise to an increasing demand for Citizens Information Services and increasingly complex information needs which present challenges.

These environmental challenges are being met by a strategic focus on placing the citizen at the centre of the organisational endeavour. In turn, this focus places increased emphasis on co-ordination across the service and on working in partnership. At an operational level this is leading to the development of universal standards of service delivery and evaluation, as well as the development of new advocacy services.

Historically and in current practice there is a principled attachment to a substantial volunteer involvement in the Citizens Information Service. There is no necessary contradiction between the idea of a volunteer-based service provision and the delivery of high and universal standards of service. However there are substantial costs associated with the training and management of volunteers which need to be fully acknowledged.

The continuing importance of such voluntary action in the future delivery and development of the service may be considered as a matter of principle and necessity. However voluntary action that remains local in its orientation and direction will find it difficult to play an ongoing role as the Citizens Information Service works towards developing the consistency and quality of its service. The importance of the present contribution and future potential contribution of volunteers needs to be articulated at national level as well as at local level. At present there

does not appear to be a shared meaning around volunteering and the use of volunteers across the service as a whole. It is important that such a shared meaning in relation to the role of volunteers within the service is generated and fostered across the service as a whole.

### Linking the CIS volunteer role to active citizenship

We propose that CIB consider the merits of placing the concept of citizenship at the heart of the identity of the Citizens Information Service. The concept of citizenship, in its balancing of rights and responsibilities, strikes a position between the voluntary agency and that of the State agency. Citizenship, not only places the concerns of the citizen as 'client' at the heart of the organisational endeavour, but serves also to recognise the appropriateness and legitimacy of the actions of the citizen as 'volunteer' within the service.

In this scenario the Citizens Information Service is seen to be for citizens, informed by citizens, run by citizens. With such an identity, the Citizens Information Service is placed within the public imagination as an organisational expression of citizenship in practice. This identification with the national community will support the sense of belonging to a national rather than a localised citizen information endeavour.

Positioning the concept of citizenship as an important element in the organisational identity of the Citizens Information Service is consistent with the intention set out in the CIB Strategic Plan 2009-2012 to 'actively play our part in achieving the Government's vision for a more citizen-centred public service' (CIB 2009: 10). It is consistent also with Strategic Priority 3, namely, 'to serve as a pivotal and trusted intermediary between citizens and public services' (CIB 2009: 20).

Therefore we propose an integrated series of actions aimed at:

- » Articulating an organisational identity for the Citizens Information Service as a national service which encompasses CISs, volunteers, paid staff and clients.

- » Generating a shared meaning across the service delivery partners that clarifies all the operational steps needed to deliver on a shared strategy, particularly in relation to service quality within a citizen-centred approach. This shared meaning should be maintained through improved communication throughout the service.
- » Developing and instituting a national volunteer strategy, designed to support operational requirements, that is characterised by multiple roles, targeted recruitment, specialised training and attention to volunteer biographies.

These actions should be framed and carried out in a manner which is consistent with, and directly supportive of, the key priorities and associated operational goals of the Citizen Information Board and its service delivery partners, as set out in their Strategic Plan 2009-2012.

The recommendations are set out in greater detail in Chapter Five and are presented here under four specific headings:

## 1. Creating elements of a shared meaning across the Citizens Information Service

- » Articulate a CIB commitment to volunteer involvement in the service as both a principle and a necessity.
- » Clarify and promote the integrated nature of the three-channel approach to information provision in providing a national service at the point of need.
- » Promote the essential unity of the service, whilst recognising a range of origins and associated loyalties within the CISs
- » Develop the idea of citizenship as the underlying value of the Service, uniting staff, volunteers and clients in the exercising of rights and responsibilities.
- » Create and promote a stronger national identity for the Citizens Information Service.
- » Re-envision the potential range of roles of volunteers within the Service.

- » Institute and lead, through CIB, the development of a national volunteer strategy for the Service, consistent with the Strategic Plan 2009-2012.

## 2. Operational elements of a volunteer strategy

- » The expansion of volunteer roles and the specification of a number of volunteer roles within the Service, including related training requirements.
- » The institution of a national volunteer recruitment strategy directed to the specified roles.
- » The enlargement of the CIB Training Programme, to cater for the increased training needs of additional volunteer roles.
- » The creation of a volunteer database (the capacity is already present in the Oyster data collection system).

## 3. Attending to the volunteer experience

- » Forging a sense among volunteers that they belong to a national cohort.
- » Instituting a national volunteer service recognition system.
- » Instituting a volunteer e-zine to support the sense of national cohort and to provide a platform for the sharing of experiences and knowledge.
- » Support volunteers in the development and advancement of their own volunteer biography or 'career path' within the organisation.

## 4. Structural adjustments proposed for implementation

- » Assigning responsibility at a management level within CIB, supported by a dedicated Volunteer Development Team and budget line.
- » Deepening the processes of collaborative development between CIB and the CISs.

- » Assigning specific responsibility for volunteer development to the Development Managers within the CISs.
- » Instituting the role of volunteer co-ordinator at CIS/CIC level, where there is a large number of volunteers.
- » Consider the structural approach to be taken to the possible involvement of volunteers in the development of advocacy services and social policy.

We present these recommendations recognising that the Citizens Information Service is a system where change requires discussion, and the realignment of people, and that variation across the service delivery partners may mean that such change moves at different speeds in different quarters. All these proposals are ultimately directed towards one end, that is, the agreement nationally of the form and standard of a service that is supported centrally and delivered locally.



## Chapter 1

# Background and Literature Review

### 1.0 Background and introduction

This chapter reviews relevant literature to set the context for the research findings and recommendations from this study.

The Citizens Information Board (CIB) has earned a reputation as the leading provider in Ireland of information, advice and advocacy services. The services provided by CIB act as a bridge between the citizen, and public and social services. The ethos underpinning the delivery of services by CIB is guided by two key principles, namely, to maintain a citizen-centred approach which keeps the citizen at the centre of everything they do and to become more proactive in anticipating changes in their service environment and in citizens' needs. In this context, the concept of citizenship embraces all citizens, not just people holding Irish citizenship. One out of every five people using Citizens Information Services is an immigrant.

In early 2009 CIB commissioned research on the role and contribution of volunteers in the CIS. At the onset this study had two key objectives. Firstly, CIB were interested in obtaining an overview of the current deployment of volunteers in the CIS as well as a profile of CIS volunteers. Second, CIB required the research to address a number of objectives including:

- » Identifying the advantages and disadvantages of volunteer information providers;
- » Identifying the blocks/barriers to recruiting and retaining volunteers;
- » Exploring how volunteering could be developed and enhanced to support the CIB three-channel information provision approach;
- » Proposing initiatives to enhance recruitment and support of volunteers in the CIS;
- » Setting out guidelines for matching the skills of volunteers to the different aspects of the service, that is, information, advice, advocacy and social policy work;
- » Identifying training and other supports required to implement an agreed volunteer strategy; and
- » Making recommendations arising from the findings and informing Citizens Information Board and CIS strategic thinking in relation to the use of volunteers.

A multi-stage, multi-method approach was taken in conducting the research and the research stages and methods are outlined in full in Chapter Two.

## 1.1 Evolution of volunteerism

### 1.1.1 Definition of volunteering

In its deliberations for its report in 2002, the National Committee on Volunteering noted that volunteering has a variety of definitions dependent upon the country and context within which such definition occurs. The White Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity* had defined volunteering in 2000 as 'the commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society, local communities, individuals outside the family, the environment or other causes. Voluntary activities are undertaken of a person's own free will, without payment (except for reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses)' (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs 2000: 83). This definition was quite similar to that found in policy from the European Commission on volunteering and in the other literature (European Commission 1997). When phrasing its question in relation to volunteering for the most recent Census, the Central Statistics Office drew on advice from several interested parties and observers, and pre-tested and piloted its survey question before agreeing on the final wording.

Like definitions found elsewhere (Donoghue, Anheier and Salamon 1999, Ruddle and Mulvihill 1999, 1995) we can surmise, therefore, that volunteering comprises activities that are unpaid and are entered into without compulsion. In Ireland, however, it appears from data gathered as part of the mapping project (Donoghue, Prizeman, O'Regan and Noël 2006) that volunteering can include the notion of membership. In member organisations, such as the GAA for example, the concept of member and volunteer can be conflated, a situation which has also been reported on in Sweden. Despite popular perceptions of the volunteer as a particular kind of activity and person, therefore, the data would appear to point to variations from such perceptions and possibly also new developments in volunteering in Ireland which mirror, or are responses to, changes in the socio-economic environment and debates and discourses surrounding questions such as active citizenship and civic engagement. While this report adopts the definition of volunteering noted above, such a definition is by necessity broad and not too constrained in order to

reflect not only the changing volunteer but also the different kinds of organisation with which volunteers are engaged today. To put the present-day volunteer in context, therefore, we now turn our attention to the social and historical context of volunteering in Ireland.

### 1.1.2 Social and historical context of volunteering

Volunteering has a long history in Ireland but much of that has gone unrecorded, subsumed into archives and research on other related topics such as kinship and community patterns, for example, where the importance of meitheal and community self sufficiency are noted (Brody 1973). Volunteering was an inherent part of the way in which communities in Ireland functioned and sustained themselves and, as such, did not garner much academic or policy attention until recent decades. Earlier reports on volunteering (Ruddle and O'Connor 1993, Ruddle and Mulvihill 1995, 1999, Ruddle and Donoghue 1995) and on voluntary organisations (Faughnan and Kelleher 1993, Donoghue, Salamon and Anheier 1999) noted the importance of the work of volunteers in voluntary organisations (a significance which has also been noted in the international literature (Salamon and Anheier 1997, Salamon, Anheier and Associates 1998). The importance of volunteering can also be seen in studies on the measurement of the economic impact of voluntary nonprofit organisations worldwide, where 'volunteering' is regarded as one of the five key structural-operational characteristics defining nonprofit organisations (Salamon and Anheier 1997). In Ireland, research has noted the importance of volunteers for social service organisations (Faughnan and Kelleher 1993, Ruddle and Donoghue 1995, Donoghue, Anheier and Salamon 1999, Donoghue, Prizeman, O'Regan and Noël 2006).

While the history of volunteering might be lacking rigorous or in depth scholarly work, the area was given useful attention in the National Committee on Volunteering (NCV) report to Government in 2002. Different phases in the development of volunteerism in Ireland were noted in that report as drawing on the Christian concept of *caritas* in mediaeval times, the strong tradition of Protestant philanthropy in the 18th century, the significant increase in Roman

Catholic voluntary institutions in the 19th century and the Gaelic revival in sports, culture and language, which had very strong roots in voluntary endeavour.

Tracing the roots of co-operation through the *meitheal* and *cooring*<sup>7</sup>, the report notes the institutional face of that in the establishment of the co-operative movement in agriculture and rural regeneration, through organisations like *Muintir na Tíre*. Urban community development gained significant momentum from the late 1960s, helped from the 1970s by the EU (then EEC) in the form of the Poverty Programmes, and later the Combat Poverty Agency. The 1980s saw the rise of rights organisations, or communities of interest, which have been important domains for self-expression as well as breeding grounds for advocacy and challenging social norms. Another area noted by the NCV report was the international arena where Irish volunteers have long played a significant role. Indeed some of the largest voluntary organisations in Ireland are in the field of international development.

The NCV report draws an important lesson from the history of volunteering, that is the role of volunteers over time in addressing social needs and reflecting changing norms. While there have been some recent concern with decreasing numbers of volunteers (National Committee on Volunteering 2002, DKM 2004), declining social capital (Donoghue 2001, National Committee on Volunteering 2002) and the importance of volunteering in civic engagement (Donoghue 2002, Active Citizenship Office 2008), volunteering must be recognised as an important expression of a community, individual and different social groups, and individuals themselves. The nature of volunteering and the way in which it is exhibited may have changed over the decades, therefore, but the individual's and community's need for self-expression will continue and is one significant aspect of volunteering. We will explore this in some depth below, but turn now to Government policy.

<sup>7</sup> *cooring* (from the verb *comhair* to help) involved the exchange of labour in agricultural work where households helped each other out. *Meitheal* involved the coming together of the community to provide assistance to one another.

### 1.1.3 Government policy and volunteering

There is no formal government policy on volunteering but as already noted above, the National Committee on Volunteering (NCV) reported to Government in 2002. The NCV, established as part of the International Year of the Volunteer (2000), and on foot of commitments contained in *Partnership 2000*, sat for two years and produced a substantial report providing a statistical profile of volunteers in Ireland, exploring the experience of volunteering from an organisational perspective, examining the issue of young people and volunteering and drawing, as noted above, on the history of volunteering in Ireland in order to give the work some context. The related issues of accreditation and recognition were also dealt with. In short, the two core recommendations were: 1) that a national policy on volunteering should be developed; and 2) that infrastructure to support and develop volunteering be established nationwide. There were 50 recommendations in total, ranging through policy and infrastructure, but also encompassing research, supporting volunteering, regulating volunteering, promoting volunteering, addressing barriers and targeting volunteers.

A policy on volunteering has never been produced but significant funding for a volunteering infrastructure has been provided since the publication of the NCV report in October 2002. For example, the government made a commitment to supporting the development of volunteer centres in Ireland (*cf Towards 2016 and Transforming Ireland 2007-2013*), one in each county and several in Dublin and a recent report noted that in late 2008 there were 17 volunteer centres which were members of Volunteer Centres Ireland (VCI) and a number of other centres being developed (Donovan and Prizeman 2008). In addition, Volunteering Ireland (VI) performs a significant development and promotion role for the activity of volunteering. These two organisations, VCI and VI, as well as the volunteer centres, receive funding through the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (now known as the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs), the government department charged with voluntary affairs and which has also produced the recent charities legislation.

**Table 1.1 Voluntary activity by gender (CSO 2006)**

Voluntary activity/organisation	All volunteers %	Female %	Male %
Social or charitable organisation	34.84	40.63	28.98
Religious group or church	25.87	31.2	20.48
Sporting organisation	32.62	20.07	45.32
Political or cultural organisation	8.49	7.15	9.84
Other	25.39	27.9	22.85
<b>Total Number involved in one or more activity</b>	<b>70,5755</b>	<b>35,3207</b>	<b>35,0548</b>
<b>Total Number volunteers</b>	<b>55,3255</b>	<b>27,8242</b>	<b>27,5013</b>

### 1.1.4 Active citizenship in Ireland

Not many months after the publication of the NCV's report in October 2002, the Government announced the establishment of a Taskforce on Active Citizenship<sup>8</sup>, which was charged with exploring active citizenship and promoting the conditions for the development of such, influenced by the work of Robert Putnam on social capital (Putnam 1995). While the UK Government went the Third Way route, promoted by Anthony Giddens (Giddens 2000), active citizenship became the focus in Ireland. Links between these major concepts can be seen, however, most notably in the focus on voluntary or third sector<sup>9</sup> organisations. For example, Giddens (2000) notes the importance of third sector organisations in the delivery of public services and the promotion of civic culture and community development. The Taskforce on Active Citizenship, meanwhile, reviewed the inter-related areas of civic, community, cultural, occupational and recreational life in Ireland, including voluntary organisations active in those areas. Among its many recommendations was the introduction of a programme in public service to promote community engagement and participation. Such community engagement and participation includes volunteering, according to the Taskforce, and it recommended that employers formally and officially recognise voluntary effort in job

8 The taskforce has published a number of works looking at particular aspects of active citizenship in Ireland, for example, Statistical Evidence on Active Citizenship in Ireland (2007a), Active Citizenship in Faith-based Communities (2007b), and The Concept of Active Citizenship (2007c).

9 Third sector organisations are non-governmental, community and voluntary groups. The term 'third sector' is used to contrast these organisations with the public and private sectors.

applications and through giving employees time off to volunteer (Active Citizenship Office 2007a/b). Volunteering, and voluntary organisations, have been the subject of policy and related attention for a while, therefore, and not only in Ireland but in the UK, Germany and other EU countries as well (European Commission 1997, Home Office 1998).

## 1.2 Volunteering trends in Ireland: volunteering profile

Data on volunteering were collected in the last Census (2006), which means that we now have some idea of the national profile of volunteers in Ireland. Prior to the inclusion of a question on volunteering in the Census previous studies of volunteering were based on sample surveys (ESRI 2006, NESF 2003, Ruddle and Mulvihill 1999, 1995, Ruddle and O'Connor 1993). We will compare data across the various surveys below but first we will turn our attention to the most recent profile of volunteers drawn from Census 2006 data, bearing in mind that these figures pre-date the current economic recession, anecdotal evidence about which suggests that there may be some increase in volunteering numbers and differences in profile. In 2006, 553,255 individuals stated that they were involved in one or more voluntary activities. These activities comprised voluntary engagement with 'a social or charitable organisation', 'a religious group or church', 'a sporting organisation', 'a political or cultural organisation', and 'other' activities.

In total, 16.4 per cent of the population aged 15 and over stated that they were involved in voluntary organisations and activities. As can be seen however, when compared to their proportionate representation in the population at large, volunteers were significantly over-represented among those aged between 45 and 54, and were over-represented in age cohorts 35-44 and 55-64. Volunteers were under-represented in younger age cohorts, particularly those aged between 20 and 34.

**Table 1.2 Voluntary activity by age (CSO 2006)**

Age group	Volunteers %	Irish population %
15-19	6.87	8.6
20-24	6.46	10.15
25-34	15.07	21.04
35-44	21.99	18.47
45-54	21.43	15.46
55-64	15.54	12.06
65 and over	12.64	13.86

If we examine volunteers by social class, we can also see patterns of under- and over-representation, when compared to the Irish population in general. Volunteers drawn from managerial and technical classes are over-represented, and significantly so, while slight under-representation occurs among the unskilled.

**Table 1.3 Voluntary activity by social class (CSO 2006)**

Social class	Volunteers %	Irish population %
Professional	9.06	5.99
Managerial and Technical	35.54	25.22
Non-manual	17.94	16.95
Skilled manual	13.99	17.61
Semi-skilled manual	9.26	11.78
Unskilled	2.71	4.67
Other	11.52	17.79

To summarise briefly, although the proportion of volunteers in the population is significantly lower, certain demographic characteristics can still be seen. For instance, volunteers are drawn from professional and middle classes, and from those aged 35 and older. Unlike previous surveys, however, men and women were almost equally as likely to engage in voluntary activities (16.38 compared to 16.39 per cent), and those living in rural areas were over-represented in volunteering data. While more than half of those engaging in voluntary activities were living in towns and cities (56%), all town and city dwellers comprise 61.5 per cent of the population. Similarly, while rural dwellers comprise 38.5 per cent of the Irish population, they make up just fewer than 44 per cent of volunteers. This profile is reflected when we examine a breakdown, 24 per cent of all volunteers in 2006 lived in towns, and 32 per cent lived in cities. Just 26 per cent of the total population lived in towns, while 35 per cent lived in cities. In other words, those living in cities and towns are under-represented in volunteering data, unlike the conclusions reached in earlier studies (Donovan and Prizeman 2008, CSO 2006, ESRI 2006, NESF 2003, Ruddle and Mulvihill 1999, 1995, Ruddle and O'Connor 1993), and rural dwellers are over-represented in volunteering figures.

We can augment this profile of volunteers with recent work on volunteer-involving organisations (Donovan and Prizeman 2008: 23), which notes that 16 per cent of these organisations are based in social services while a further five per cent are in the field of advocacy, law and politics. Furthermore, one quarter of these organisations had 40 or more volunteers in their organisations. Over half of these organisations regarded the contribution made by volunteering as essential to their operations and a further quarter stated this contribution was important (see also Donoghue et al. 2006). Given the crucial position of volunteers within Citizens Information Services in Ireland (covering both social services and the advocacy fields), these data are important for placing those volunteers in context, before we examine in greater detail their role and contribution in the following chapters.

### 1.3 Motivations to volunteer

There are many motivations behind an individual's decision to volunteer, the most important being 'belief in the cause' (43%), 'being asked to help out' (35%), 'wanting to help out' (32%), 'being neighbourly (30%) and 'knowing the people involved' (29%) as has been noted in Ireland (Ruddle and Mulvihill 1999: 68). The rewards reaped from volunteering are also closely involved with reasons for getting involved, and these are instrumental (for example 'seeing the results' as cited by 54% of volunteers, 'meeting people', stated by 41% of volunteers, and 'getting experience or developing skills', noted by 18% of volunteers), or altruistic ('feeling of doing good' 49% of volunteers and 'enjoyment' 34%; Ruddle and Mulvihill 1999: 70).

More recent literature has divided volunteering styles (including motivations for volunteering) into two main strands: 1) the identification with communities of interest and, 2) the need for individual expression, usually termed as the 'reflexive' mode (Hustinx and Lammertyn 2003, Hustinx 2007). The first strand, a collective style of volunteering, is centred on a sense of personal responsibility to the community in which the volunteer is placed, or with which she or he identifies. The second strand is more personal and individual; volunteering, in this instance, is the social expression of identity, or an expression of who that volunteer is. Volunteers motivated for reflexive reasons, therefore, are involved in a biographical quest for themselves, or a search for self-understanding. The first strand could, in a simplistic sense, be related to the notion of 'giving back', or of a relationship with the community which serves to enhance the identity of the individual engaged in that interaction. This style of volunteering is more concerned with the civic self and the expression of that (Donoghue 2002) and while serving as an expression of the individual, is less of a search for self-understanding than the second strand. Both of these styles of volunteering are reflected in data on volunteering in Ireland but questions are raised for the continued provision of information services in Ireland by such research on motivations, particularly in the context of strategic future development of the service. We now consider the position of volunteers

within the service and some lessons from other countries internationally.

### 1.4 Volunteering and Citizens Information Services

#### 1.4.1 Evolution and history of Citizens Information Services

It is difficult to define an exact date or episode that led to the establishment of Citizens Information Services in Ireland but several key events that occurred in the late 1960s help to shed some light on the evolution process of a community-based information service in Ireland. In late 1968 Muintir na Tíre<sup>10</sup> opened the first Community Information Centre in Tipperary with another opening in Carlow in 1970 (McCourt 2005). The service was delivered by volunteers to 'advise members of the local community on their statutory rights in relation to social services' and was seen as a watershed in the historical evolution of CICs (McCourt 2005:12/13). Cork was established through a different process as a Citizens Advice Bureau shortly afterwards. The early 1970s continued to be significant years in the evolution of information services in Ireland with the first Community Information Centres (CICs) being established in 1974. At that time they were affiliated to the National Social Service Council (NSSC), the body from which they received all of their funding (National Social Service Board 1997). The National Social Service Council<sup>11</sup> was established in 1971 and took on the role of promoting and developing a network of voluntary information services. In 1974 the Government requested the National Social Service Council to act as the central body for the development of Community Information Centres, later renamed Citizens Information Centres (CICs) and now known as Citizens Information Services (CISs). When many of the CICs were originally established they were run by local voluntary committees with 'voluntary organisers' making a huge contribution to the

10 Muintir na Tíre is a national voluntary organisation dedicated to promoting the process of community development in Ireland and was founded in 1937 by the late Canon John Hayes.

11 The organisation was later renamed the National Social Service Board in 1984 when it took on a statutory role. In 2000 it was merged with the National Rehabilitation Board to form Comhairle which was renamed the Citizens Information Board in 2007.

delivery of the service. The structures, emphasis on community representation and reliance on volunteers in the CICs were similar to those in the Citizens Advice Bureau in the UK. The National Social Service Board's role included registering voluntary bodies for the provision of information and advice, and developing and supporting these local advisory centres in this (Nexus Research Co-operative 1998).

The NSSB was brought under the aegis of Comhairle on its establishment in 2000 and was later renamed the Citizens Information Board (CIB). The Board comes under the remit of the Department of Social and Family Affairs (now the Department of Social Protection) and all funding is received from this source. In 2009, CIB obtained a total of €28,005,211 to fulfil their statutory role.

As mentioned earlier CIB provides services utilising a three-channel approach which involves the national network of Citizens Information Services (CISs), the Citizens Information website and the Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) to deliver information, advice and advocacy services for people who require access to public and social services in Ireland.

At the time of writing this report Citizens Information Services were being delivered through 42 CISs operating from 62 locations and comprising 110 CICs and 152 outreach services. The role of CIB was briefly outlined earlier in this chapter and part of its remit is to support CISs to enable them "to deliver information, advice and advocacy services for people who require access to public and social services in Ireland." (Citizens Information Board 2009b).

#### 1.4.2 Volunteers and paid staff in the CIS

Volunteering is central to the service provided by CISs and forms a cornerstone in the foundation of citizens information services in Ireland (Comhairle/CIC 2002). As we saw in the previous section, the first community information services were delivered by voluntary contribution and the CICs were at their conception traditionally staffed on a

part-time basis by trained volunteers (Nexus Research Co-operative 1998). This continued to be the case until 1996 when the network experienced significant changes in its personnel structures. A significant development was the growth of county-wide key Citizens Information Centres which then evolved into Citizens Information Services (CISs). Each CIS covered a geographical region and consisted of a number of Citizens Information Centres. Additional funding was provided to Comhairle to enable the recruitment of Development Managers and paid information providers and administrators to the service. In addition other paid workers were employed by way of Community Employment (CE) and Jobs Initiative (JI) Schemes (Comhairle/CIC 2002).

The relationship between paid staff and volunteers in the CIS has been explored or addressed in several reports, for example, Boyle (1990), Nua Research Services (2001), Comhairle/CIC (2002) and Citizens Information Board (2007a). In Boyle's study carried out in 1990 she noted that there "were divided views regarding the use of paid staff in the CICs" (p57). Some centres "feared that the voluntary enthusiasm could be lost" with the introduction of paid staff while others, she said, would "strongly welcome the notion of paid staffing in the CICs" (Boyle 1990:57). Her report set out a number of recommendations which included the introduction of paid staff:

- (a) Where there was a recognised need for information but no volunteers to establish a CIC
- (b) Where there was a scarcity of volunteers to run an established service
- (c) Where volunteers in certain CICs were unable to deal with their workload, particularly administrative duties (Boyle 1990)

In addition Boyle (1990) recommended that volunteers be consulted regarding their perceived need for paid staff. A report conducted over a decade later (Comhairle/CIC 2002) indicated that several observations were made upon the arrival of paid staff into the CICs, the most significant being that the volunteer contribution had remained "a consistent mainstay to service provision" and

that in certain centres the mix of volunteers and paid staff had been "a major strength" (p.10). In a similar vein, Nua Research Services (2001:47) reported that "[v]olunteers were regarded by the manager in [one] Centre as part of the team and just as effective as paid staff."

While the proportion of paid and employment scheme staff in the service has increased since 1998, the proportion (but not the number) of volunteers has decreased somewhat with volunteers now representing three quarters of the staff in the service as opposed to over 90 per cent in the 1990s<sup>12</sup>. This change came about as a result of the introduction of paid and scheme staff into the service. The number of volunteers who have become or remain involved in the service has continued to grow and this section has highlighted the significance of volunteers in the history and development of the CISs and illustrates the continued importance of volunteers to the provision of Citizens Information in Ireland today.

#### 1.4.3 Development of volunteers and the service

As part of the 'public face' of Citizens Information Services in Ireland, volunteers, along with paid staff and scheme employees, are critical and an important resource (Comhairle/CIC 2002). As highlighted above there are now an estimated 1,175 volunteers in the service. Almost three-quarters of contacts made with Citizens Information Services in 2007, for example, were in person (Solution Enable 2008a: 17) and the average time spent per client in such face-to-face interactions was 26 minutes (Solution Enable 2008a: 22)<sup>13</sup>. At the moment, volunteers with the service complete a number of different tasks, ranging in skill, such as providing information, advice (advising clients on options), filling out forms

and writing letters. In recent years the level and complexity of client queries has increased and has placed additional demands on volunteers both to provide up-to-date information and to be able to deal with distressed clients. Volunteers within the service, give their time and must be trained to a particular level of skill in order to fulfil CIB's mandate, which is to provide a high quality service to the public. This has a subsequent effect on the workload of Development Managers. CIB has developed a number of documents on volunteer policy, which outline principles of good practice, preparation and planning for new volunteers within an organisation and recruitment and selection (Citizens Information Board 2007a, 2008b).

An infrastructure that supports and facilitates the development of volunteering is essential so that the service itself is not only maintained and sustained but is allowed to develop (Nua Research Services 2001, Comhairle/CIC 2004, Comhairle/Citizens Information Board 2006). Understanding the motivations of volunteers as well as probing their role and function within Citizens Information Services is essential in order to embark on strategic development for information services. In addition, lessons from models applied elsewhere are useful to include in the learning mix and it is to some comparative models that attention now turns.

## 1.5 Comparative citizens information models

### 1.5.1 Republic of Ireland

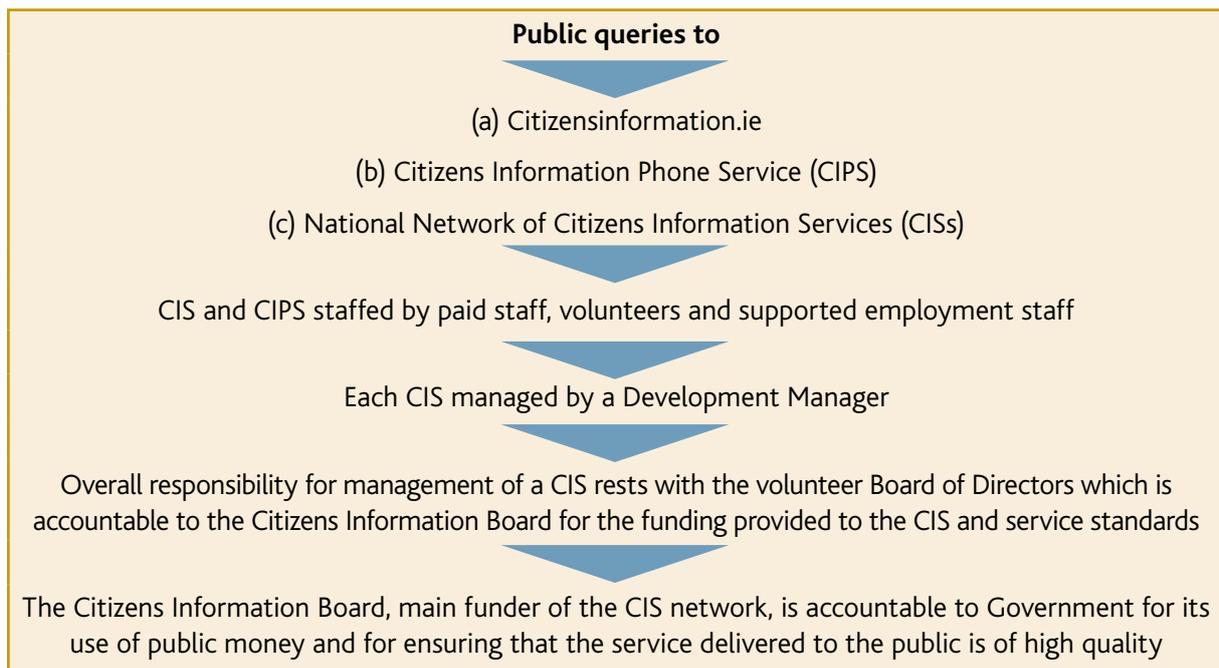
#### Citizens Information Services

As stated in a previous section Citizens Information Services in Ireland can trace their roots to the late 1960s.

Each Citizens Information Service is registered as a Company Limited by guarantee. It is a requirement of Company Law that such companies have a minimum of two directors. Within the Citizens Information Service network there are 42 Boards of Directors with approximately 1,100 volunteer directors drawn from local communities, statutory agencies and other organisations (including CISs). Boards of Directors are responsible for ensuring that the CIS delivers its aims and objectives, using

12 In a study carried out in the late 1990s over 90 per cent of the staff in the CISs were volunteers (Nexus Research Co-operative 1998). Volunteers represent 75.8 per cent of the total staff in the CIS based on the Oyster Activity reports from January to June 2009. Current figures (for 2009) are 1,175 volunteers who represent 77.6% of the total staff in CISs.

13 In 2009, data from the Oyster system showed that time spent with callers to CISs ranged from less than 10 minutes for 52% to 40+ for minutes for 2%. Thirty-eight per cent of callers took between 10 and 20 minutes and 8% took between 20 and 40 minutes.

**Figure 1.1 Overview of the structure of the Citizens Information delivery network**

its available resources to best effect. The day-to-day running of the service is the responsibility of the Development Manager who, along with a team of paid staff, volunteers and supported employment workers delivers the information service to the public. In each region there is a CIB Area Executive whose role it is to help and support CIS Boards to carry out their work.

Figure 1.1 gives an overview of the structure of the Citizens Information delivery network and its relationship with the Citizens Information Board.

Each CIS is managed by a Development Manager who in turn is responsible to the Board of Directors of the CIS. The Development Managers report to the Chairperson or other nominated director of the Board on a day-to-day basis. Some of their specific responsibilities include:

- » Management and development of the service in line with the Citizens Information Board's guidelines for the provision of Citizens Information Services;
- » Development and management of innovative processes for provision of quality information to clients in various formats;
- » Management of the recruitment, training and development of a team of paid staff and volunteers including supervision and support;

- » Development and management of a network of information service providers in the area; and
- » Supporting the development of the Board of the CIS and assisting in strategic planning for the service.

At present CISs continue to be staffed by a combination of volunteers, paid staff and employment scheme workers. In 2009, there were 1,175 volunteers participating in the work of CISs with some of the 111 CICs not involving any volunteers (providing the equivalent of 107.28 whole-time equivalent posts). There were a total of 168.5 whole time equivalent paid posts in the network of Citizens Information Services. Numbers of paid staff and their roles are listed below (whole time equivalents):

Development Manager	42
Information Officer	104.5
Administrator	22

In 2009 there were 170 scheme participants working in Citizens Information Services. These scheme participants provided the whole time equivalent of 97 posts to the network of Citizens Information Services.

*Advocacy in Citizens Information Services*

Advocacy is developing as a significant feature of Citizens Information Board services in response to the difficulties some people experience when seeking information, claiming their entitlements or seeking the services that they need. Advocacy can empower people by supporting them to assert their views and claim their entitlements and, where necessary, representing and negotiating on their behalf.

Information providers in the network of Citizens Information Services (CISs) provide advocacy services by supporting their clients to act on their own behalf wherever possible (self-advocacy). They also advocate on behalf of clients, for example, contacting and negotiating with a third party or attending meetings, hearings and appeals. An Advocacy Resource Officer (ARO) Pilot Programme has been in operation since 2005. This pilot project was developed to enhance the capacity of CIS information providers to advocate on behalf of clients, through mentoring CIS staff, training in case management and the principles and practice of advocacy, and making available expert knowledge when required. This programme is currently being evaluated.

In line with its strategic approach, the Citizens Information Board has developed and funded a programme of support for community and voluntary organisations to provide advocacy services for people with disabilities. Since the process began in 2004, a range of projects have been supported and funded and 46 projects now provide advocacy services to people with disabilities.

*Influencing social policy*

The Citizens Information Board's social policy work aims to highlight the concerns of users to those who provide services and in turn encourage improvements and developments in service provision and service delivery. Policy submissions draw largely on information in cases with social policy implications highlighted by the CISs and the CIPS. Social Policy Quarterly Reports (SPQRs) are based on the reported social policy cases. Their purpose is to draw the attention of policy makers and service providers to customer service issues, trends,

emerging needs, anomalies, gaps in service provision and to the effectiveness of current social policies and services.

**National Association of Citizens Information Centres and Services**

The National Association of Citizens Information Services (NACIS) was established in 2003 and is the national representative body of Citizens Information Services and Citizens Information Centres in Ireland. The Association is funded by CIB and acts as the voice of the CIS and CIC and is committed to supporting the development of an independent, professional, non-judgmental information and advocacy service. The main purpose of NACIS is to represent the collective views of Citizens Information Centres (CICs) and Citizens Information Services (CISs) nationally and to inform policy and strategic planning in regard to those services with a view to benefiting the individuals and communities serviced by CISs, promoting social inclusion and tackling disadvantage. NACIS is concerned with issues arising from the CISs around the delivery of services and liaising with CIB with this remit in mind. They do not deal with HR issues or related issues. The National Executive of NACIS is made up of 15 regional representatives from the CISs (five members of the boards of management, five paid staff and five volunteers) one of each category from each of the five regions in Ireland who engage with CIB.

**Volunteers in the CIS**

Volunteers who work in the service come from different backgrounds and bring different skills to the service. While there is no minimum time requirement for volunteering documented within the CIS<sup>14</sup>, typically many CISs set a time requirement that suits the needs of their individual services and the volunteer. In the CIS volunteers play three key roles: information provider, administrator/ receptionist and board member. Table 14 provides a brief description of each of these roles.

Given the way in which the service has emerged and evolved since the late 1960s it

14 A recent internal CIB report indicated that Co. Wexford and Cork City South CISs had successfully sought a 6-8 hour per week commitment from new volunteers (CIB 2009b).

is not surprising that a number of different models of CIS have emerged. At present, the service is delivered by three distinct models of CIS, run with (a) many volunteers and few paid staff, (b) paid staff and relatively few volunteers and (c) a mix of paid staff, volunteers and employment scheme workers. These differing models pose challenges for CIB with regard to the role and contribution of volunteers to the overall service.

#### *Training of volunteers in the CIS*

The Citizens Information Board is committed to supporting and developing all CIS personnel (paid staff and volunteers) "through training based on principles of quality standards, accessibility and equality" (Citizens Information Board 2008c). CIB considers training to be an investment in staff and strongly recommends, encourages, and supports Development Managers in ensuring that all information providers (IP) participate in training programmes to ensure that all IPs have a good basic standard of relevant knowledge

and skill as well as the requisite competencies to provide a high quality service for customers.

CIB also provides a National Calendar of training events over two periods of the year (March to June and September to December) offering approximately 70 events on information, interpersonal skills, management/organisational skills and advocacy and social policy information. The content of the programme is informed by structured consultation with CISs on training needs at local and regional level and in consultation with CIB central services. Events are also organised off-calendar to meet changing needs and demands of the CISs. This calendar is intended to complement the training which is organised locally in each CIS. The programme combines five Regional Training Programmes and a Customer Service and Training Programme (Citizens Information Board 2009c). See Appendix D for a breakdown of courses that were offered in the September to December 2009 programme.

**Table 1.4 Volunteer roles in the Citizens Information Service (Republic of Ireland)**

Volunteer role	Description
<b>Information Provider</b>	This is the role where the volunteer makes the most significant contribution to the CIS (Comhairle/CIS 2002). Information Providers (volunteers and paid staff) run the service on a day-to-day basis. Their tasks include delivering information, advice and advocacy directly to members of the public in person and on the telephone. They also have to liaise with and refer clients to other service providers (statutory and voluntary). In addition they are required to source and retrieve specific social and public information using a range of appropriate information sources and in particular citizensinformation.ie. All Information Providers receive free training in-house and are offered FETAC* accredited training.
<b>Administration/ Receptionist</b>	The Administrator/Receptionist assists in the daily operation of the CICs. Their tasks include clerical duties, answering the telephone, taking minutes of meetings, maintaining files and records, greeting clients, arranging events and meetings. Findings from this volunteer study suggest that, in fact, there are very few volunteer administrators/receptionists in the service (see Table 3.1). This is not one of the key roles carried out by volunteers.
<b>Board Member</b>	The Board is responsible and accountable for supervising the affairs of the service, directing the affairs of the service to ensure it is in compliance with all relevant statutory obligations and Citizens Information Board requirements, and that it is well-run and delivering the outcomes for which it has been set up.

\* FETAC (the Further Education and Training Awards Council) is the national awarding body for further education and training in Ireland.

The Citizens Information Board delivers an accredited Information Providers' Programme (IPP) validated by FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council). It is designated at level 6 on the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland framework. Accreditation serves two important functions:

- » To provide quality assurance for information, advice and advocacy services both for CIS customers and for those seeking information from other relevant organisations
- » To establish certified standards of competency for information providers

The IPP is available through three formats: a taught programme, distance learning and recognition of prior learning<sup>15</sup>. It consists of two modules that cover Information, Advice and Advocacy Practice and Social and Civil Information.

CIB conducted an Information Providers Programme audit in September 2008 which reported that 97 paid employees had or were in the process of completing the IPP which represented 40 per cent of the 242 paid individuals in the CIS network (at that time). In addition 77 of the 162 scheme workers (47.5%) had completed the IPP training course. In comparison only 177 out of the 1,085 volunteers in the service at that time had completed the IPP; this represented 16.3 per cent of volunteers<sup>16</sup> (Citizens Information Board 2008b).

The audit identified three main reasons why information providers were not undertaking the IPP. These included the lack of interest displayed by some experienced information

15 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is accredited recognition of prior learning as a way for experienced information providers to gain accreditation via FETAC certification. The learner must present a portfolio of evidence which includes written assignments reflecting on experience in the information setting and discussing case studies, a demonstration of required skills in information provision and IT, plus a computer-based theory examination.

16 CIB were previously not in a position to centrally record and monitor the training completed by all volunteers in the service but the new Oyster System that was introduced earlier this year will enable the recording of such information.

providers (especially volunteers), cost and time resource issues and the belief that local induction and other CIB-accredited and non-accredited training were sufficient (Citizens Information Board 2008b). The three most common positive benefits cited by the Development Managers who were part of the audit included the perception that standards in the CICs had risen, there was increased confidence or performance in the former course participants and a perceived increased confidence from the public in the service (Citizens Information Board 2008b).

*Supports and resources for volunteering in the CIS*  
As well as providing relevant training to all volunteers CIB offer various supports and resources to the CISs to support volunteering in their service. These include:

- » The publication, *Guide to Developing a CIS Volunteer Policy and Procedures* (CIB 2007a). This is a comprehensive document which was one of three developed<sup>17</sup> following recommendations from the CIC/Comhairle joint working group examining the *Role of the Volunteer in the CIS Network* (2002). The guide reflects national and international best practice in volunteering and endorses much of the current practice within the CIS network. In the development of this document it was envisaged that services would refer to the various sections on a need-to-know basis and that each service would develop its own policy in the order which was most useful to it. Services therefore can choose to copy, adapt or adopt the material according to their specific situations.
- » *A Handbook for Volunteers* (a handbook for volunteers which includes information on the following; volunteering with the CIS; background on the CIS; who's involved in the CIS?; volunteer roles; starting as a volunteer; a volunteer agreement; and while you're in the office. The handbook can be amended by individual CISs to reflect their specific needs).
- » Information leaflet for potential volunteers (a template of a leaflet which briefly outlines the work of the CIS. The document can be

17 The other documents developed following recommendations from the working group were a *Handbook for Volunteers* and an *Information Leaflet for Potential Volunteers*.

amended by individual CISs to reflect their specific needs).

- » Induction Training Programme for new staff and volunteers (see Appendix C for checklist of issues to be covered in the induction programme).

In addition, CIB has developed a generic set of resources for volunteer organisations - *Managing Volunteers*. Various publications from CIB provide an additional resource for volunteers and development managers. Area Executives whose role is one of co-ordination between the CISs and CIB also support volunteers in the service.

CIB recognises that the roles and responsibilities of all voluntary Boards of Directors have become more onerous and complex in recent years. What were previously ad hoc and/or informal arrangements have been formalised through legislation. While most Boards recognise that this change is beneficial, they may at times feel the pressure that such compliance brings. Voluntary Boards have particular challenges in keeping abreast of what is required given the different skills and abilities of their members. To help Boards understand what is involved individually and collectively, the Citizens Information Board has written a number of documents specifically to assist Boards in meeting their obligations (CIB 2008f)<sup>18</sup>.

### 1.5.2 United Kingdom

#### Citizens Advice<sup>19</sup>

Citizens Advice is the United Kingdom's largest advice provider. Citizens Advice in the UK is a voluntary umbrella body with Citizens Advice Bureaux being funded by different local authorities. In this respect the service in the UK is different to the Citizens Information Service in the Republic of Ireland. Citizens Advice helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free information and advice, and by influencing policy makers. Citizens Advice began in 1939 as an emergency

war service. Citizens Advice provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. There are 416 Citizens Advice Bureaux across England and Wales, and a further 22 bureaux in Northern Ireland, all of which are independent registered charities (Citizens Advice 2009a). They are all members of Citizens Advice, the membership organisation - also an independent registered charity - that provides training and support to member bureaux, and co-ordinates a national policy work. Citizens Advice and every Citizens Advice Bureau are reliant on the support of a wide range of funders including central and local government, charitable trusts, companies and individuals. In 2007/08 the largest funding of the national Citizens Advice charity came from government grants, the majority of this as grant-in-aid from the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (previously the Department of Trade and Industry). Information and advice are delivered through face-to-face and telephone services as well as email and online services. As well as providing advice, the Citizens Advice service also campaigns for changes to policy and practice that prevent problems arising in the first place.

#### Volunteering in Citizens Advice

Of the 27,000 people who work in the service, 21,000 are volunteers, all from different backgrounds with different skills (Citizens Advice 2009b). There is no minimum time requirement to volunteer with Citizens Advice and volunteers perform a number of roles which include advisers, administrators, receptionists, trustees, campaigners, IT support co-ordinators, PR and marketing, fundraising, volunteer recruitment and peer education workers. Table 1.5 below provides a brief description of each role.

18 These include *CIS Company Law Guidelines, Good Governance: A code of practice for Boards of Directors of Citizens Information Services* and *Training Guideline: Board of Directors Roles and Responsibilities*.

19 Information used here was primarily obtained from the Citizens Advice website: <http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/cabdir.ihtml>

**Table 1.5 Volunteer roles in Citizens Advice (United Kingdom)**

<b>Volunteer role</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Advisor</b>	CAB advisors run the service on a daily basis. Advisors are supported in their work and all their expenses are paid. As a CAB advisor, individuals interview clients, help them negotiate with people such as creditors or service providers, draft letters, make telephone calls on behalf of clients, refer them to other agencies and represent them in court and at tribunals. All advisors receive comprehensive free training, which is recognised and respected throughout the UK. The training programme consists of observation, working through self-study packs, and a five-day course run by Citizens Advice. Volunteers are supported throughout their training by an in-bureau Guidance Tutor. In general most volunteers complete the advisor training programme in 6-12 months.
<b>Administrator</b>	As a CAB volunteer administrators ensure the smooth running of a bureau. Their role includes the following: word processing, file management, arranging events, using databases and spreadsheets, answering emails and phone calls and updating local information.
<b>Receptionist</b>	Receptionists are seen as the public face of the Citizens Advice service, meeting clients on a daily basis. They greet clients, arrange appointments, answer the telephone, provide information on the service to clients, manage the waiting room and keep records.
<b>Trustee</b>	Every CAB is a registered charity. Therefore each has its own board of trustees. Some trustee roles require specific skills but bureaux welcome people of all ages, backgrounds and experience to their trustee boards. Trustees manage and plan the bureau's overall strategic direction, act as employer for paid staff, manage the bureau's finances, ensure the bureau complies with the law and are responsible for premises, insurance and equipment.
<b>Campaigner</b>	Campaigners in CAB complete and collate evidence forms recording clients problems, identify and raise relevant issues in the bureau, train staff and volunteers in identifying issues and completing evidence forms, conduct research and write reports, get involved in media campaigning and liaise with other bureaux and agencies.
<b>IT support co-ordinator</b>	IT support workers help CAB to use IT effectively in order to provide quality services to clients. They support bureau workers including paid staff and volunteers through troubleshooting, web design, training bureau workers in IT skills and assisting with email advice.
<b>PR and marketing</b>	The Citizens Advice Bureaux need to raise their profile in their local community in order to attract funding, recruit volunteers, promote local and national CAB campaigns and to ensure that potential clients know how to access their services. PR volunteers carry out a number of activities including, producing promotional materials to use locally, tailoring press releases issued by the national Citizens Advice press office to use locally, seeking coverage for the bureaux work in local papers and on TV and radio and arranging events, displays and talks to promote the bureaux.
<b>Fundraiser</b>	Every Citizens Advice Bureau is a registered charity reliant on money from local authorities, companies, charitable trusts and individuals. Fundraisers work with the bureau treasurer or other trustees to meet fundraising objectives, help with researching fundraising opportunities, organise fundraising events, help complete fundraising applications, put together presentations to give to potential funders and provide support to the bureau fundraising group. For example, some bureaux have a Friends of CAB group.
<b>Volunteer recruitment</b>	Many CAB bureaux run volunteer recruitment campaigns throughout the year either to help them expand their services or to replace volunteers who have left. Some bureaux have volunteers with a specific role to run these campaigns others might include this in their general PR/marketing.
<b>Peer education worker</b>	Peer educators promote CAB in schools, colleges and youth organisations by giving talks about a specific problem and running an advice service for young people.

### **CAB Northern Ireland<sup>20</sup>**

On 1 April 1984, Citizens Advice (Northern Ireland) became an independent limited company with its own constitution and at that time it received 100 per cent funding from the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI). Today, each Citizens Advice Bureau is a registered charity which is funded by various sources including, grants received from local councils, the National Lottery, charitable trusts, private companies, individuals and others. Citizens Advice is one of the largest voluntary organisations in Northern Ireland with a Regional Office in Belfast, 28 local offices and 120 other outlets. In recent years CAB in Northern Ireland has come through a period of considerable growth and development. Citizens Advice has pioneered the use of computers in advice work, implemented the accreditation of advice training, developed outreach work and developed cross-border advice. In addition CAB represents at some 1,200 social security tribunals per year and is the largest single source of help for appellants in Northern Ireland. The Association now handles in excess of 250,000 queries a year and holds a number of key contracts to deliver advice and information to the public on a range of issues.

Citizens Advice (Northern Ireland) is linked to Citizens Advice England and Wales and is part of it the largest advice-giving network in the United Kingdom with over 60 years experience. At the moment there are 227<sup>21</sup> volunteers who play a number of roles in Citizens Advice (Northern Ireland). These roles are slightly different to those outlined by CAB United Kingdom. Table 1.6 below provides a short summary of the various roles volunteers can play in the service.

### **Citizens Advice Scotland**

The first Scottish bureau was established in Glasgow around the time of the Second World War, but further bureaux opened in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and elsewhere soon afterwards. In 1975, the regional office for Scotland – the Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (SACAB) – became an autonomous umbrella

organisation. In 1980 SACAB became fully independent, and a charitable company limited by guarantee in 1984.

Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) is the national umbrella body that provides support services for Scottish citizens advice bureaux and collates client case evidence to shape policy in Scotland and the UK. CAS provides a range of services and the best possible advice and support to its member bureaux to meet the needs of existing and potential clients. CAS is the voice of the CAB Service in Scotland and aims to raise the profile of the service and make changes to social policy. The Department of Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform supports CAS through annual grant in aid. Citizens Advice (England and Wales) is the sister organisation of CAS and knowledge and experience is shared among all Citizens Advice organisations. Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) is the operating name of the Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, which is a company limited by guarantee. CAS is a registered charity and employs approximately 70 paid staff in offices based in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness. The Board of Directors and Standing Committees control the strategic direction of CAS. The Board and Standing Committees are elected by member bureaux at the Annual General Meeting each year.

The majority of citizens advice bureau staff in Scotland are trained volunteers. There are a number of different roles that volunteers play in CAS. Table 1.7 provides a brief summary of these roles.

<sup>20</sup> Information used here was obtained from several sources including, the CAB Northern Ireland and the website (<http://www.citizensadvice.co.uk/en>) and telephone interview with the CEO of CAB Northern Ireland.

<sup>21</sup> Annual Report and Accounts 2008/2009 (CABNI 2009).

**Table 1.6 Volunteer roles in Citizens Advice (Northern Ireland)**

<b>Volunteer role</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Information provider/ money advisor</b>	The role of information provider/money advisor is to help provide an effective and efficient advice service to members of the public. Main duties include: interviewing clients, both face-to-face and on the telephone; finding, interpreting and communicating the relevant information and exploring options and implications in order that the client can come to a decision; acting, where necessary, on behalf of the client, negotiating, drafting or writing letters or making appropriate referrals; completing clear and accurate case records; recognising the root causes of problems and participating in taking appropriate action and keeping up to date on important issues by attending the appropriate training.
<b>Podcasting</b>	The purpose of a citizens advice podcasting team is to capture the current advice and information available to citizens advice clients and produce a regular series of informative podcasts which will be hosted on the citizens advice website and which will be available for public download. Volunteers are asked to volunteer on a weekly basis for a minimum duration of six months. Duties include: researching and developing content for broadcast, compiling all required information and necessary staff resources, scripting a regular series of podcasts, the recording and production of podcasts in a variety of locations and uploading of completed podcasts to citizens advice website.
<b>Social networking</b>	The role of social networker is new within the service and serves to act as a bridge between the more traditional format which involves making an appointment and physically going to a bureau to talk in person and the new remote forms of accessing advice via the web, text message and podcast. Volunteers are asked to volunteer for a minimum of six hours per week for a six-month duration.
<b>Administration</b>	The role of an administrator is to help ensure the smooth running and organisation of the bureau. Duties include typing letters and memos for bureau workers, updating databases and information systems, filing, photocopying, taking minutes at workers' meetings, answering the telephone, taking messages where appropriate, ordering stationery and other necessary items and completing social policy forms.
<b>Interpreter</b>	The purpose of this role is to assist in making the bureau accessible for those for whom English is a second language.
<b>Librarian</b>	The purpose of this role is to organise the leaflets available for clients and to build and maintain a reference library to be used as an internal resource.
<b>Social policy</b>	The social policy volunteers use the evidence from bureaux to lobby for change on behalf of Citizens Advice. They produce reports and briefing papers, and work with ministers and officials, regulators and other organisations.

**Table 1.7 Volunteer roles in Citizens Advice Scotland**

<b>Volunteer Role</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Citizens advice bureau advisers</b>	<p>The role of adviser is varied and includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Interviewing clients by phone, in person or by email</li> <li>» Using the Electronic Information System (EIS) to give information to clients</li> <li>» Helping to fill in forms and write letters</li> <li>» Referring clients to other agencies</li> <li>» Representing clients at tribunals and other legal settings</li> </ul>
<b>Administrator</b>	<p>The kinds of tasks carried out by bureau administrator workers include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Updating leaflets and local information resources</li> <li>» Compiling monthly statistical reports for CAS on enquiries the bureau has had</li> <li>» Filing client records</li> <li>» Receiving and sending faxes, mail, email and telephone calls</li> <li>» Taking notes and minutes at meetings</li> </ul>
<b>Bureau management committee volunteers</b>	<p>The management committee is a voluntary group of people with the key role of ensuring that the bureau fulfils all its legal obligations and operates efficiently and according to good practice guidelines.</p>
<b>Social policy volunteers</b>	<p>Volunteers involved in social policy work would carry out the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Completing and collating client evidence forms</li> <li>» Keeping in touch with the Social Policy team at Citizens Advice Scotland</li> <li>» Researching projects</li> <li>» Identifying and raising issues</li> <li>» Taking local action</li> </ul>
<b>IT support</b>	<p>Volunteers in this role would carry out the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Supporting and training users in day-to-day use of IT systems</li> <li>» Working with the Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) IT support team to identify and fix hardware and software problems</li> <li>» Maintaining the bureau network</li> <li>» Designing spreadsheets, databases or a bureau website</li> </ul>
<b>Bureau fundraising</b>	<p>Fundraising volunteers are supported by paid staff to enable them to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Develop a local supporter and donor base of individuals, businesses and charitable trusts</li> <li>» Investigate fundraising prospects in the area - identifying local individuals, businesses and charitable trusts which might support the bureau</li> <li>» Ask for donations and legacies from local supporters</li> <li>» Build relationships with local companies to generate cash and in-kind support</li> <li>» Organise fundraising events and appeals</li> <li>» Prepare applications to charitable trusts requesting grants for bureau projects</li> </ul>

### 1.5.3 Other networks

Citizens Advice International is an umbrella organisation set up in March 2004. It represents the interests of advice giving bodies throughout the world and supports independent providers of free impartial and confidential advice and information to the public about their rights and thus aims to contribute to advancement of the civil society. Citizens Advice International is made up of a network of national and local organisations from Europe and New Zealand. All Citizens Advice International organisations share the same values, principles and concerns, which are:

- » To be committed to and act in accordance with the principles of democratic governance: openness, transparency, participation and accountability
- » To observe and maintain human dignity by ensuring respect for human rights and better access to justice; to observe the principles of independence, impartiality and confidentiality when providing services to citizens
- » To carry out their activities independently of governments, political parties and commercial interests
- » To ensure a high standard of free and impartial advice and information service provided to citizens
- » To possess the expertise of working with the public and for the public

The National Association of Citizens Information Services in Ireland (NACIS) is a member of Citizens Advice International as is Citizens Advice Northern Ireland. Other members of Citizens Advice International include: England and Wales, Czech Republic, Gibraltar, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Scotland, Slovakia, Slovenia and New Zealand.

### 1.5.4 Summary and potential learning

The above sections have outlined the model of Citizens Information services in Ireland as well as given a brief outline of citizens information services in Northern Ireland and across the United Kingdom. Looking across these models we can see that culturally and historically the emergence of information services in the

United Kingdom, Northern Ireland and Scotland differ from the emergence of the services in Ireland. However there are a number of specific practices around the role and contribution made by volunteers in information services which could provide useful models for the CIS to consider in the development of volunteers in the service. For example, we saw that in Ireland volunteers play three key roles in the service while in the UK, NI and Scotland many more roles where volunteers could make a contribution were identified. CIB/CIS could explore other possible roles that volunteers could play in the service and become more innovative about their use of volunteers in the overall service.

## 1.6 Conclusion

Evidence shows that volunteers are drawn from particular groups in society and have different kinds of motivations for engaging in voluntary activity. From an organisational perspective, there are a number of challenges to be borne in mind. The profile of volunteers is changing and volunteers may be engaging in short bursts of voluntary activity, rather than signing up to an organisation for life (NCV 2002). Organisations, therefore, need to be aware of the need to attract their volunteers differently and they may also have to consider a variety of maintenance strategies to keep their volunteers engaged. Organisations may also have to target different kinds of groups so that they are represented across society, and in so doing, can build better relationships with the clients that the organisations seek to serve.

The CICs have, traditionally, been based in communities and their volunteers come from those communities. As communities change, there may well be a need for the CICs, and the Citizens Information Service, as a whole, to address the representation of those communities in which their CICs are based. CIB has throughout its history demonstrated awareness of its reliance on volunteers and the centrality of volunteers to its operation and service provision (Comhairle/CIC 2002), and it has reviewed volunteer management and strategy on an ongoing basis (Comhairle/Citizens Information Board 2006, Citizens Information Board 2007).

As the literature demonstrates, however, volunteers engage in voluntary activities for different motivations and an emerging trend of a reflexive style of volunteering can be seen, which may present a challenge for community-based organisations, like CISs. CISs may need to address this challenge by recognising that reflexive volunteers are seeking a 'biographical' end, that is, they are seeking to learn something about or make some gain for themselves through the means of volunteering, unlike the community style volunteer who is concerned with 'giving back' to the community. However, the strong community ethos from which CISs have emerged must continue to influence the work of volunteers in the service. Models from Northern Ireland, England and Scotland indicate too the need to identify and be innovative and creative about the kinds of roles that volunteers can play in the provision of information, an area that has developed enormously in the years since the establishment of the service in Ireland. The CIS depends on volunteers to deliver a service to its clients and volunteers depend on the CIS to provide them with a meaningful way to engage with their local community.

Having reviewed the literature and identified the challenges that potentially face the Citizens Information Service in the future, we now turn our attention to volunteers within that service and the role that they play. In the next chapter, Chapter Two, the methodology which was employed in carrying out this research is described. Chapter Three sets out the findings from the online volunteer survey. Chapter Four presents findings from focus group discussions and is also substantially informed by face-to-face interviews. Finally, Chapter Five sets out the present context within which Citizens Information Services operate and outlines recommendations for the future which are directed towards achieving a volunteer-involving Citizens Information Service.



## Chapter 2

# Methodology

## 2.0 Background and introduction

As noted previously, the key focus of this research study was on the role played by volunteers in the day-to-day service of the Citizens Information Service. We deliberately did not, therefore, involve volunteers who were serving on the Boards of Management. However, some of the focus group participants were serving a dual role – information provider and board member – so some issues around the performance of Boards and the role of the volunteer on Boards were raised (see Chapter Four). This chapter sets out the methodological approach that was adopted.

### 2.1 Multi-stage, multi-method approach

Based on the objectives of the study a multi-stage, multi-method approach was utilised for the research project. The research was divided into the following stages:

*Stage I: Secondary Research: Literature Review:* compilation of existing data and literature from a volunteering perspective in order to locate the research within the general context of research conducted to date as well as the policy framework for voluntary activity in Ireland.

*Stage II: Quantitative Element:* This involved a nationwide online survey of volunteers in the CIS in order to present an overview of the deployment of volunteers in the service and to provide a profile of those volunteers.

*Stage III: Qualitative Element:* Focus group discussions with CIS Development Managers, paid staff and volunteers in order to explore the role and contribution of volunteers from all perspectives and to further tease out the topic areas addressed in the online survey. In addition interviews with identified key stakeholders and informants were also carried out.

## 2.2 Online volunteer survey

### 2.2.1 Questionnaire development and deployment

A survey of CIS volunteers had not previously been conducted. Therefore this research aimed to include all volunteers involved in the day-to-day service of CISs. Postal surveys are time-consuming and costly, and require the personal address details of the individuals involved. As CIB does not centrally hold the personal information of CIS volunteers it was agreed that an online survey was the most appropriate way to reach as many CIS volunteers as possible. CIS volunteers have access to and use the internet while volunteering as information providers in the CICs. It was agreed, therefore, that volunteers would be able to complete the online survey during their volunteering shifts or at home using their personal computers. However a paper version of the survey was made available to Development Managers for

volunteers in their services who did not wish to use or could not access the online survey.

A questionnaire was designed based on relevant literature and reports received from CIB as well as other literature which examined trends in volunteering more generally (See Appendix E for complete questionnaire). A comprehensive questionnaire was developed using Zoomerang online survey software and the final version of the online survey was tested prior to deployment. A link to the survey was sent to the 42 Development Managers in CISs and a link was also made available on the Centre for Nonprofit Management's website in order to allow access to as many volunteers as possible<sup>22</sup>. The survey was launched on 21 April 2009 and closed on Friday 3 July. The final number of volunteers who participated in the survey was 437 and included 19 participants who completed paper questionnaires and two partial surveys which had not been fully transferred online.

### 2.2.2 Response rate

As with any survey the objective is to achieve as high a response rate as possible. Response rates vary depending on the target audience and the methods used in the study. In this Survey, the response rate was also dependent on communication at local level with volunteers. If we accept that there are approximately 1,078 volunteers in the CIS<sup>23</sup> at the time the study was being conducted, we can say that the survey achieved a response rate of 40.5 per cent. Considering the target audience were volunteers who were being asked to give 30 minutes of their time to complete a questionnaire, the only incentive being to help out and be part of the research process, and the fact that there was no centrally held information about the volunteers, this response rate is more than satisfactory. If there had been individual email addresses for each volunteer it would have been easier to

22 The Development Managers were able to forward the link, via email, to those volunteers who requested it and volunteers were able to access the weblink from any computer, either in the CIC or at their home.

23 This figure of 1,078 is based on the six-monthly reports that Development Managers send to the CIB – this figure comes from the Report for January to December 2008. In December 2009, there were 1,175 volunteers working in the service.

target them directly and would have reduced the amount of time spent on following up with Development Managers. On the other hand there is no evidence to suggest that more than 40 per cent would have taken part in the survey if this were the case. More importantly is the issue of representativeness and the volunteers who took part in the study are representative of the overall number of volunteers in the CIS (See Table 2.1). It should also be noted that while 437 respondents completed the survey each of these respondents did not answer all questions. The tables and charts presented in Chapter Three will highlight the number of respondents where relevant.

### 2.2.3 Regional breakdown

The Citizens Information Board supports the Citizens Information Services through their offices which are located in five regions (see Appendix F for details of the CISs in each of the five regions). There are differences across each of these five regions in the number of volunteers that work in the CISs. In Table 2.1 (next page) we can see that Regions 3 and 4 have high numbers of volunteers (N=697 in total) while Region 5 has a relatively small number of volunteers (N=87).

Examination of responding volunteers by CIS region shows that for Regions 1, 2, 3 and 5 the proportion of volunteers responding to the survey is very similar to the proportion of volunteers represented in each region. Region 4 is the only region where the proportion of responding volunteers (22%) was lower than the proportion of volunteers that work in the region (30.3%)<sup>24</sup>.

These findings give us confidence to say that the volunteers who took part in the study are representative of the overall number of volunteers in each of the regions.

24 During the course of the fieldwork there were difficulties accessing volunteers in many of the CICs in this region which is reflected in the overall number of volunteers responding from the region.

**Table 2.1 Region where volunteers were located**

Region	N	%	N	%
	Total number of CIS Volunteers*	Proportion of vols. from each region	of vols. completing the survey	Proportion of responding vols. from each region
Region 1**	161	14.9	59	13.5
Region 2	133	12.4	72	16.5
Region 3	370	34.3	169	38.7
Region 4	327	30.3	96	22.0
Region 5	87	8.1	38	8.7
No Reply	N/A	N/A	3	0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>1078</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>100</b>

\* These figures cover January 2008 – December 2008.

\*\* There are five CIS Regions: Region 1 – Dublin North and the North East; Region 2 – Dublin West and the Midlands; Region 3 – Dublin South and the South East; Region 4 – Southern and the Mid West; Region 5 – West and the North West.

**Table 2.2 Group discussions held**

Group interviewed	Location	Date held	No. in attendance
Managers	Dublin	22/05/09	6
Information Officers	Dublin	27/05/09	4
Managers	Dublin	29/05/09	7
Volunteers	Dublin	4/06/09	8
Volunteers	Kilkenny	10/06/09	7
Volunteers	Cork	24/06/09	9
CIB Area Executives	Dublin	01/07/09	6
CIB Regional Managers	Dublin	09/07/09	3

**Table 2.3 Interviews held with key stakeholders and informants**

Organisation	Location	Date
CEO, Volunteer Centres Ireland	Trinity College, Dublin	May 2009
Manager, South Dublin County Volunteer Centre	Tallaght, Dublin	July 2009
CEO, Citizens Advice NI	Telephone Interview	July 2009
Manager, Advocacy and Accessibility, CIB	CIB, Dublin	August 2009
Senior Manager, Regional Services, CIB	CIB, Dublin	August 2009
Chief Executive, CIB	CIB, Dublin	September 2009
Dept. of Social and Family Affairs*	Dublin	October 2009
Training Manager, Customer Service and Training, CIB	Dublin	September 2009
Chairperson, NACIS	Telephone Interview	October 2009
Dept. of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs**	Dublin	September 2009

\* Now Department of Social Protection

\*\* Now Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs

### 2.2.4 Analysis

Once the survey was closed, raw data files were downloaded from the Zoomerang website and converted from MS Excel into SPSS (a data analysis package). Data were analysed and relevant tables and charts were prepared.

## 2.3 Focus groups

Focus group discussions were held in order to enhance the data received in the survey and to tease out some of the key areas of interest. Table 2.2 above outlines the focus groups that were held. The discussions took place between May and July 2009.

## 2.4 Interviews with key stakeholders and informants

In addition to the group discussions a number of face-to-face interviews were held with identified key stakeholders and informants in order to explore the role and contribution of the volunteer in the CIS from their perspective. Table 2.3 above outlines the interviews that were held. The interviews took place between May and October 2009.

## 2.5 Data analysis

A facilitator and rapporteur moderated each of the focus group discussions and each focus group was tape recorded (with permission) and notes were taken. Again the face-to-face interviews were recorded (where permission was granted) and notes taken. The group discussions and interviews were not transcribed (due to cost and time limitations) but each group discussion and interview was listened to several times so that additional supplementary notes could be made and key issues arising could be noted. Analysis commenced with attention to this data followed by an iterative process of identifying themes and returning to the data to review the significance of these themes (Bude 2004, Reissman 2004). Using this technique data gathered from each of the groups and interviews were analysed and relevant emerging themes recorded. These themes were then used to guide the presentation of findings as set out in Chapter Four.

We now turn our attention to Chapter Three which presents the findings from Stage II of the research process, the online survey that was completed by CIS volunteers.

## Chapter 3

# Volunteers in the CIS – Survey Findings

### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a profile of responding volunteers including their gender, age, nationality, employment status, and highest educational qualification. In addition, the chapter sets out the volunteering history of those who participated in the survey, including the length of time they have spent volunteering and the number of hours per week they volunteer in the Citizens Information Service (CIS). Many of the questions which the respondents were asked in the survey were attitudinal questions where they had to rank the importance of or their agreement with certain statements. The rankings were scored from one to six where six was 'most important' or 'strongly agree'. In presenting the findings from these types of questions the average or mean score was calculated for each statement and presented in a figure/diagram (See section 3.3 onwards). Other data presented in tabular form relates to the percentage of respondents which indicated their age, marital status, hours volunteering and so on.

### 3.1 About the respondents

#### 3.1.1 Role of the volunteer

At the moment volunteers in the CIS perform three key roles. The majority of respondents (88.3%) spent most of their time as information providers. A small percentage (10.5%) of volunteers worked mainly in reception or administrative roles and only five volunteers stated that they spent the majority of their volunteering time as a board member. It should be noted that some of the information providers

who completed the questionnaire were also members of the boards of management of their CISs but their key role was information provider in the service.

**Table 3.1 Key roles of CIS volunteers**

Role	N	%
Information Provider	386	88.3
Reception, Administration	46	10.5
Board Membership	5	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>100</b>

### 3.2 Background of the volunteers

#### 3.2.1 Profile of CIS volunteers

As part of the survey volunteers were asked to provide some demographic information and the majority of respondents gave this information. Only 12 people did not complete this part of the survey. From the information given we are able to provide a profile of those volunteers who took part in the study. As can be seen from Table 3.2 over three-quarters (78.4%) of volunteers in the CIS were female while just over one fifth (21.6%) were male. Looking at the age of the volunteers we see that over half (56%) were aged between 45 and 65 years. A further one third (32.5%) were over 66 years of age and a smaller percentage of volunteers (11.5%) were aged 44 years or younger (See Table 3.3).

**Table 3.2 Gender of volunteers**

	N	%
Female	333	78.4
Male	92	21.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 3.3 Age of volunteers**

Age Range	N	%
Under 25 years	4	0.9
25 - 44 years	45	10.6
45 - 65 years	238	56.0
66+ years	138	32.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>100</b>

Most of the volunteers (78.4%) did not have any dependent children. Of those who indicated the number of dependent children they had (N=88) over half (56.8%) had only one dependent child (See Table 3.4).

**Table 3.4 Number of dependent children**

No. of dependents	N	%
One	50	56.8
Two	18	20.5
Three	15	17.0
Five	1	1.2
Four	4	4.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>100</b>

Over two-thirds of volunteers (68.8%) were married. Smaller percentages indicated that they were single (12.4%), widowed (11.2%), separated/divorced (5.7%) or living with a partner (1.9%) (See Table 3.5).

**Table 3.5 Marital status of volunteers**

Marital status	N	%
Married	289	68.8
Single	52	12.4
Widowed	47	11.2
Separated/ Divorced	24	5.7
Living with partner	8	1.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>100</b>

The majority of volunteers (90.9%) were of Irish nationality, very few (N=38) were non-Irish nationals (See Table 3.6 below). This breakdown reflects the population as a whole based on the most recent data available from the Central Statistics Office. Census (2006) indicates that 89.9 per cent of the population are Irish nationals, a further 6.7 per cent are EU nationals and small percentages (3.5%) are non-EU nationals<sup>25</sup>.

**Table 3.6 Nationality of volunteers**

Nationality	N	%
Irish National	378	90.9
EU National	29	7.0
Non-EU National	9	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>100</b>

Almost three-quarters (77.3%) of volunteers had been living in their locality for over 11 years at the time of the survey. A smaller percentage of volunteers (15.6%) were living in their locality for between four and ten years. Very few (7.1%) had been living in their locality for less than four years (See Table 3.7).

**Table 3.7 Length of time volunteers were living in locality**

Length of time in locality	N	%
Less than one year	7	1.6
1 - 3 years	23	5.5
4-10 years	66	15.6
11 plus years	326	77.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3.8 shows that almost half of volunteers who took part in the survey were retired (48.1%) and a further one-fifth (20.6%) were working full-time in the home. Another one fifth (20.8%) were employed in some capacity, full-time (4.7%), part-time (14%) or self-employed (2.1%). A smaller percentage of volunteers (9.2%) were unemployed at the time the data was gathered.

25 CSO (2007), Census 2006 – Volume 5 – Ethnic or Cultural Background

**Table 3.8 Current employment status of volunteers**

Employment status	N	%
Retired	203	48.1
Work at home full-time	87	20.6
Part-time employed	59	14.0
Unemployed	39	9.2
Full-time employed	20	4.7
Self-employed	9	2.1
Student	5	1.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>100</b>

Volunteers were asked to indicate the highest level of qualification that they had attained and as can be seen in Table 3.9 just over one quarter of volunteers (26.6%) were educated to leaving certificate level. A further 24.2 per cent had achieved third level qualifications to diploma or certificate level. Just over one in ten (11.9%) volunteers had achieved a primary third level degree while 6.2 per cent indicated that they held a postgraduate qualification. Other volunteers (15.2%) indicated that they held a professional qualification. Looking at this table we can see that over half of the respondents (57.5%) had achieved a professional or third level education. This is very different from the national profile. Data from the most recent Census (2006) indicates that 29.1 per cent of the population (whose full-time education had ceased) had achieved a non-degree or degree third-level qualification<sup>26</sup>.

A smaller percentage were educated to group or junior certificate level (7.8%) and very few (N=7) indicated that they held a primary education only. Again these figures are very different from general population data collected in Census 2006 (18.1% with primary education only and 20.1 per cent with junior/group certificate). It seems that the volunteer corps in the CIS is made up of a highly educated group of individuals.

26 Sourced from Central Statistics Office website: <http://www.cso.ie/statistics/pmfageover15edcompleted.htm>  
<http://www.cso.ie/statistics/pmfageover15edcompleted.htm>

**Table 3.9 Highest educational qualification**

Highest educational qualification	N	%
Leaving Certificate	112	26.6
Third level (Diploma/Certificate)	102	24.2
Professional Qualification	64	15.2
Third level (Primary Degree)	50	11.9
Third level (Post graduate Degree)	26	6.2
Junior/Intermediate Certificate	22	5.2
Group Certificate	11	2.6
Primary Education	7	1.7
Other, please specify	27	6.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>100</b>

Findings from the survey indicate that the majority of volunteers (95.4%) in the CIS did not have any special needs requirements. According to the volunteers, the CIS were able to meet the requirements, such as, wheelchair accessibility and support for back injuries, of the small percentage (4.6%; N=21) of those volunteers who indicated that they had special requirements.

Volunteers who are information providers need to be able to use a computer and the internet in order to carry out their day-to-day role. Almost three-quarters of the volunteers (72.7%) who completed the online questionnaire indicated that they had access to a computer at home and frequently used it to send emails, book tickets or get information over the internet.

**Table 3.10 Computer and internet usage**

Computer and internet usage	N	%
I do not have access to a computer or internet in my home.	39	9.3
I have access to a computer at home AND frequently use it to send emails, book tickets, get information or purchase items over the internet.	306	72.7
I have access to a computer at home BUT seldom use it to send emails, book tickets, get information or purchase items over the internet.	76	18.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>100</b>

To summarise, at the moment volunteers in the CIS are more likely to be Irish women who are married, are aged 45 years or older and have achieved a high level of education. They have been living in their locality for more than 11 years, are either retired or working full-time in the home and are educated to leaving certificate or diploma/certificate level. Looking at the profile of the volunteers by regional breakdown showed that there were small regional differences, for example, Region 4 had a higher percentage of females than the full volunteer sample and Region 3 volunteers were more likely to be living in their locality for 11 plus years. Overall, however, the profile presented is similar across all regions. As mentioned earlier, volunteers are nationally under-represented in younger age cohorts and this is reflected in the age profile of CIS volunteers. The gender profile of the CIS volunteer has not changed significantly since the late 1990s when approximately three-quarters of CIC volunteers were women (Nexus Research Co-operative 1998) and does not correspond with the national profile of volunteers in Ireland based on the most recent data available which show that just over half (50.3%) of volunteers were of women (CSO 2006).

### 3.2.2 Volunteering history of volunteers

Respondents were asked to indicate the number of years they had been volunteering with the CIS and Table 3.11 below indicates that over half (52.9%) have been with the CIS for up to five years. Over one-quarter (28.1%) have been volunteering with the CIS for six to 14 years and almost one-fifth (19.0%) have volunteered with the CIS for 15 or more years.

**Table 3.11 Length of time volunteering**

Number of years	N	%
Less than one year	55	12.6
1-2 years	82	18.9
3-5 years	93	21.4
6-9 years	69	15.9
10-14 years	53	12.2
15-19 years	46	10.6
20 plus years	37	8.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>100</b>

The majority (90.3%) of volunteers were volunteering on a weekly basis with smaller numbers doing so on a fortnightly or other basis (See Table 3.12). Looking at those volunteers who volunteer on a weekly basis and who indicated the number of hours they work (N=380) we see that two-thirds (66.3%) give between three and five hours per week to the CIS (see Table 3.13).

**Table 3.12 Basis of volunteering**

Basis of volunteering	N	%
Weekly	391	90.3
Fortnightly	31	7.2
Other	11	2.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>433</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 3.13 Volunteering hours per week**

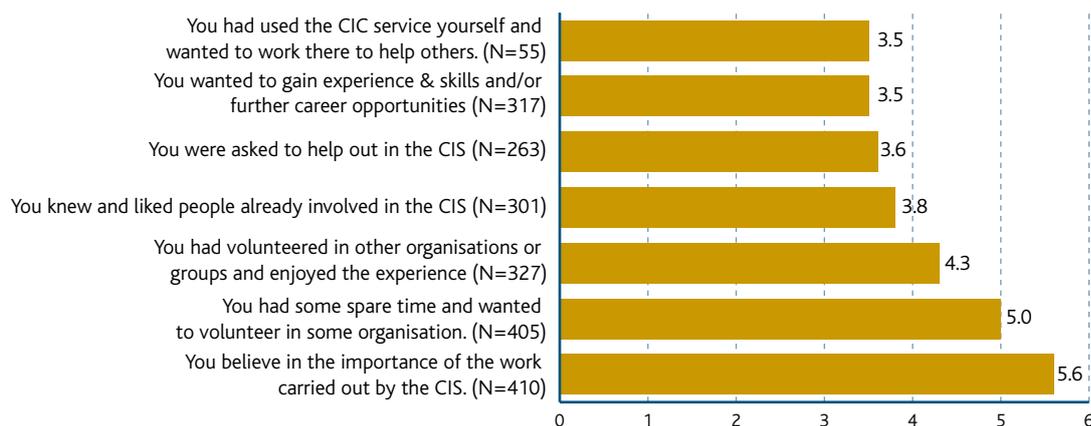
Hours per week	N	%
1-2 hours	55	16.9
3-5 hours	252	66.4
6-9 hours	57	12.9
10 plus hours	16	3.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>372<sup>21</sup></b>	<b>100</b>

As we saw in Table 3.1 the majority of volunteers who completed the study were information providers with the CIS and examination of the number of hours volunteered on a weekly basis by information providers (N=372) shows that two-thirds of volunteer information providers give between three to five hours per week to the service. All respondents were asked if they thought that volunteers should be asked to commit to a minimum number of hours per week and over two-thirds (66.4%) agreed that this should be the case. When asked if they would like to increase the number of hours that they currently worked in the CIS over three-quarters (77.8%) indicated that they would not. It seems, therefore, that CIS volunteers feel that all volunteers in the service should be asked to commit to a minimum of three to five hours per week.

27 This refers to all those volunteers who were information providers and who volunteered on a weekly basis (N=372).

**Table 3.14 Minimum number of hours and increase current hours**

Minimum number of hours per week	N	%	Increase current hours	N	%
No	146	33.6	No	332	77.8
Yes	288	66.4	Yes	95	22.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>100</b>

**Figure 3.1 Important factors in the decision to become a volunteer in the CIS**

In summary, more than half the volunteers in the CIS have been volunteering on a weekly basis for up to five years giving between three and five hours per week. Twenty-eight percent have volunteered for 6-14 years and almost 20% have volunteered for 15 years or more. They felt that volunteers should be asked to volunteer for a minimum number of hours but they did not want to increase the hours that they currently gave to the CIS.

### 3.3 Perception of roles and experiences in the CIS

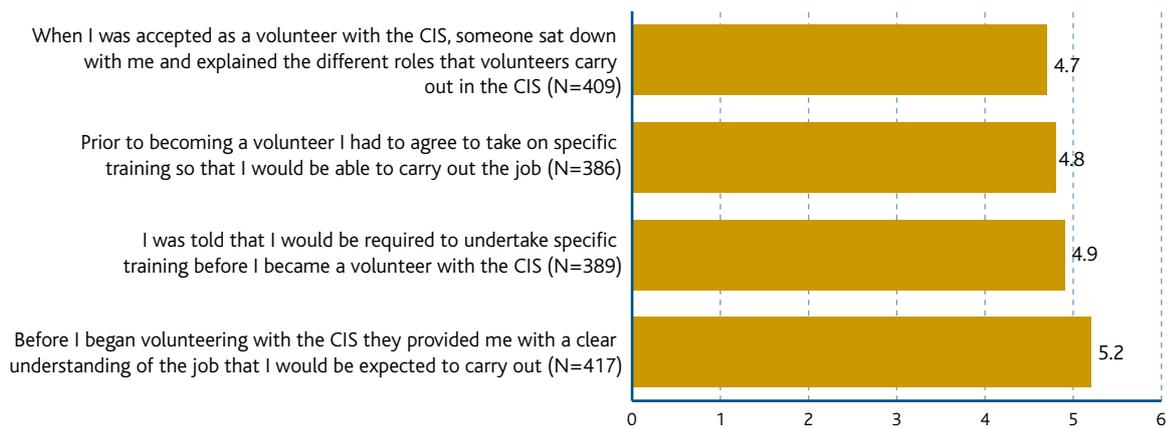
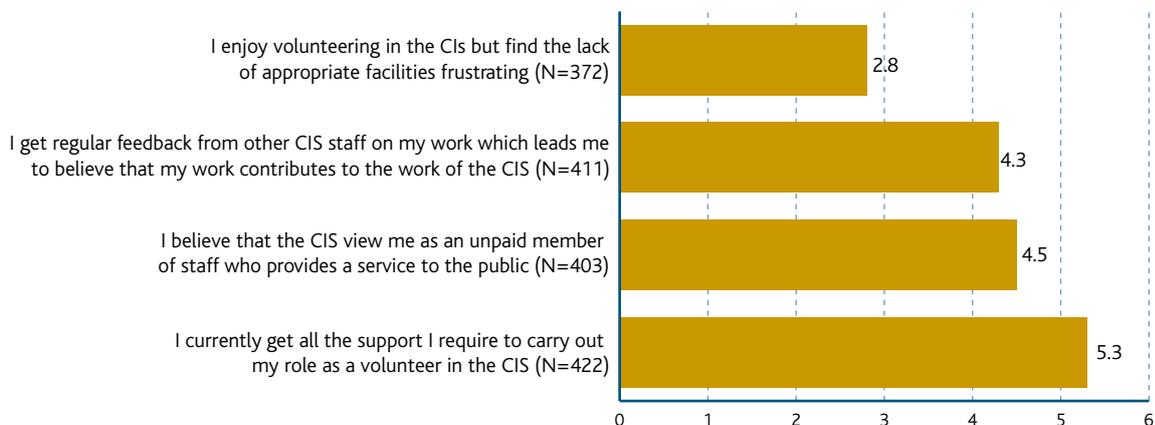
#### 3.3.1 Perceptions about the volunteering role

The questionnaire asked volunteers to complete a number of attitudinal questions that were related to their views about their role and experience as a volunteer in the CIS. Respondents were asked to rank the importance (from 1 to 6 where six was most important) of particular reasons in their decision to become a volunteer in the CIS. As can be seen from Figure 3.1 the belief in the importance of the work carried out by the CIS was the most important reason, getting a score of 5.6 out of 6. This was followed by the respondents having some spare time (mean score of 5.0) and/or having had precious volunteering experience

(mean score of 4.3). Other factors such as knowing other people in the CIS, being asked to help in the CIS or wanting to gain work experience were of less significance.

We also explored the volunteers' understanding of the role of a volunteer in the CIS prior to becoming a volunteer. Volunteers were asked to indicate their level of agreement (from 1 to 6 where 6 was agree strongly) with four statements. As can be seen in Figure 3.2 below prior to becoming a volunteer in the service participants believed that they were provided with a clear understanding of the job that they would be expected to carry out (mean score of 5.6 out of 6). The other statements received mean scores ranging from 4.7 to 4.9 suggesting that volunteers in the service had an understanding of the role and expectations prior to becoming volunteers.

Looking at the support that respondents felt they received once they became volunteers in the service we see that they generally felt they got 'all the support' that they required in order to carry out their role in the CIS (mean score of 5.3 out of 6). Figure 3.3 also indicates that most volunteers believed that they were viewed as unpaid CIS staff providing a public service (mean

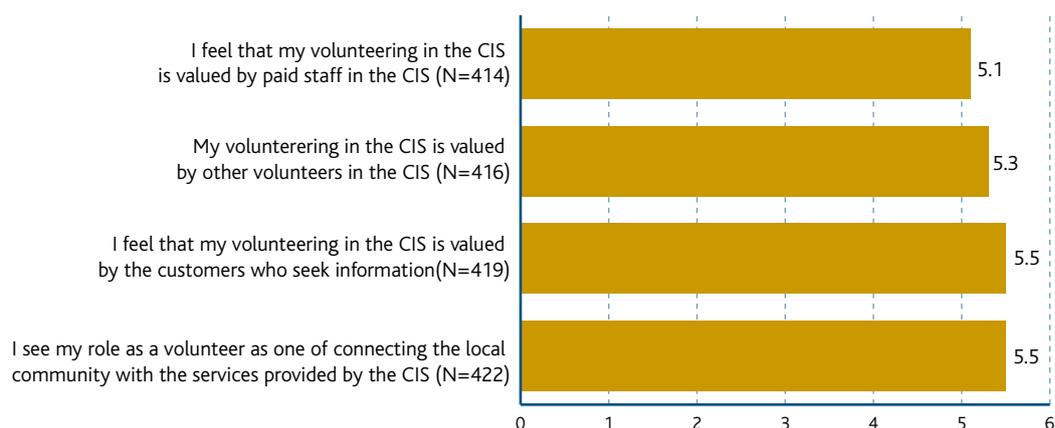
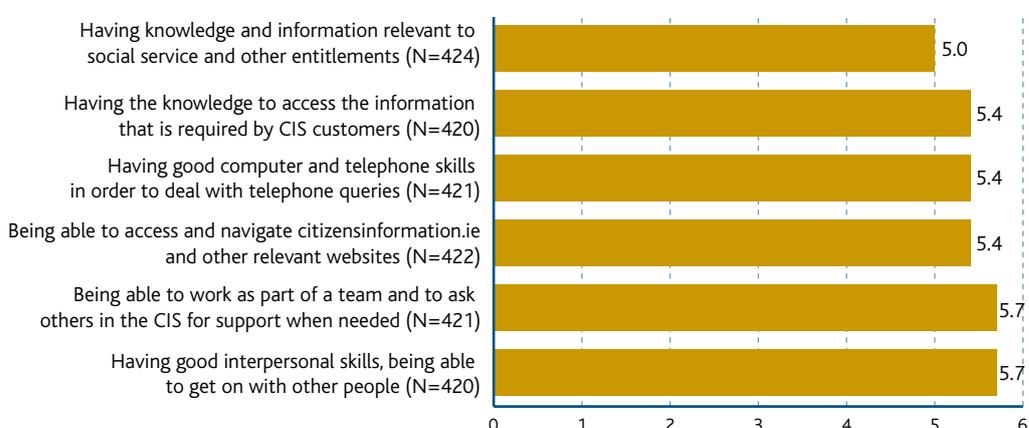
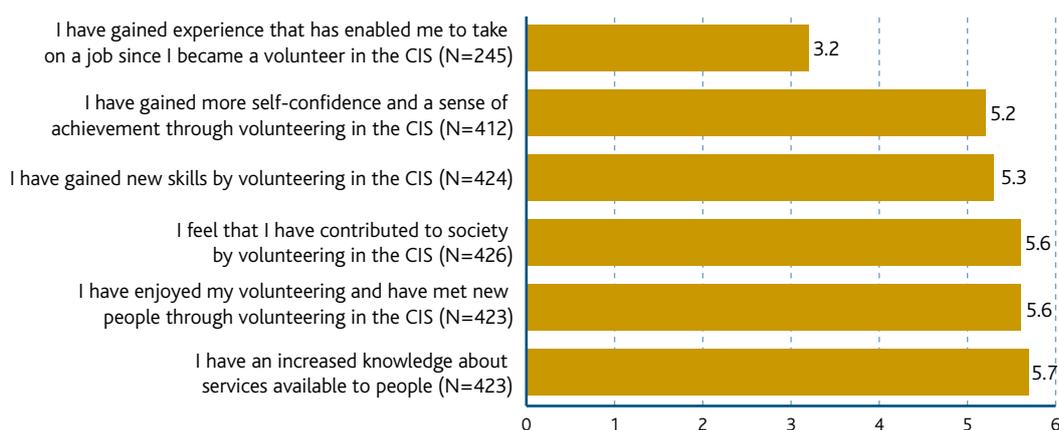
**Figure 3.2 Understanding of the role of volunteer prior to becoming a volunteer in the CIS****Figure 3.3 Support received once a volunteer in the CIS**

score 4.5). They also felt that they contributed to the work of the CIS (mean score 4.3). While some centres have difficulty providing facilities for their volunteers respondents in this survey did not suggest that this was a major problem for them (mean score of 2.8 out of 6).

Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a number of statements about their perception of their current role as a volunteer. Figure 3.4 outlines the mean scores that each statement received. As can be seen, volunteers felt that their volunteering in the CIS was valued by customers seeking information and they also saw their role as one of connecting the local community with the CIS (both achieving mean scores of 5.5 out of 6). The CIS was built on a recognised need in the local community so it seems that the strong community ethos is reflected in the views of the volunteers. It seems that volunteers perceived their work to be valued both by other volunteers and paid staff in the service.

### 3.3.2 Perception about gains to the volunteer and the CIS

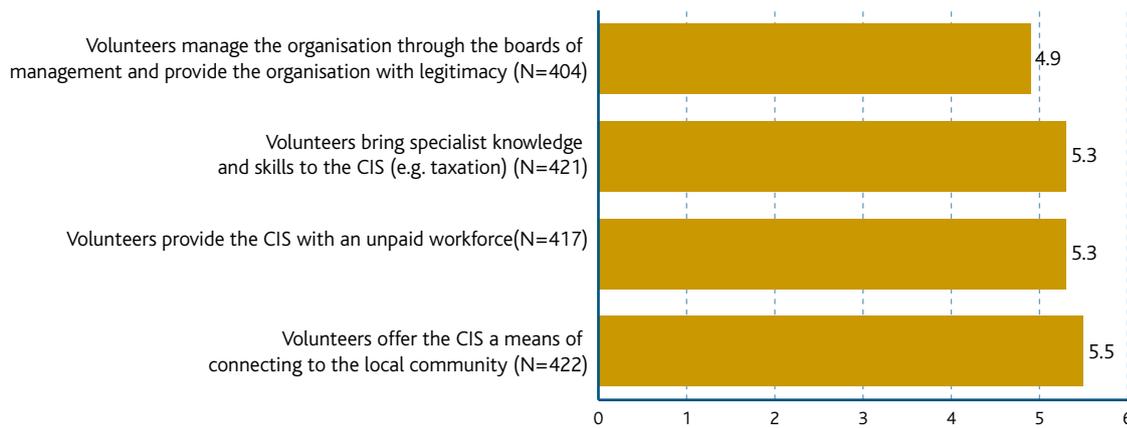
Respondents were asked about the skills that they felt they have brought to the CIS. They were presented with a number of statements and asked to agree or disagree (where 1= disagree strongly and 6= agree strongly). Figure 3.5 shows that overall volunteers were confident that they had brought a number of skills to the service. The two most important skills were seen as being 'able to work as part of a team' and 'having good interpersonal skills, being able to get on with other people' (both scoring 5.7 out of 6). Skills receiving slightly lower scores include having the knowledge to access the information required by customers, being able to navigate relevant websites and having good computer skills (all scoring 5.4 out of 6). Respondents gave the lowest score to 'having knowledge and information relevant to social service and other entitlements' but this could be expected as the knowledge and skill is acquired through training gained in the CIS and is not initially brought to the CIS.

**Figure 3.4 Perception of current role as a volunteer in the CIS****Figure 3.5 Level of skill that volunteers bring to the CIS****Figure 3.6 Benefits that volunteers gain from volunteering in the CIS**

Looking at the possible benefits that volunteers think they have gained from volunteering in the CIS (Figure 3.6) we see that three benefits achieve high scores of 5.6 and 5.7 out of 6. Participants believed that they had gained an increased knowledge about the services available to people. They also felt that they had contributed to society by volunteering in the CIS and had met new people through this activity. Two benefits

that achieved lower scores were gaining new skills (scoring 5.3 out of 6) and gaining more self-confidence through volunteering in the CIS. Volunteering in the CIS was not considered by the volunteers to be an avenue to gaining a job (scoring 3.2 out of 6). Given the profile of the volunteer as outlined earlier, it could be said that many of them were not seeking employment but solely wanted the experience of volunteering.

**Figure 3.7 Benefits that CISs gain from having volunteers**



**Table 3.15 Induction prior to volunteering and satisfaction with induction**

Period of induction	N	%	Satisfaction with induction	N	%
No	128	29.3	Not at all satisfied	1	0.3
Yes	300	68.6	Somewhat satisfied	57	19.0
No Reply	9	2.1	Very satisfied	242	80.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>437</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

Turning to the perceived benefits that volunteers believed the CIS gained from having volunteers in the service, we see that 'providing a link to the local community' was seen as the most important benefit (scoring 5.5 out of 6). Earlier we saw that volunteers saw their role in the CIS as one of connecting to their local community. Volunteers also believed that they provide the CIS with an 'unpaid workforce' and bring 'specialist knowledge and skills' to the service (both scoring 5.3 out of 6). The benefit that received the lowest mean score (4.9 out of 6) and was seen as least important was the belief that volunteers provide legitimacy for the CIS through their voluntary management of the organisation.

### 3.4 Training of volunteers in the CIS

#### 3.4.1 Induction and training

Respondents were asked a number of questions related to induction, training, support and recruitment of volunteers in the CIS. Looking firstly at induction we see that over two-thirds of volunteers (68.6%) stated that they had undergone a period of induction before volunteering in the CIS. The majority of those who underwent an induction period were

'very satisfied' with their induction (see Table 3.15). The regional breakdown shows that volunteers in Region 1 were less likely to have undergone a period of induction before they began volunteering in the CIS. Just under half (45.8%) of volunteers in this region indicated that this was the case. Those in Region 2 (82.9%) and Region 4 (82.3%) were more likely to have undergone a period of induction. There were no regional differences in satisfaction with the induction received (See Table 1 in Appendix G).

Several induction methods are offered in the CIS and some volunteers had undergone a number of induction processes, for example, 'general induction' and a 'trial period'. As can be seen from Table 3.16 below the most popular method of induction was 'working with an experienced information provider' with six in ten volunteers stating that they had undergone this form of induction. Over half of volunteers (57.7%) had undergone a general induction process in the CIS while over one-third (38.7%) had undergone a 'trial period'. One-third (36.2%) of the volunteers who took part in this study indicated that they had worked with a supervisor while volunteering in the CIS.

**Table 3.16 Methods of induction received by volunteers**

Method of induction	N	%
Working with an experienced information provider	267	61.1
General induction	252	57.7
Trial period	169	38.7
Working under a supervisor	158	36.2

Looking at Table 3.17 we see that only 12.7 per cent of volunteers had undergone only one method of induction which was more likely to be in-house training on general topics. Half (50%) of volunteers had undergone either two or three induction methods, one of which included general induction. Finally, over one-third of volunteers (37.3%) had undergone all four methods of induction outlined in the study.

**Table 3.17 Number of methods of induction received by volunteers**

Number of induction methods undertaken	N	%
One Method Only	37	12.7
2 Methods	70	24.0
3 Methods	76	26.0
All 4 Methods	109	37.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3.18 below indicates the kinds of training that volunteers had undergone. The most common form of training for CIS volunteers was in-house training on general subjects with 87.6 per cent of volunteers indicating that they had undertaken this form of training. Other forms were less common with only one-fifth of volunteers (19.7%) indicating that they had undergone 'recognition of prior learning'.

Comparing the percentages in the regional breakdown with the full sample of respondents, we see that volunteers in Region 5 were more likely to have attended in-house training (92.1% versus 87.6%) and were more likely to have undergone recognition of prior learning (34.2% versus 19.7%). Volunteers in Region 2 were more likely to have undergone IPP FETAC accredited training (19.4% versus 13.7%) and FETAC

distance learning training programmes (15.3% versus 10.1%) (See Table 2 in Appendix G).

**Table 3.18 Kinds of training undertaken by volunteers**

Kinds of training	N	%
In-house training on general topics	383	87.6
Recognition of prior learning (FETAC accredited)	86	19.7
IPP FETAC taught accredited training	60	13.7
FETAC distance learning programme	44	10.1

### 3.4.2 Information Providers Programme (IPP) FETAC training

In recent years the CIS introduced the Information Providers Programme (IPP) FETAC taught accredited training and FETAC distance learning programmes which are validated by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) and are designated at level six on the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland Framework (Citizens Information Board 2009)<sup>28</sup>. As seen in Chapter One an IPP Audit carried out in September 2008 indicated that 177 volunteers had completed IPP training which equated to 16.3 per cent of volunteers (Citizens Information Board 2008c). As indicated in Table 3.18 almost one-third (30%) of volunteers had undergone some form of FETAC accredited training. This indicates that two-thirds of volunteers in the CISs still need to be trained to FETAC standard. The report highlighted the lack of interest on the part of older volunteers and those who already offer certain expertise, for example tax or employment law, as one of the key reasons for the lack of uptake of the IPP training. In Chapter Four the issue of barriers to IPP training will be addressed further when the findings from the focus group discussions are presented. See also Appendices B and D.

28 As indicated in Chapter One, the programme comprises two locally devised modules and is delivered in three formats, taught (classroom), Distance Learning (using a CD-ROM) and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

**Table 3.19 How and when IPP FETAC training was undertaken**

How training undertaken	N	%	When training took place	N	%
Opted for IPP training	45	75.0	More than one year ago	33	55.0
Told IPP training was compulsory	10	16.7	Within the last year	7	11.7
Other	2	3.3	Within the last eight months	16	26.7
No reply	3	5.0	Don't remember	4	6.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 3.20 Level of satisfaction with IPP FETAC training and perception about level of work required**

Level of satisfaction	N	%	Level of work required	N	%
Not at all satisfied	0	0.0	Too little	2	3.3
Somewhat satisfied	12	20.0	Just about right	50	83.3
Very satisfied	45	75.0	Too much	4	6.7
No reply	3	5.0	No reply	4	6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

Looking at those volunteers who have undertaken the IPP FETAC training (N=60), we see that three-quarters (75%) opted for this training while 16.7 per cent indicated that this training was undertaken because they were told it was compulsory for volunteers in the CIS to do so. For more than half (55%) of volunteers their training took place more than one year ago while over one quarter (26.7%) underwent the training within the last eight months.

Volunteers were asked about their level of satisfaction with the IPP FETAC training they had received and three-quarters (75%) were 'very satisfied' with the training. A further one-fifth of volunteers (20%) were 'somewhat satisfied' with the IPP training received. The majority of volunteers who had taken part in the IPP FETAC training believed that the amount of work required to complete the training was 'just about right' (See Table 3.20). During the focus group discussion, volunteers and Development Managers noted that there were not enough places on IPP FETAC training programme for the number of volunteers who were looking to take up the training. There was also some discussion about the timing of the training not always being suitable. While there are some issues around the delivery of the programme, volunteers who took part in the training were very satisfied with it overall.

### 3.4.3 Other training in the CIS<sup>29</sup>

The Citizens Information Board delivers other forms of training services to volunteers in the CIS. Training programmes are delivered at regional level throughout the country (Citizens Information Board 2009). There is a Regional Training Executive based in each of the five regional service teams and each Regional Training Executive identifies training needs in consultation with the Citizens Information Centres. As mentioned in Chapter One, CIB delivers two training programmes annually, one from March to June and another from September to December.

In the survey the majority of volunteers indicated that they had undertaken the in-house training provided by CIB. As indicated in Table 3.21 below, over four in ten (45.6%) of the volunteers who underwent CIB training (N=399) did so within the last year. A further three in ten (30.6%) underwent the training within the month prior to completing the survey.

<sup>29</sup> Some of the 60 volunteers who completed the IPP FETAC training would also have taken part in additional training while volunteering with the CIS. Therefore their responses are also included in this section.

**Table 3.21 When training took place**

	N	%
Number of years ago	46	11.5
Within the last year	182	45.6
Within the last month	122	30.6
Within the last week	49	12.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>100</b>

The majority of the training took place at the local CIS (43.1%) or through the Citizens Information Board training calendar (44.1%) (See Table 3.22). The majority of volunteers (73.9%) were 'very satisfied' with the training received (see Table 3.23). However, over one quarter of volunteers were only 'somewhat' (24.4%) or 'not at all' (1.7%) satisfied with the training they received. Volunteers in Region 5 were more likely than other volunteers to avail of training through the Citizens Information Board training calendar (65.7% versus 44.1%).

**Table 3.22 Location of most recent training**

Location	N	%
At my local CIS	175	43.1
Through the CIB calendar	179	44.1
Other	52	12.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>406</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 3.23 Level of satisfaction with training received**

Level of satisfaction	N	%
Not at all satisfied	7	1.7
Somewhat satisfied	98	24.4
Very satisfied	298	73.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>100</b>

All volunteers were asked whether or not they received training on an ongoing basis and if they felt that there were areas in which they needed further training. Table 3.24 shows that over three-quarters (78.3%) of volunteers stated that they received ongoing training and over six in ten (62.9%) believed that they required further training in specific areas. The regional breakdown shows that volunteers in Region 5 were more likely than other volunteers

to receive ongoing training (91.9% versus 78.3%) while a higher percentage of volunteers in Region 2 indicated that they required further training (72.9% versus 62.9%).

Volunteers were asked to indicate the areas where they felt they required further training and a total of 260 volunteers identified a number of specific areas. The most commonly mentioned areas of training included the following:

- » Social welfare (No. of mentions =66);
- » Taxation (No. of mentions =21);
- » Employment rights (No. of mentions =17);
- » Computer training (No. of mentions =15);
- » Redundancy (No. of mentions =9);
- » Advocacy (No. of mentions =6); and
- » Immigration (No. of mentions =5).

These are the areas that were specifically mentioned by volunteers. Many other volunteers stated that they believed all volunteers should receive updated information and training on an ongoing basis in order to allow them to deal with the customer queries on a daily basis. The survey was completed during a period when unemployment rates were rising and many changes had been made in social welfare entitlements due to the 'mini' budget which had been implemented in April 2009 so the areas highlighted appear to reflect the climate that the volunteers found themselves working in.

**Table 3.24 Ongoing training and need for further training**

Receive ongoing training	N	%	Require further training	N	%
No	90	21.7	No	154	37.1
Yes	325	78.3	Yes	261	62.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 3.25 Types of supports that volunteers have received in CIS**

Types of support	Never %	Occasionally %	Regularly %
Working as a pair with a more experienced person (N=392)	8.9	22.2	68.9
Newsletters and other communication methods (N=407)	6.9	27.3	65.8
Mentoring from people with experience (N=393)	10.9	37.4	51.7
Regular staff meetings (N=374)	16.3	35.6	48.1
Meetings with Development Managers (N=379)	19.3	45.9	34.8
Part of a sub-group to deal with volunteer issues (N=334)	49.7	26.6	23.7

### 3.5 Supporting, recruiting and retaining volunteers in the CIS

#### 3.5.1 Types of supports received in the CIS

Volunteers were asked a number of questions about the possible supports that they could expect to receive in the CIS. They were presented with six possible types of support and asked if they had 'never', 'occasionally' or 'regularly' received this kind of support while volunteering with the CIS. Table 3.25 provides a summary of their responses. As can be seen over two thirds (68.9%) of volunteers had regularly worked as a pair with a more experienced person while over half (51.7%) had regularly received mentoring from other more experienced people. Less than half of the volunteers (48.1%) had regularly attended staff meetings while almost one quarter (23.7%) had regularly worked as part of a sub-group dealing with volunteer issues. Newsletters and other communication methods were received regularly by almost two-thirds (65.8%) of volunteers while just over one-third (34.8%) of volunteers stated that they regularly had meetings with their Development Manager.

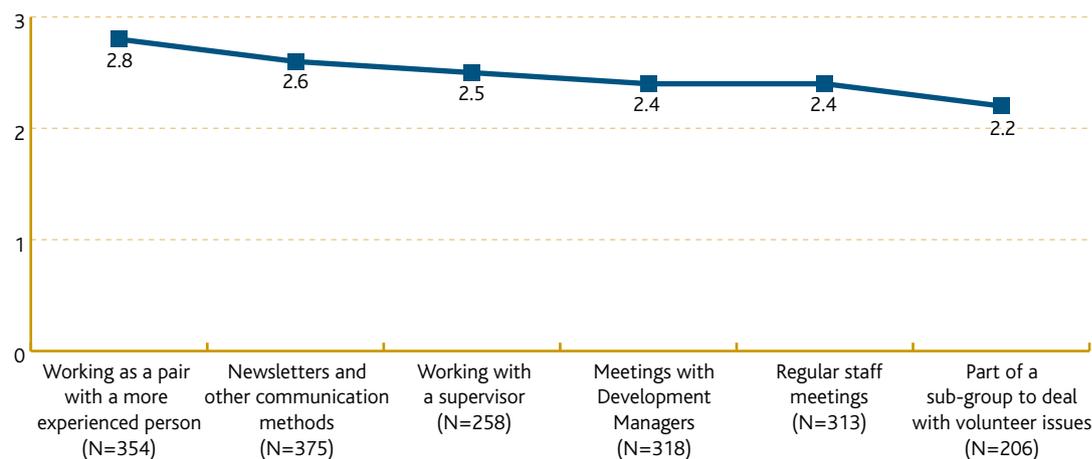
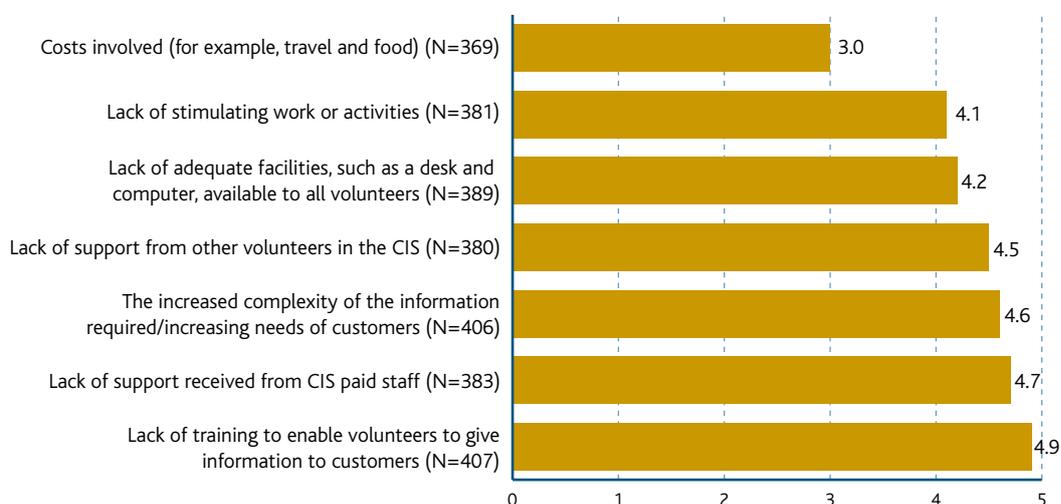
Table 3.25 highlights some interesting findings. For example, almost half (49.7%) of the volunteers in this study had never worked as

part of a sub-group dealing with volunteer issues while almost one-fifth (19.3%) had never had a meeting with their Development Manager. Smaller percentages had never worked as a pair (8.9%), received mentoring from experienced people (10.9%) or attended regular staff meetings (16.3%).

Volunteers were asked to rate their satisfaction with the kinds of support they had received (where 1=not satisfied and 3=very satisfied). Figure 3.8 shows that overall volunteers were generally very satisfied with the support they had received. Those who had worked as a pair seemed to be most satisfied, giving a score of 2.8 out of 3 while those who worked as part of a sub-group were least satisfied (score of 2.2 out of 3).

#### 3.5.2 Barriers to volunteering in the CIS

Volunteers were asked to rank the importance (from 1 to 6 where six was most important) of particular issues that could be considered barriers to an individual becoming or remaining a volunteer in the CIS. Figure 3.9 indicates that lack of appropriate training was considered by volunteers to be the most important barrier (scoring 4.9 out of 6). This is not to say that they did not feel they were getting appropriate training, as we saw in a previous section. Overall volunteers were happy with the level of

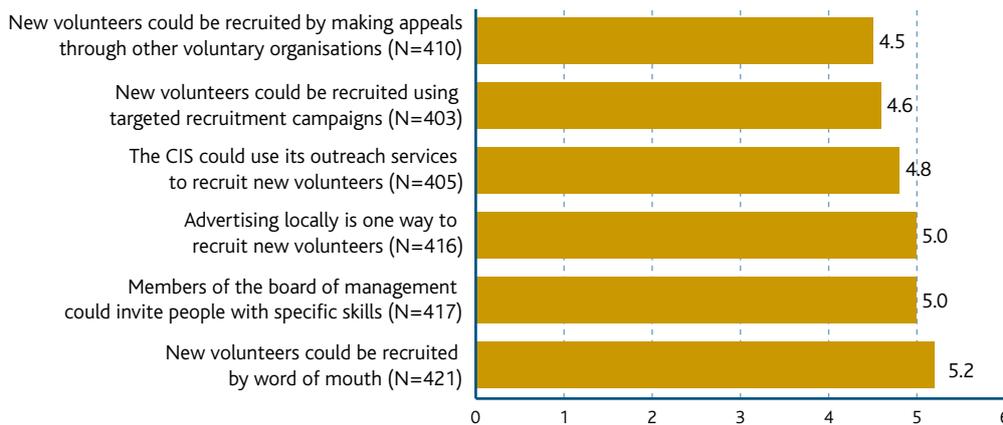
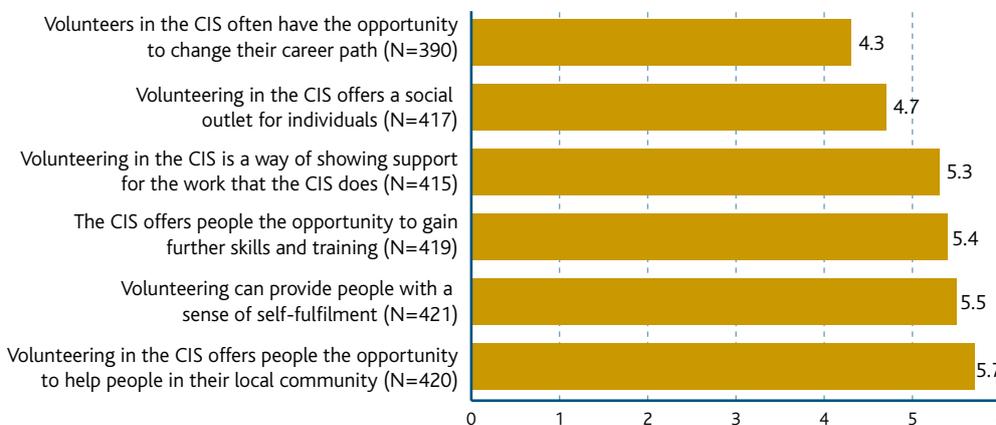
**Figure 3.8 Level of satisfaction with support received****Figure 3.9 Level of importance of possible barriers to volunteering in CISs**

training they had received. The volunteers here were highlighting the significance of appropriate training for individuals who wish to volunteer in the CIS. Other important factors include support from CIS paid staff (score 4.7), the increased complexity of customer queries (score 4.6) and lack of support from other volunteers (score 4.5). The reason that was seen by participants as the least important in recruiting and retaining volunteers was the costs involved in being a volunteer, achieving a scoring 3 out of 6. These findings suggest that if the CIS want to recruit new volunteers and/or maintain their existing volunteers they need to provide appropriate support and training in order to enable them to work in the Services and deal with customer queries.

### 3.5.3 Recruitment of volunteers

This section examines the possible ways in which volunteers could be recruited into the CIS as well as possible incentives that could be

offered to volunteers. Volunteers were asked to indicate their level of agreement (from 1 to 6 where six was agree strongly) on specific methods that could be used to recruit new volunteers. As can be seen from Figure 3.10, according to the volunteers, the most popular method of recruiting new volunteers is through word of mouth (scoring 5.2 out of 6). Other popular methods included advertising locally and through the boards of management (both scoring 5.0 out of 6). Other methods which were a little less popular were using the outreach services (score 4.8), using targeted recruitment campaigns (4.6) and using other voluntary organisations to recruit interested volunteers (4.5). As we saw in a previous section, volunteers stated that belief in the importance of the work of the CIS played an important part in their decision to become a volunteer so it might be natural for them to speak about this to others, possibly explaining why 'word of mouth' achieved the highest scores.

**Figure 3.10 Possible means of recruiting new volunteers****Figure 3.11 Possible incentives to encourage volunteers into the CIS**

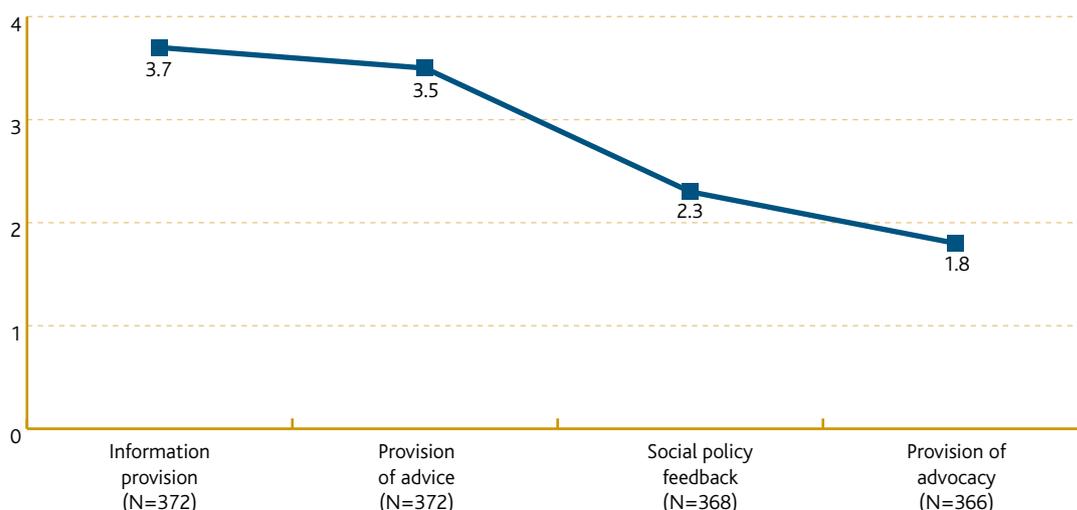
Looking at possible incentives that could be used to encourage people to volunteer with the CIS, we see that helping the local community is seen by volunteers as a key incentive scoring 5.7 out of 6. Other incentives achieving high scores included the sense of self-fulfilment that volunteers gain from volunteering with the CIS (scoring 5.5 out of 6), the skills and training that volunteers gain in the CIS (scoring 5.4) and volunteers supporting the local CIS (scoring 5.3). The belief that volunteering in the CIS provides a social outlet for individuals was not ranked as highly as the other incentives which is a little surprising considering that earlier findings showed that 'meeting new people' was ranked the second most important factor in some volunteers deciding to become volunteers. A change of career path was not considered to be as important an incentive as the others which mirrors earlier findings.

### 3.6 Level of knowledge among volunteer information providers in the CIS<sup>30</sup>

#### 3.6.1 Level of knowledge

As noted in a previous section, most of the volunteers who completed the questionnaire spent the majority of their volunteering time as information providers in the CIS. These volunteers were asked to indicate their level of knowledge (where 4 is most knowledgeable) of each of the four key aspects of the service, namely, information provision, provision of advice, provision of advocacy and social policy feedback. Figure 3.12 shows that volunteer information providers felt that they were most knowledgeable about information provision (score of 3.7 out of 4), which includes identifying problems and sourcing appropriate and accurate

<sup>30</sup> The following sections are based on the replies of those volunteers who spend the majority of their volunteer time as information providers in the CIS (N= 386).

**Figure 3.12 Information providers level of knowledge in each service area**

information. They also felt knowledgeable about the provision of advice (score 3.5 out of 4), which includes exploring options with customers and directing them to other sources of advice. The volunteers stated that they were less knowledgeable about the social policy aspect of the service (score 2.3) and the provision of advocacy, which includes covering different types of advocacy such as negotiation on behalf of a customer (score 1.8 out of 4). During the focus group discussions a number of issues were raised about the advocacy aspect of the CIS service. There was concern over the ability of volunteers to carry out the level of work that would be required with some complex advocacy cases considering the number of hours per week they volunteered at the CIC. They felt that there was a need to look at a more appropriate role for the volunteers to play with regard to the provision of the advocacy service. This issue will be raised again throughout the report.

### 3.6.2 Use and perception of information sources

Volunteer information providers need to use various sources in order to deal with customer queries. Volunteers were asked to indicate the frequency of use of each of these sources. Table 3.26 below shows that almost one third (32.5%) of volunteers accessed the Citizens Information website on a daily basis while over half (56.6%) did so on a weekly basis. As stated earlier, the majority of respondents volunteered on a weekly basis so in this case the 'daily' referred to here could be understood as referring to the day that they volunteer.

Given that this is the case we could say that the majority (89.1%) of volunteers access the Citizens Information website during the course of each of their volunteering sessions making it the most common source used by volunteers. This mirrors the findings of other research on the sources of information used by information providers in the CIS (Solution Enable 2008a).

Citizens Information Board publications were used on a weekly basis by over half (54.4%) of the volunteers while almost one-fifth (17.7%) did so on a daily basis. The Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) was not regularly accessed by volunteers with almost two-thirds (61.2%) of them stating that they used this service 'less often'. It appears that the expert query service that the Citizens Information Board offers is not regularly used by volunteers with over two-thirds (67.1%) indicating that this was the case. Some organisations (for example, FLAC, Treoir and the Immigrant Council) offer specialist support to the CIS and findings from this study suggest that over half of volunteers (53.6%) used this service on a monthly basis or less often. Government sources can also be used by volunteers and Table 3.26 indicates that over half of CIS volunteers (54.3%) used these sources on a weekly basis.

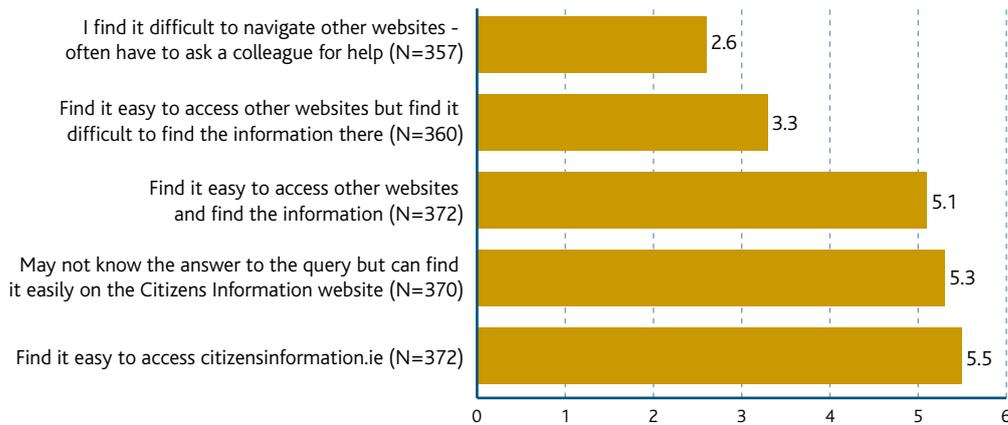
Having looked at how often volunteers access the various sources available to them, we explored their experiences in accessing information from the internet to answer customer queries. Volunteers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with specific statements (where 6 is agree strongly) and

**Table 3.26 Sources used by volunteer information providers**

Information source	Daily %	Weekly %	Monthly %	Less often %	Total %
Citizens Information Website (N=373)	32.5	56.6	1.3	9.6	100
Citizens Information Board Publications (N=373)	17.7	54.4	13.2	14.7	100
Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) (N=364)	10.0	20.2	8.6	61.2	100
Expert Query from the Citizens Information Board (N=364)	7.4	15.9	9.6	67.1	100
Specialist Support from Voluntary Agencies (N=371)	9.2	37.2	26.7	26.9	100
Department of Social and Family Affairs* (N=366)	21.1	54.1	10.2	14.6	100
Other Government Websites (N=352)	18.8	47.2	15.4	18.6	100
Government Publications (N=359)	23.1	54.3	10.9	11.7	100

\* Now Department of Social Protection

**Figure 3.13 Volunteers' perceptions about accessing information from the internet and citizensinformation.ie**



**Figure 3.14 Level of importance of various sources in answering queries**

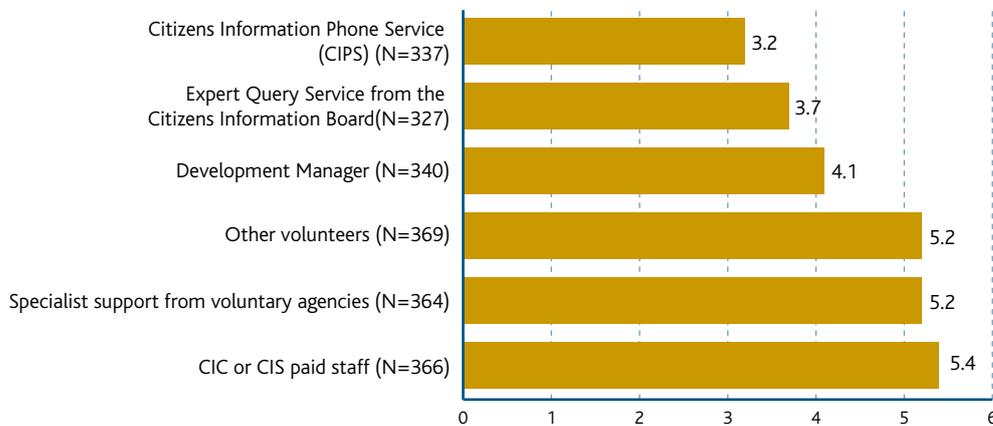


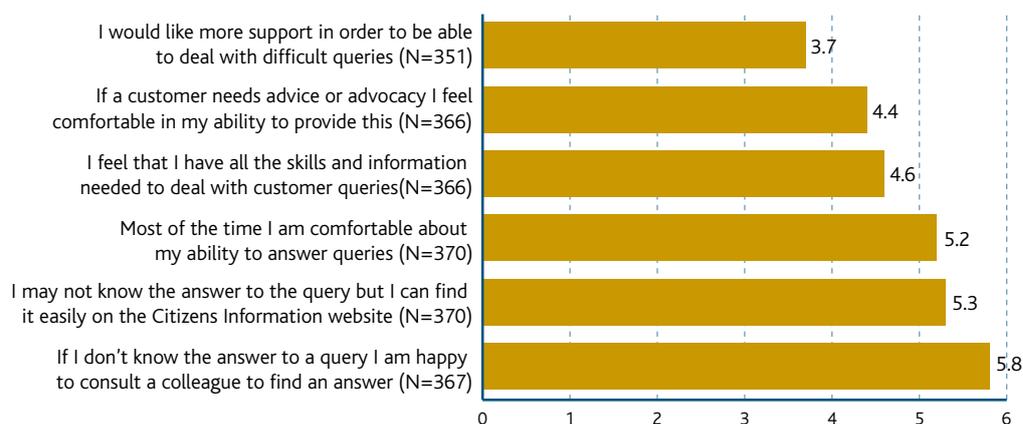
Figure 3.13 shows that volunteers were confident about accessing the Citizens Information website (score 5.5 out of 6) and other websites (score 5.1 out of 6). They also indicated that if they did not know the answer to a query, they could easily find the information they required on the website (score 5.3 out of 6). It seems that most CIS volunteer information providers do not have many difficulties accessing other websites and finding information there. In addition, most volunteers do not have to rely on colleagues for help. Both of these statements lower mean scores. These findings suggests that overall volunteer information providers are confident about accessing information for customers. However, some volunteers may need to rely on a colleague for support in sourcing information.

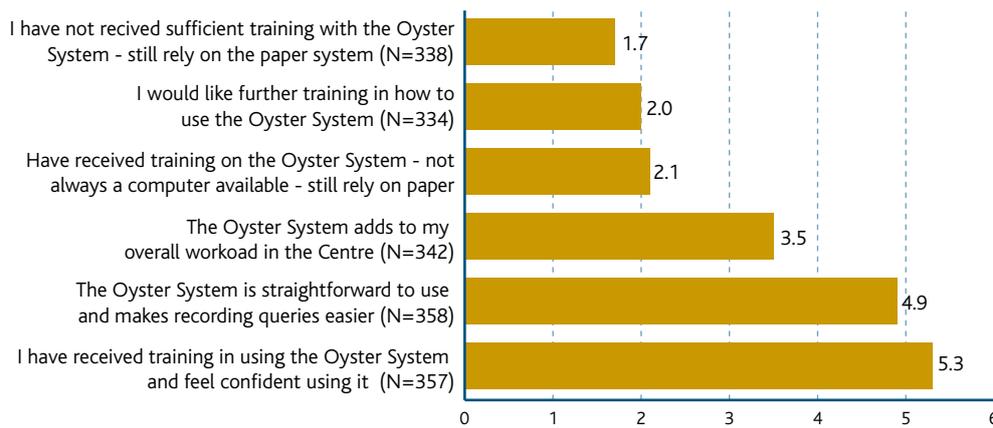
We further explored the volunteers' perceptions about the importance of particular sources in helping them to answer customer queries. Volunteers were asked to indicate the level of importance (where 6 is most important) of six different sources. We did not include the website in this question as this source forms part of the three-channel service delivery approach and is considered to be 'essential' to the service. As indicated earlier, most of the volunteers accessed the website during their volunteering shift in the CIC (see Table 3.26). Figure 3.14 highlights the three sources that were seen to be most important, namely CIC or CIS paid staff (scoring 5.4 out of 6), other volunteers and specialist support from voluntary agencies (both scoring 5.2). Other sources were seen to be less important as sources that are used by volunteers when answering customer queries. These included,

the Development Manager (score of 4.1), Expert Query Service (score of 3.7) and CIPS (score of 3.2).

Volunteers were asked to indicate their level of agreement (where 6 is agree strongly) with statements about their experiences in answering customer queries. Figure 3.15 shows that volunteer information providers in this study were happy to consult colleagues in order to find an answer for CIS customers (scoring 5.8 out of 6). Volunteers felt comfortable about their ability to answer customer queries (score of 5.2) and accessing the Citizens Information website in the case where they were unsure of the information required (score 5.3). While they were comfortable answering customer queries, they appeared to be a little less confident that they possessed all the skills and information required to answer queries (score of 4.6 out of 6). Earlier we saw that volunteers felt they were least knowledgeable about the provision of advocacy for customers. However, the replies to these statements suggest a contradictory position. Volunteers indicated here that they felt comfortable with their ability to provide 'advice or advocacy'. We would suggest that they are referring more to the advice and simple advocacy queries rather than the more complex aspect of the advocacy service. A recent survey of activity in the CIS (Solution Enable 2008a) showed that the most common form of advocacy provided in the CIS was 'assistance with forms/applications/ letter writing'. Finally, volunteers seem to have less confidence about their ability to deal with difficult queries; this statement achieved a score of 3.7 out of 6.

**Figure 3.15 Volunteers' experience in answering customer queries**



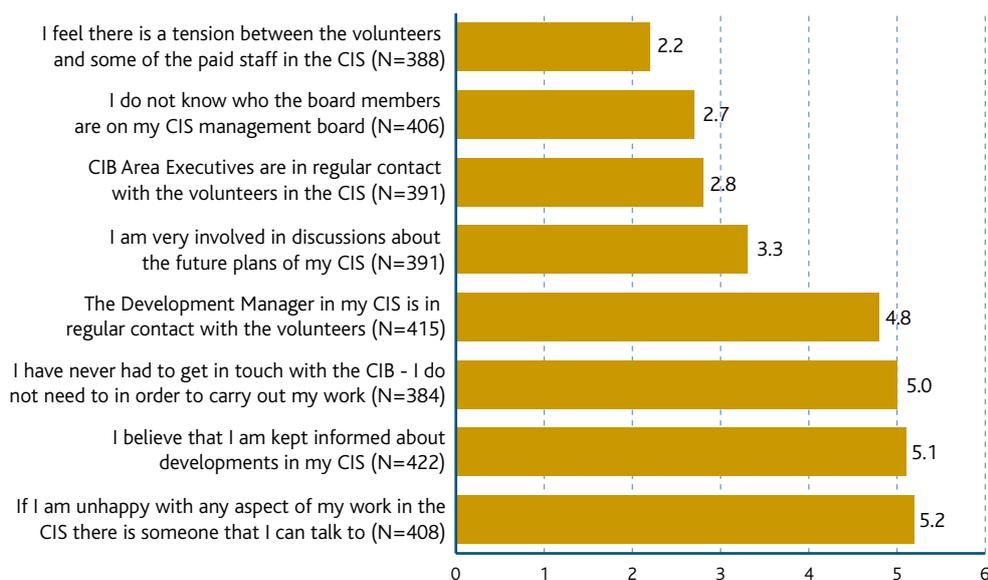
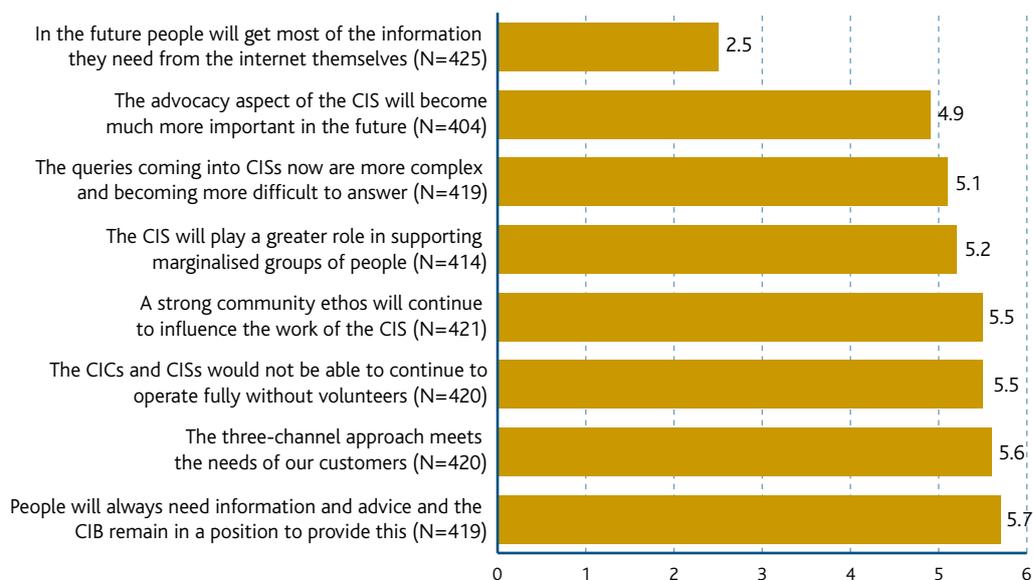
**Figure 3.16 Perceptions about the Oyster System**

### 3.6.3 Perceptions about the Oyster System

The Oyster System is a customer relationship management system for queries that was introduced into CIs late in 2008. All paid and volunteer information providers have been provided with training in use of this new system. At the time when the survey was being completed, the system had been up and running for a number of months and CIB were interested in exploring volunteer perceptions about the new system. Findings (see Figure 3.16) indicate that most volunteers felt that they had received sufficient training and were confident in using the system (scoring 5.3 out of 6). The volunteers also believed that the system made recording queries easier (score of 4.9). Anecdotal evidence suggested that some volunteers were still relying on the old paper method of recording customer queries. Findings suggest that perhaps there was still some reliance on the paper method of recording among the volunteers who might not have received sufficient training but this would appear to be a small number of volunteers. Statements relating to this issue received low scores with most volunteers disagreeing strongly with these statements. During the focus group discussions (full findings are outlined in the next chapter), it emerged that due to the large volume of customers seeking information (at the time of the survey) on redundancies and social welfare entitlements, some volunteers were not in a position to record queries during the interview but did so retrospectively. The system itself did not appear to be the issue.

### 3.7 Volunteers' perceptions of relationships and communications in the CIS

As outlined in Figure 1.1 (See Chapter One) each CIS has a Development Manager who reports to an independent Board of Management. In addition there are several Area Executives whose role is one of co-ordination between the CIs and CIB. Area Executives in turn report to Regional Managers who then report to a Senior Manager in CIB. This structure highlights the number of relationships that currently exist and the need for adequate communication between these different groups. Volunteers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a number of statements about their experience of relationships and communication in the CIS. Figure 3.17 shows that volunteers believed that if they were unhappy with any aspect of their work in the CIS there was someone they could talk to (score of 5.2 out of 6). They also believed that they were kept informed about developments in their CIS (scoring 5.1 out of 6). The volunteers indicated that overall the Development Manager in their CIS was in regular contact with volunteers (score of 4.8 out of 6). However, earlier findings showed that almost 20 per cent of volunteers had never had a meeting with their Development Manager. The volunteers appear to have little or no contact with CIB and the Area Executives. These findings were mirrored in the focus group discussion where volunteers were more likely to consider themselves as volunteers with their local CIC rather than being a CIS volunteer and a lack of any relationship with CIB was highlighted (see Chapter Four). There are

**Figure 3.17 Perceptions about relationships and communication in the CIS****Figure 3.18 Perceptions about the future of Citizens Information**

many more volunteers in the CIS than paid staff and in many cases the volunteers were running the CICs before paid staff were employed to work in them. Findings from the survey show that generally speaking there was little tension between the volunteers and the paid staff (score of 2.2 out of 6). Again, this mirrors findings in the focus group discussion with paid staff and volunteers. The group discussion did raise the issue of the potential for conflict between volunteers who are both information providers and members of the boards of management and the Development Manager (see Chapter Four).

### 3.8 The future of Citizens Information

The final question in the survey was related to the future of Citizens Information in Ireland. As before, volunteers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements about Citizens Information in the future. As can be seen in Figure 3.18 there were few differences between the mean scores for most of the statements. They are all relatively high. The lowest score of 2.5 was achieved for the statement about the use of the internet by individuals in order to gather the information they require. The volunteers believed that this

would not be the case; they felt that there would always be a need for Citizens Information Services run by volunteers.

The volunteers also believed that CIB (through the CISs) would remain in a position to provide individuals with information about their rights and entitlements and that the three-channel approach would continue to meet those individuals' needs. Earlier we saw that volunteers felt that customer queries were becoming more complex. This was also illustrated in their replies to this question. Finally, volunteers believed that the strong community ethos upon which the CIS was built would continue to influence the work of the CIS and that the CIS would need to play a greater role in supporting marginalised groups, such as people with language problems and people with intellectual difficulties.

Respondents were asked if there were any additional comments that they would like to make about the future direction of Citizens Information Services and in total 174 volunteers made some comment. Several of the comments reflected on the 'great' service that is provided by the CIS and there were calls for increased funding for the service so that additional paid staff could be employed in order to cope with the increased demand in recent months. Requests were also made for the delivery of extended services, such as, additional outreach clinics and extended hours in the CICs.

Several statements were made about the advocacy aspect of the service. The volunteers acknowledged the value of the advocacy work but they did not feel that it was something that volunteers could take on fully. They felt that paid staff or indeed dedicated staff would be more suited to the role. One volunteer stated that:

"... Advocacy is an excellent service but does not really fit in with volunteers in the CIC...[as]...not all have the time to turn up at short notice (other than duty time). Full-time staff could take it on but not if it leaves the CIC without someone on duty. I also feel one would need not only training but also much experience of hearings before attending on someone's behalf ..."

While another volunteer stated that:

"...As the queries become more complex, the staff are required to carry out more advocacy duties...[and]...by its nature this work is more complex and therefore time-consuming. I think that there is a great need for a full-time advocate to be available to each of the Centres...freeing up the paid staff/volunteers to deal with the remainder of the growing number of queries..."

The issue of training was raised by a larger number of volunteers. Many volunteers made general statements about the need for regular updated training for all volunteers. Others made more specific requests, such as:

"... there should be more informal in-house or locally based training on an ongoing basis and less emphasis on certificate attainment even for new volunteers..."

"[There should be]...less emphasis on trying to make accredited training compulsory because it will deter potential volunteers from joining."

"Making it easier for volunteers in full-time employment to partake in training by offering it at weekends or approaching employers to give the time off for training as special leave rather than annual leave."

Comments from other volunteers suggest that they felt that the work of volunteers in the CIS was not as valued as it could be. There was a call for further recognition of the contribution that volunteers make to the service both as volunteers in the Centres and on the boards of management. Comments included the following:

"I feel strongly that the volunteer input to the CIS is not as valued as it once was."

"The value of the role of the volunteer is not recognised by the Citizens Information Service...without volunteers the service would collapse."

"Just to suggest that the volunteers get recognition nationally for the work and the time they give and not give all the credit to the paid staff."

"Much greater use of and recognition of volunteer "management committees" in local CICs should be encouraged."

"In the future, I feel it will be more difficult to get volunteers, if our contribution is not recognised by CIB in future planning."

Looking specifically at the future of Citizens Information the volunteers suggested that people would always require face-to-face contact and that the service would continue to depend on volunteers to deliver information. They believed that there would continue to be a key role for volunteers in the service but that perhaps the management of volunteers would need to change. Some comments included:

"I think that the face-to-face meeting with clients is still the most important vehicle for providing information..."

"...people still like face-to-face contact so I think the future is safe for the CIS."

"Into the foreseeable future the service will depend on the involvement of volunteers

...[and]...budgetary constraints should not minimise or impinge on [that]..."

"I think that volunteers are beneficial and necessary to the future of the CIS."

"I do feel there is a role for volunteering in the CIS but it may need to be managed better."

Finally, there were comments which reflected on the following: the disparity of volunteer treatment across CICs; the lack of appropriate resources in certain CICs; the need for more volunteers, including more young male volunteers; and the desire for an annual outing for volunteers and paid staff.

We now turn to Chapter Four which presents the findings from Stage III of the research process, the focus group discussions with CIS volunteers and paid staff and the face-to-face interviews with other key stakeholders and informants.



## Chapter 4

# Volunteers in the CIS – Qualitative Findings

### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the focus groups. It is also substantially informed by the discussions in the face-to-face interviews. The views expressed in the focus groups are both subjective and particular and may, or may not, reflect accurately, either views held more widely within the Citizens Information Service or the empirical reality across the Service. Therefore the 'findings' in this chapter cannot be read as a description of a factual reality but as a description of the subjective interpretation of individuals<sup>31</sup>. What this qualitative work does offer is a sense of the range and depth of perceptions regarding the present functioning and future possibilities of volunteers within the Service. From an organisational development and leadership perspective, the relevance and value of knowledge concerning these experiences, and of the views they give rise to, is based on the recognition that individuals act relative to their interpretation of the facts rather than from the facts themselves.

In all some eight focus groups were held in various locations around the country (see Table 4.1). The structuring of these focus groups was based on organisational roles and hence the focus groups were composed of volunteers (3 groups), full-time, paid information officers (1 group) Development Managers (2 groups), CIB Area Executives (1 group), and CIB Regional Managers (1 group). Each focus group was presented with a topic guide regarding

aspects of their experience of the Citizens Information Service which we wished to address in the discussion (see Appendix H). These topic guides were tailored to the work roles of each group and also were informed by the survey results (see Chapter Three above) and the discussion in preceding focus groups. The topic guides were used to broadly structure the discussion and in practice the discussion in each focus group was allowed to develop its own momentum and direction.

The broad themes in these group discussion topic guides were:

Historical and current contexts of volunteers in the CIS

- » Emergence of the CICs
- » Role of the volunteer
- » The contribution of the volunteer
- » The benefits to the volunteer
- » Recruitment of volunteers

Issues of concern

- » Quality Measurements and evaluation
- » Training
- » Advocacy

Organisational structures

- » Relationships
- » Leadership

The future for the Citizens Information Service

- » Future directions
- » Strategies for volunteering in the Service

<sup>31</sup> The same may be said also of responses to those questions in the survey which elicited the respondents' subjective view on specific matters. See for example, section 3.8 The Future of Citizens Information.

**Table 4.1 Group discussions held**

Group interviewed	Location	Date held	No. in attendance
Development Managers (CIS)	Dublin	22/05/09	6
Information Officers	Dublin	27/05/09	4
Development Managers (CIS)	Dublin	29/05/09	7
Volunteers	Dublin	4/06/09	8
Volunteers	Kilkenny	10/06/09	7
Volunteers	Cork	24/06/09	9
CIB Area Executives	Dublin	01/07/09	6
CIB Regional Managers	Dublin	09/07/09	3

**Table 4.2 Interviews held with key informants**

Organisation	Location	Date
CEO, Volunteer Centres Ireland	Trinity College, Dublin	May 2009
Manager, South Dublin County Volunteer Centre	Tallaght, Dublin	July 2009
CEO, Citizens Advice NI	Telephone Interview	July 2009
Manager, Advocacy and Accessibility, CIB	CIB, Dublin	August 2009
Senior Manager, Regional Services, CIB	CIB, Dublin	August 2009
Chief Executive, CIB	CIB, Dublin	September 2009
Dept. of Social and Family Affairs*	Dublin	October 2009
Manager, Customer Service and Training, CIB	Dublin	September 2009
Chairperson, NACIS	Telephone Interview	October 2009
Dept. of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs**	Dublin	September 2009

\* Now Department of Social Protection

\*\* Now Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs

The focus group discussions were held on the basis that views expressed would not be attributed to specific individuals but would be attributed to the specific focus group. As noted above, the focus groups were each composed of individuals performing the same role within the Citizens Information Service. These two factors, of non-attribution at individual level and the single role identity of each focus group, are likely to have strengthened the sense of group identity and security within each focus group and hence to have assisted in securing an open and free-flowing discussion. One impact of this dynamic may have been to generate a sense of insider and outsider, or of 'them and us', in the tone and tenor of the discussion. Thus, while the sense of security and anonymity promoted discussion, it may also have led to the articulation of views in a trenchant form. The discussions may have been

more guarded, or different in tenor, if each of the focus groups had been composed of a mixture of volunteers, paid CIS staff, and CIB executives and managers. Hence while a sense of 'them and us' in some degree of opposition runs through a number of the views expressed in the focus groups, it needs to be remembered that the structure of the focus groups was inherently biased in this direction.

There is a common concern across the service with the provision of a quality service. Thus, while there are some tensions within the various relationships (and these need to be addressed), these arise more from the complexity of the service structures and the challenges of communication across the network, rather than from any differences of intent and mission.

The face-to-face interviews took place after the focus group discussions. Face-to-face interviews were held with senior CIB staff, external stakeholders of the Citizens Information Service and other key informants (see Table 4.2 for list of key informants). These interviews provided insights into the strategic thinking ongoing within CIB and elsewhere regarding the future development of the Citizens Information Service.

This chapter is set out under the broad headings of (4.1) Historical and current context of volunteers within the CIS, (4.2) Issues of concern, (4.3) Organisational matters, and (4.4) Future possibilities for volunteers within the CIS. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the information presented (4.5).

#### 4.1 Historical and current contexts of volunteers in the CIS

Right across the different levels of the service it is recognised that the varied origins of the CISs have given rise to a substantial diversity of practice and culture at the level of the individual CIC.<sup>32</sup> Therefore where generalisations were expressed by focus group participants about current culture and practice within the Service, these were invariably accompanied by caveats regarding variation across individual CICs. The main lines of distinction drawn were:

- (i) Between volunteer-led CICs and those led by paid staff
- (ii) Between CICs originating within the community, often prior to the establishment of a CIS and those originating outside the community and placed within it
- (iii) Between urban and rural CICs

To varying degrees, the first two of these distinctions were seen as being reflected in the third, that is, urban-based CICs were more likely to be characterised as being led by paid staff, and as originating outside the community.

Focus group participants noted that while both urban and rural CICs dealt with essentially the same problems, the context was somewhat different, with a degree of anonymity being

<sup>32</sup> See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the historical development of the Citizens Information Service.

offered in the urban CIC which might be absent in the rural context. Hence rural CICs had experience of potential clients travelling to more distant CICs, albeit typically to another within the county area. One volunteer focus group participant, from a very rural context, described this behaviour on the part of clients as seeking to avoid the 'public humiliation' of attending a CIC. They instanced the closure of the Castletownbere CIC because of lack of use, adding that its very public location in the middle of the square was a disadvantage. Others indicated that locating a CIC within a multi-purpose building helped to overcome this problem, or that a regular column or 'citizen's information watch' in a local newspaper helped the legitimisation of the service.

In rural services it is not uncommon for volunteer information providers, who are from the locality, to find that they know the client who is presenting for advice. The normal procedure in such an instance is to offer to pass the client on to another information provider. Focus group participants reported that such an offer is often declined by the client. Of course, in a small community, the incoming client is more likely to have been aware of the identity of the information providers in advance and, in effect, have self-selected into the service knowing this.

In other discussions, a distinction was made between older and newer CICs. Older CICs were typified as having a 'traditional' approach to the operation of the service, with volunteers being focused on the information provision role, structured around two to three hours per week. Regret was expressed that some of these CICs were perhaps less open to considering the diversity of skills and experience offered by incoming volunteers. Newer CICs were seen as being a little more flexible around volunteer roles, as well as being willing to ask for a greater time commitment from volunteers.

A cultural difference between older and more recently established CICs was also raised in the context of the focus group discussions. In the older services the prevailing culture was typically one of volunteer ownership, with this perspective being reported both by the volunteers and the Development Managers. This perspective found

expression in terms of resistance to change and development, hence making role performance difficult for Development Managers. This culture gave rise to an expectation that the needs of the volunteers would receive substantial management attention. Some services were seen to have originated from a group of people with their own information and social needs. Such a group could become self-referencing, with new volunteers being recruited from an inward looking social circle. In more extreme examples, Development Managers spoke of a 'culture of apology' around being a staff member. In practice, such a culture was seen to give rise to the carrying of many volunteers within the service, with this problem being aggravated by the lack of a volunteer exit policy.

#### 4.1.1 Role of the volunteer in the Citizens Information Service

Volunteers, paid staff and Development Managers were uniformly insistent that, from a client's perspective, volunteer-based information provision should be indistinguishable from that provided by paid staff. These groups further noted, that from a client perspective, the contribution of the volunteer is usually unrecognised, in that they typically are unaware that they are being dealt with by a volunteer. If clients do become aware that they were dealt with by a volunteer, they often express surprise at the quality of the service they are receiving on a voluntary basis.

In the early days of the Citizens Information Service the type of information provided was relatively simple<sup>33</sup>. Now however, queries are becoming more complex and dealing with them requires greater knowledge and experience. The capacity of volunteer information providers to remain up to date in a changing and increasingly complex information landscape, on the basis of three hours practice a week, is a major point of debate within the service, including among volunteers<sup>34</sup>. Among some volunteers within the focus groups there was a reluctance to give more

time, either in terms of direct volunteering or, to a lesser extent, in terms of additional training.<sup>35</sup> A view was expressed that the challenge of remaining current and of offering a high standard of service on the basis of three hours<sup>36</sup> volunteering per week is actively managed by limiting the service offered to the provision of information and advice. Hence some volunteer-based services were thought to offer a low level of advocacy. Indeed in some services advocacy was held to be strictly and absolutely outside the competence or responsibility of volunteers.

It was held by some within the volunteer focus groups that many Development Managers have a preference for paid and full-time staff, finding the co-ordination and turnover of volunteers to be a burden. The substitution of volunteers, with CE Scheme and Jobs Initiative employees, is instanced by some volunteers as evidence of this preference on the part of Development Managers.

While there are examples of CICs functioning well with relatively few (in one case none) volunteer information providers, there are many others where volunteer information providers form the core of the service. Hence across the service there is substantial variation in the specific contribution and role of volunteers from very low, with some volunteers being characterised as being 'carried' within the context of an individual CIC, to very high, including roles such as the co-ordination of volunteers or financial administration. Despite reservations regarding particular instances or cases, Development Managers and Area Executives in the focus groups held that the volunteer corps remain absolutely essential to the ongoing provision of a nationwide service.

33 For a review of the development of the historical development of the Citizens Information service see section 1.4.1 Evolution and history of Citizens Information Service.

34 See survey results, Chapter Three, Table 3.13 Volunteering hours per week.

35 See survey results, Chapter Three, Table 3.14 Minimum number of hours and increase current hours, and Table 3.24 Ongoing training and need for further training.

36 The average number of hours per week seems to have increased over time, with one informant indicating that previously the figure was more typically 2 hours.

#### 4.1.2 The perceived distinctive contribution of the volunteer

The distinctive value which volunteers bring to the delivery of the information service is articulated variously by volunteers, paid staff, Development Managers and CIB Area Executives, as being related to their community links, diversity of work experience, relational skills and length of life experience. Within the volunteer focus groups, the view was expressed that the present volunteer cohort is able to bring to their information provision role a type of experience and skill set gained from previous work, which paid staff, (being characterised by them as younger and hence less experienced) typically weren't seen to have<sup>37</sup>. Some focus group volunteers argued that being, on the whole, more mature, they are better placed to deal with the client base relative to the younger cohort of paid information workers.<sup>38</sup>

Other reflections from the focus groups identify the volunteer resource within the service as enabling longer opening hours than if the service were solely reliant on paid staff. Interestingly, the volunteers in the focus groups suggest an additional element to the resource question. Volunteers saw their distinctive contribution to the resourcing of the service as best expressed in terms of the time they were able to offer each individual client. Again and again this point was emphasised. The human contact and relationship inherent in the face-to-face information provision was seen as its greatest strength. It was argued that the volunteer information provider, by virtue of being there from personal choice, was actively seeking the human engagement inherent in the role. Indeed the personal satisfaction of helping others, of seeing their intervention transforming the worry and stress initially presented, to the relief and smiles of the

37 The implication within some of the views expressed by some volunteers that volunteer information provision was of a higher quality, because of personal experience and time available, than the information provision of paid staff, is without evidence. Indeed, it is contradicted by (i) the emphasis other volunteers placed on the value and quality of the combined volunteer/paid staff information service delivery model, and (ii) the insistence, voiced across all levels of the Service, that volunteer and paid information provision presents a uniform offering.

38 See Chapter Three, Table 3.3 Age of Volunteers. We have no information regarding the age range of paid staff.

departing client, constituted the key reward for their commitment.

Volunteers believed that most clients had a positive experience of dealing with a volunteer information provider and that they were seen as friendly and competent. They argued that utilising volunteers in the information provision role increased the amount of person hours of face-to-face information provision available within the service. Hence, they felt that they as volunteers, in their role as information providers, had time to support people going through all aspects of their problem and to move them from seeing the service as a charity to one of supporting their accessing of their rights. They held that this approach required time and patience. Often clients presented with a basic information issue, but this was merely the basis on which they gained confidence in the service and they then moved to a more complex and personal query. Alternately, there are a group of clients who need substantial support beyond the provision of information because they are limited in their capacity to act on the information received. They may need help in filling a form, they may have literacy problems, and they may need something explained several times to them<sup>39</sup>.

Others in the focus groups, including paid information staff and other volunteers, argued that the approach to the information provider's role is similar whether the individual is a volunteer or a paid staff member, as both are acting from the same training. In daily practice there are distinctions between the work of paid staff and volunteer information providers in that while both do similar information provision work, the background administration and organisation work of the service is typically done by the paid staff. There is a complementary relationship between paid staff and volunteers at play here. Information provision work can be very stressful because

39 In acting like this on behalf of clients, information providers may be seen to act beyond the strict interpretations of information provision and advice. In such instances information providers are providing a degree of assistance or support to clients in the pursuit of clients' entitlements. Such support does not constitute the provision of advocacy, which is perhaps better understood in terms of actively presenting the case of a client.

of the stress some of the presenting clients are under. Volunteers have expressed the view that, from their experience, it is not a role that an individual can perform on a full-time basis and hence requires a part-time structuring of the role<sup>40</sup>. Yet, the additional knowledge and expertise that derives from the longer hours of the paid staff member is recognised by the volunteers. Hence, in many CICs, paid staffs act as line support to the volunteers. Having paid staff was held, by volunteer focus group participants, to shift the service up a gear to a different level without diminishing the work of volunteers in any way. In addition, volunteers argued that the continuity provided by the permanency of paid workers was a real asset to the service.

There were an interesting set of views, at times contradictory, expressed around this theme of the contribution of volunteers. We have no basis from this research for generalised distinctions between the quality of information provision by volunteers and paid information staff. Indeed, both volunteers, paid information providers and Development Managers insist that the quality of the information provision provided by a volunteer and a paid information provider should be and generally is indistinguishable. Of course, some variability in the delivery of a human service is inevitable, the more so where there are not standardised training and skill requirements. Nonetheless, the volunteers argued that their presence brings a distinctive quality to the information service by enabling a more extensive and intensive service. The core of the case being made is that this is a quantitative more than a qualitative issue, in that the presence of volunteers in the system enables longer opening hours and greater time allocation to each client. Yet, despite this insistence on similarity of information provision by volunteers and paid staff, the volunteers also expressed a view that the operational model based on a mixture of volunteer and paid information providers generated a complementary and synergistic relationship with benefits for volunteers, for paid information providers, and, inter alia, for clients. Indeed, within the volunteer focus groups this model of combined volunteer and paid information providers was

40 In contrast, CIB management consider that the information provider's role may be properly performed on a full-time basis.

argued to be a valuable delivery model, and one that was preferable to the volunteer only model.

### 4.1.3 The volunteers' experience of the role

Volunteer information providers maintain that they have experienced a distinct change in the nature of their work over the last year or so. Due to the changing economic environment and related social conditions, their experience of the information provider role is that it is becoming more pressurised. On top of the cultural changes and diversity of national origins of the client group which arose from the Celtic Tiger years, increasing levels of unemployment are generating a whole new client group. This serves not just to increase the volume of queries but information providers are finding that queries are becoming increasingly complex, often inter-relating several issues stemming from a sudden change in household income. In addition, and perhaps not unrelated, are increasing numbers of clients seeking to deal with the break-up of partner or marriage relationships. In this environment, volunteers report that they are not always in a position to provide assistance and that client problems do not necessarily have a solution. Given this, the satisfaction which volunteers report that they derive from helping others, is not always available to them. Hence, some volunteers spoke of the need to develop the personal capacity 'to leave it behind going out the door'.

The volunteers in the focus groups seem well aware that they receive a range of benefits from their volunteering<sup>41</sup>. Reasons expressed for volunteering include the opportunity to give something back to the community, the sense of satisfaction achieved arising from helping people and the positive feedback received from clients, the degree to which volunteering offers a weekly structure to a retired person's week<sup>42</sup>, their own information learning, and the social opportunity which CIS membership provides.

41 See Chapter Three, Figure 3.6 Benefits that volunteers gain from volunteering in the CIS.

42 Some 48.1 per cent of volunteers responding to the survey categorised themselves as 'retired', see Chapter Three, Table 3.8 Current employment status of volunteers.

#### 4.1.4 The recruitment of volunteers

The diversity of organisational approaches within the Citizens Information Service is reflected also in the variety of approaches used in the recruitment of volunteers. Within the focus groups, volunteers, paid staff, and Development Managers reported the use of a variety of volunteer recruitment approaches<sup>43</sup>. However, a repeated element across this variety of approaches is a simple opportunism. In some CICs the approach is a straight-forward word of mouth from the present volunteer group. Others utilise an advertisement in the local paper or posters in the local community centre, employment office or Parish Centre. Some CICs are a little more structured in their approach, placing an advertisement in the local paper, in the summer, seeking a volunteer intake in September. In Cork a stand is taken at the annual adult education exhibition. In general, however, there was little in the focus groups' response to this discussion theme which indicated the planned targeting of volunteers with identified skills and certainly nothing that might merit the term volunteer recruitment strategy.

While it is well acknowledged across the service that the volunteer cohort is predominantly female and middle-aged<sup>44</sup> and lacks cultural diversity, for the greater part within the volunteer focus groups (although there were some dissenting voices), this lack of diversity was not seen as presenting a problem to clients. Indeed, they were more inclined to argue that the demographics of the present volunteer cohort<sup>45</sup> simply reflect those in society who typically have the time and inclination to volunteer<sup>46</sup>. In some CISs foreign nationals (typically Polish people are instanced) have been recruited for their language skills. In a number of cases these individuals have initially come in to the service as a client and were recruited in that context.

43 See Chapter Three, Figure 3.1 Important factors in the decision to become a volunteer in the CIS, and Figure 3.10 Possible means of recruiting new volunteers.

44 Some 78.4% of volunteers are female (see Chapter Three, Table 3.2 Gender of volunteers) and 88.5% are older than 44 years.

45 See Chapter Three, Tables 3.2 to 3.9. regarding the demographic characteristics of the present CIS volunteer cohort.

46 See Chapter One, section 1.2.

There is a growing awareness and experience throughout the Citizens Information Service that the economic conditions have rapidly and substantially changed the potential pool of volunteers, but also that this new pool of potential volunteers are likely to have a series of reasons for volunteering quite different to the present volunteer cohort. Volunteers, paid staff, Development Managers and CIB executives all commented on these changes. Increasingly volunteer inquiries are coming from younger individuals, of whom greater proportions are males. Specifically this new type of volunteer is experiencing unemployment and looking for a means to increase their skills or experience base so as to develop their paid employment opportunities. For example, the CIC based in the South Mall, Cork, are finding many professionals, including young solicitors, looking for volunteering opportunities. This present opportunity to attract a new volunteer cohort is viewed positively across all focus groups, even if such volunteering is likely to offer a relatively short-term commitment. It was noted by some focus group participants that while, in principle, there seems little or no reason why such volunteers might not maintain their commitment following re-employment, the day-time opening hours operated by many of the CICs militated against this. While this suggests an opportunity might exist in the future for the volunteer staffing of evening opening hours in some CICs, some focus group participants offered anecdotal evidence that where evening opening hours had been instituted, there proved to be little client use of the facility.

Although the approach to the recruitment of potential volunteers may lack a little sophistication, many focus group participants reported the use of interviews in the selection of volunteers. In this context examples were offered of interviews leading to the refusal of potential volunteers. However, the selection and acceptance of volunteers remains a local decision and potential volunteers are not subject to Garda vetting, for example. Some Development Managers and CIB Area Executives have expressed a concern over this, noting that information providers are often dealing with quite vulnerable clients and privy to private information.

### 4.1.5 Training of volunteers

Information providers, volunteer and paid staff, have access to two sources of training within the Citizens Information Service: the training organised and operated by CIB, and the training organised by the individual CIs. Taken together, these various training programmes offer a range of courses varying in depth, intensity and comprehensiveness, from one-day, topic-specific, courses to the nine month, FETAC-accredited Information Providers Programme. Additionally, CIB, in recognition of the presence in the service of volunteer and paid staff information providers with considerable experiential knowledge and skills, have instituted a Recognition of Prior Learning Programme, that provides accreditation of this practical learning. Altogether there is a substantial training facility available to information providers within the service, whether they are volunteers or paid staff. However, within the volunteer and Development Manager focus groups, a number of issues were raised in regard to some of these arrangements. They believed that:

- (i) The training programme available to any given information provider was not consistent across the service.
- (ii) The standard of training was therefore not consistent across the service.
- (iii) The training required before an individual may act in the role of information provider was not consistent across the service.
- (iv) It was not appropriate or possible to require of volunteers that they attend particular aspects of the training programmes available to them. Thus, consistent with the variation found in operations and recruitment, there is not a uniform standard of training among the information providers, particularly among the volunteer information providers, within the service<sup>47</sup>.

The discussions in the focus groups concerning the Information Providers Programme (IPP) indicated that it was highly regarded by those who have undertaken it<sup>48</sup>. When undertaken

47 See Chapter Three, Table 3.18, Kinds of training undertaken by volunteers.

48 See Chapter Three, Table 3.20, Level of satisfaction with IPP FETAC Training. Some 75% of the volunteers of the volunteers who had taken the IPP reported being 'very satisfied' with the programme.

by a volunteer it is seen to increase their commitment, although given the time and effort demanded to fulfil the IPP, such commitment probably precedes the course. CIB is seeking to position the IPP as the essential core training course. It requires a substantial time commitment and, because it is accredited, involves the measurement of learning outcomes and performance on the part of the individual trainee. Hence, among the focus group participants, it is not attractive to many of the older volunteers and indeed the performance measurement aspects were identified as being off-putting for many of them.

The full CIB Training Programme has been designed around spring and autumn schedules and although this provides a degree of certainty regarding what training will be available and when, there were some comments from volunteers, paid staff and Development Managers, regarding insufficient notice of the contents of the programme. There is a certain balance to be struck here, the greater the notice provided, the less responsiveness to current issues which can be built into the programme. Other volunteers and paid information providers noted the manner in which queries are often bunched around specific issues that were current in the news, with questions around back to school allowances and medical cards for pensioners being instanced as recent examples. There were comments from volunteers, paid staff and Development Managers, that their experience of the CIB organised training programme was of insufficient places to meet the demand. Volunteers also noted blocks at CIC level to taking up training opportunities related to (i) a lack of funding to cover training costs and expenses and (ii) not being released from information provision duty rota in order to attend training. Among certain CIs, participation in CIB-organised training is relatively low as these CIs offer substantial training programmes of their own. The survey findings in the previous chapter also highlighted some regional differences between forms of training undertaken by volunteers in the service<sup>49</sup>.

49 See discussion in Chapter Three under section 3.4.1 *Induction and training* and Table 3.25 Types of supports that volunteers have received in CIS. Here it is noted that 68.9% of volunteers report 'regularly' working as a pair with a more experienced person.

Within the focus groups, participants reported the use of a pairing or shadowing approach to experiential learning on the part of information providers<sup>50</sup>. In some CISs all ongoing information provision is reported as being through paired arrangements. In one instance, in a volunteer focus group, it was said that this pairing of information providers was a function of the layout of particular CIC offices, for example, where this is based on a number of small consultation rooms. In this instance, it was said that a requirement for personal security on the part of the information providers is met by the pairing arrangement. Whether pairing arrangements are for training purposes, some type of quality assurance or for the provision of personal security, there is a degree of questioning right across the service regarding the impression of individual capacity on the part of the information provider (or lack thereof) which this pairing arrangement sends out to clients. Some volunteer information providers simply argue that 'two heads are better than one'. There were some reports, within the volunteer and paid information provider focus groups, of clients expressing surprise, if not indeed annoyance, at facing two information providers in their consultation, although this was not a dominant theme.

Many of the various elements in the training programmes are constituted by half-days or full-days on specific topics. While such an approach has the merit of keeping the body of information providers up to speed, some information providers pointed out that topic-specific training can be irrelevant to their day-to-day experience. It seems inevitable, as the knowledge required of information providers increases constantly and is subject to regular change, that a core part of the training requirement is not about the transfer of knowledge but rather about how to access knowledge. Indeed, some information providers (volunteer and staff) commented that the best support they could be given was a really effective information access process<sup>51</sup>. All of the

50 See Chapter Three, Table 3.16 Methods of induction received by volunteers.

51 See Chapter Three, Figure 3.13 Volunteer perceptions about accessing information from the internet and citizensinformation.ie, Figure 3.14 Level of importance of various sources in answering queries, and Figure 3.15 Volunteers experience in answering customer queries.

information providers in the focus groups, both volunteer and paid, emphasised the importance of being sure of the information one was providing and that a willingness to check and to ask for help from others was a crucial attribute.

While the role of information provider has aspects both of discrete knowledge and relationship skills, much of the training available to information providers is of the knowledge transfer variety. Although the matter of developing skills in inter-personal relationships is dealt with in a module of the IPP, a few volunteers questioned whether greater emphasis should be placed on developing these relationship skills within the training programmes.

One of the other resources provided by CIB in relation to the knowledge required by information providers is the supply of literature, including the newsletter *RELATE*<sup>52</sup>. In the focus groups information providers commented very favourably upon this publication as an important mechanism for keeping themselves up to date<sup>53</sup>.

#### 4.1.6 The recognition of volunteers

The discussion within the focus groups indicated that, within the Citizens Information Service as a whole, the acknowledgement and thanking of volunteers for their service and commitment seems to be left to the Development Managers and the CIS Boards formally, and to the clients informally. Formal recognition of volunteers, on the part of individual CISs, is typically provided via two social events in each year. Within the focus groups, volunteers identified a client's appreciation as an important part of the satisfaction they receive from their

52 *RELATE* is the Citizens Information Board's monthly journal on legislation and developments in social services and social policy.

53 For a detailed analysis of volunteer usage of the Citizens Information website, Citizens Information Board publications, Citizens Information Phone Service and Expert Query from the Citizens Information Board, see Table 3.26 Sources used by volunteer information providers. For volunteer views on the relative importance of various information sources to their work see Figure 3.14 Level of importance of various sources in answering queries. For an indication of the high degree of volunteer satisfaction with the supports they received see Figure 3.3 Support received once a volunteer in the CIS and Figure 3.8 Level of satisfaction with support received.

volunteering<sup>54</sup>, even if the client is unaware that they are being dealt with by a volunteer. It may be noted in passing that such appreciation can only be enhanced by a greater client awareness of the volunteer basis of information provision wherever it occurs within the service.

Volunteers within the focus groups reported identifying primarily with their CIC. Indeed some reported having no sense of linkage even with their CIS. Consistently across the participants in the volunteer focus groups, no one indicated having any sense of a relationship with, let alone actively identifying with CIB. Among some volunteers there was a sense of not being valued by CIB or of being regarded as merely a financial saving. In a number of comments from volunteers, CIB was regarded with a degree of suspicion and, at times, resentment arising from a sense, on the part of the volunteers, of their efforts being subject to 'external' direction.

The corollary of this position was expressed by some voices within CIB, that is, that there was limited recognition on the part of some at CIC level, of their role as part of a national network and the core role of State funding, and of the State's interest and administrative responsibility which attached to this funding.

It may be considered that these contrasting views arise from a sense of multiple identities and related allegiances within the service. Any tensions inherent in multiple identities and allegiances are likely to be exacerbated by the challenge of communication across the service network. The presence of such communication challenges may be indicated by the dissonance between the recognition and appreciation of volunteers and the clear commitment to their future role which is repeatedly voiced at senior levels within CIB and an apparent distrust of the intentions of CIB which seems to exist within some elements of the volunteer cohort.

Key informants from volunteer centres<sup>55</sup> highlighted the need for the recognition of

volunteers within any service as a means of enhancing the volunteering experience for individuals. At the time of the fieldwork, the National Association of Citizens Information Services (NACIS) was working with CIB towards the development of a 'recognition of service' system for volunteers within the Service<sup>56</sup>.

## 4.2 Issues of concern

### 4.2.1 Quality standards and performance evaluation

The single dominant theme in terms of areas of ongoing concern, as raised across all the focus groups, related to the theme of quality standards and performance evaluation with the service. As a theme it was raised with greater urgency and concern in those focus groups composed of office holders from within CIB, namely the Area Executives and the Regional Managers, although it was raised independently by individuals at all levels in the Citizens Information Service. At operational levels this discussion centred on the issue of how many hours per week in active information provision were required to keep a volunteer information provider up to date. At management levels in the service the issue was raised relative to goals of universal standards and systems for performance evaluation.

Within the focus groups there were a range of views regarding the time required to keep an information provider up to date. Among volunteers, one 3-hour shift combined with ongoing training days, and the reading of incoming material from CIB was held to be adequate, while still acknowledging the likely benefit accruing from increased hours per week. Some felt that 3-hours per week constituted the limits of the viable ask of volunteers and indeed it seems a traditional expectation within large elements of the service<sup>57</sup>. The resistance to change, expressed within volunteer focus groups on this question, may partly stem from a sense that the demand for increased hours of volunteering is promoted by CIB, with the figure of eight hours per week

54 For related survey results see Chapter Three, Figure 3.1 Importance factors in the decision to become a volunteer in the CIS, and Figure 3.6 Benefits that volunteers gain from volunteering in the CIS.

55 Volunteer Centres Ireland and South Dublin County Volunteer Centre.

56 A Volunteer Recognition Programme has now been initiated (2010).

57 See Chapter Three, Table 3.13 Volunteering hours per week, and Table 3.14 Minimum number of hours and increase current hours, and related commentary under 3.2.2 *Volunteering History of Volunteers*.

arising from recent CIB-commissioned research adding to this perception<sup>58</sup>. The resistance may also stem from a lack of experience of the impact of increased hours on one's own capacity to act as an effective information provider. Those volunteers in the focus groups who, for various reasons, had experience of greater hours were quick to point to the difference it made to their personal capacity as information providers. Other voices across the focus groups noted that, with the information landscape subject to rapid change and increasing complexity, the only way to remain up to date was through constant computer access to up-to-the-minute information.

In contrast to the apparent reluctance of the older volunteer cohort to increase their weekly commitment (77.8% of the volunteers surveyed indicated they would not increase the hours worked), a number of CISs have raised the bar substantially in terms of the commitment required of new volunteers. Thus in a recent volunteer recruitment drive by a particular CIS, a six-hour shift, a commitment to training, and a minimum term of service was being requested and willingly accepted<sup>59</sup>. A number of information providers noted that it should be recognised that the experience gained in practice related both to hours in the role and the relative busyness of the CIC in which these hours are performed.

At present, there is no systematic means of measuring the quality of information provision within and throughout the service. Acknowledging this, many participants in the focus groups are concerned about a lack of uniformity of standards and there were various comments that the quality of service a client receives may depend on the CIC they attend or the information provider they are allocated. Others note, in defence of the service, that like many service industries, their quality of service is reflected in the ongoing and increasing demand for their services as well as in the number of return clients they receive. However, within the Area Executive and Regional Manager

focus groups the present lack of universal quality standards and of associated evaluation mechanisms was seen as simply unsustainable over the longer term.

#### 4.2.2 Information, advice, advocacy

The distinction between information provision and advice can be quite tenuous, with some advocacy being performed at a relatively low level and hence the information, advice, and advocacy triad may be understood as a kind of a continuum. However, advocacy at a more advanced level demands a different set of skills and experience than mainstream information provision and requires to be considered separately. In the event, most of the discussions in the focus groups revolved around the delivery of, what might be termed, high level advocacy. While views differed, the addition of the responsibility for the development of an advocacy service was not welcomed generally within the volunteer focus groups. Indeed, participants in the volunteer focus groups indicated that many if not most of the present volunteer cohort did not appear to be interested in the additional responsibility and concomitant training which advocacy provision requires. In some CISs, volunteers are simply not allowed to engage in advocacy.

Some of the requirements of basic advocacy performance such as document maintenance and case management over an extended period are seen by volunteers and Development Managers alike as incompatible with the part-time nature of volunteer commitment and as being properly the preserve of full-time staff. In fact, the time commitment likely to be required of full-time staff in advocacy work was held by some volunteers as likely to draw staff away from their role as line support for volunteer information providers. Hence the delivery of any advocacy within the CIC context was seen as inappropriate by some volunteer focus group members. This view appeared more marked among members of volunteer-oriented CICs. Putting the argument differently, some volunteers held that the type of advocacy service being proposed by CIB<sup>60</sup> was

58 Solution Enable (2008b).

59 This experience may reflect the changing pool of potential volunteers available to the Citizens Information Service; see related discussion above under 4.1.4 *The recruitment of volunteers*.

60 Volunteer focus group participants had in mind advocacy work which involved representing the interests of a client over an extended period and presenting the client's case in person in various dispute resolution contexts.

simply not feasible at the level of resources they seemed prepared to commit to it. In contrast to this general view there were a smaller number of volunteers who were more open to becoming involved in advocacy work but believed it would require substantial skill development and training on their part. They argued that advocacy on behalf of their clients is the natural inclination of information providers in dealing with the relationship between the citizen and the State.

### 4.2.3 The social policy role

There was a limited awareness among the volunteers in the focus groups of the value of the CISs in providing frontline feedback on the functioning of social policy initiatives<sup>61</sup>. The experience of CISs serves as a first line alert regarding systemic failure. The potential role and value of the Oyster System in such an information system appears to be somewhat lost on the volunteers as, at the time the focus groups were held, they had received little feedback on the collated information and its related policy analysis<sup>62</sup>. One volunteer focus group participant noted the need to recognise that even when they can't help a client directly, they can do so indirectly through feedback to CIB on the practical impact of social policy.

## 4.3 Organisational relationships and processes

### 4.3.1 Inter-role relationships

In the context of the individual CIC or CIS the relationships between the different roles and staffing levels are reported as being very good. Discussions in the focus groups (volunteer, staff, Development Managers) on these relationships all commented very positively on their quality. Many of the paid staff had arrived into the

service as volunteers hence any distinction between paid and volunteer information providers is limited in practice. Volunteers and paid staff are reported as blending together and this is seen as reflecting their interdependent relationship in delivering the frontline of the information service. This quality of relationship extends to Development Managers as well.<sup>63</sup>

The degree of group identity within a given CIC varied. In some CICs with large numbers of volunteers there was little sense of community reported across the volunteer group. In this context, volunteers tended to identify more with the group of individuals, irrespective of their roles, that they came into contact with on their shifts. Hence, a given volunteer might identify more closely with those paid information staff with whom they worked than with other volunteers in the Centre. Monthly meetings, reported as being attended by perhaps half of the volunteer group within a given CIC, as well as training days, provided an opportunity to generate relationships outside of this shift group. Beyond the confines of the CIC, the opportunity to interact with others in the service was seen as being very limited. A possible exception to this lack of opportunity was provided by the biennial conference of the Citizens Information Service, but in general only one or two volunteers attend from each CIS. The one real exception to this localised nature of the volunteers' experience within the Citizens Information service was generated among the students on the Information Providers Programme. The student cohort for each course constituted a group with a substantial shared experience and many found ways to keep in touch after the course had ended. In general however, and despite a slowly increasing sense of being part of a national operation, volunteers in the focus groups spoke of each CIC as having a sense of its own community and independence. As a result it appears that while there is an enormous reservoir of common experiences with the service, there are few enough shared experiences and hence, for volunteers in particular, knowledge and identity remains locked at the local level. However, when the potential

61 CIB is committed to 'review and evaluate citizens' experience of accessing social and public services' and to 'provide feedback to service providers on the basis of this evidence'. Citizens Information Board Strategic Plan for 2009- 2012, p. 11.

62 The Oyster System is a management information and system monitoring programme which is being put in place throughout the Citizens Information Service. One of its benefits will be to provide timely and service-wide information on the number and nature of client queries. At the time of the focus groups were held, the Oyster System was in the introductory stages of roll out and in its first full year of year of operation.

63 See Chapter Three, Figure 3.4 Perception of current role as a volunteer in the CIS, and Figure 3.17 Perceptions about relationships and communication in the CIS.

benefits of such experience sharing was raised in the volunteer focus group discussion, there were some negative reactions and suggestions that volunteers would not be interested in committing to the additional effort which such knowledge and experience sharing would require.

#### 4.3.2 Valuing the volunteer

Within the volunteer focus groups, the view was expressed that volunteers in the service sense that they are not appreciated by CIB, or are appreciated only insofar as CIB has no other option in terms of service delivery. The participants in the volunteer focus groups report that any concern shown for the welfare of the volunteers is seen to emanate from the Development Manager and the Board of their CIS<sup>64</sup>. There is a concern among some volunteers that unless there is some attention to the real and potential stresses for information providers, arising from the increasing demand and complexity of information provision within the service, then problems will arise<sup>65</sup>. The view that the service pressure, increasingly felt at CIS/CIC level, was not appreciated by CIB, was justified on the grounds that requests to CIB for increasing staffing finance are not finding a positive response. Volunteers noted that increasingly there are structures and processes in place in the service the running of which would normally require paid staff. Some volunteers expressed concern that they are, or will end up, substituting for the work of paid staff.

The communication challenge is not all one way however. Some members of CIB staff have found some volunteer-oriented CICs to be highly sensitive to any questioning of their approach

64 That this should be the case is fully consistent with the mode of functioning of the Citizens Information Service such that the CIB acts as back-up resources and relates to the CIS as a whole service with the primary contact point for CIS volunteers and staff being the Development Manager.

65 While the possible nature of these potential problems was not indicated specifically in the discussion, the implication was that they related to the capacity of individuals to manage the increased relational stresses of the information provision role - this, notwithstanding the significant level of attention paid by CIB to the provision of targeted information resources (e.g. the new e-bulletin 'Scope' and the micro website 'losing your job.ie') to address the increased complexity of queries and information needs.

and performance. Such CICs may appear to be self-righteous, presenting a view that they know best, and are apt to take umbrage and to reject criticism on the basis that their service is being provided 'for free'.

In contrast to these individual views, and as discussed above (see 4.1.6), there is a clear recognition, on the part of CIB executives and management of the important and central role played by volunteers in the delivery of the Citizens Information Service. Consistent with this view, they also expressed an interest in the ongoing development of this contribution into the future.

#### 4.3.3 Board involvement <sup>66</sup>

One of the roles volunteer information providers are sometimes asked to perform is that of CIS Board member. Discussions within the focus groups indicated that there is substantial variation in views on the performance of the Boards of the CISs. In particular, volunteers may be seen to struggle in this governance role, as they may lack the necessary experience and skill set. Volunteer focus group participants who acted, or had previously acted, as Board members, reported seeing their role on the Board as being primarily concerned with representing the volunteers' position. Some of the focus group participants with Board experience noted that CIB had encouraged the recruitment of individuals external to the CIS to the Board. Where this had occurred it was reported to have brought considerable benefit to the capacity of the Board. However, the issue of governance skill and capacity is not restricted to the volunteer members and there were comments in the Area Executives and Regional Managers focus groups that Board members recruited from outside the CIS, did not automatically have the capacity to stand back and focus on the strategic level and to direct Development Managers.

66 We note that this research did not specifically set out to address the role of volunteers as CIS Board members. Insofar as this issue was explored at all within the focus group discussion it arose by way of the nature of the discussion during which the agenda was partly shaped by the participants. We caution that we have no information regarding these issues other than that expressed within the focus groups.

One governance issue, which was the subject of recurring comment across the focus groups, was the confusion that can arise in the relationship between a Board member and a Development Manager when that Board member is also a volunteer information provider working to the direction of the Development Manager. This issue was especially raised within the Development Manager focus group. It is addressed specifically below at section 5.3.9.

#### 4.3.4 The issue of agency

In facing into the increasing demands and complexity of information provision in the current and future environment, the Citizens Information Service is challenged by what might be termed an agency issue - in other words, the role of the CISs as agents of CIB in its performance of its statutory responsibilities in relation to information, advice and advocacy provision. The structural foundations of this issue are discussed at 5.1.7 below. At its heart lies the tension between CIB statutory roles and responsibilities and the varying degrees of independence exercised by the CISs and CICs. We have seen some of the tensions arising in this relationship referred to above (section 4.3.2 Valuing the volunteer). These may become expressed as resentment on the part of the CISs in relation to 'interference' from CIB and, on the part of CIB, as challenges in relation to trying to lead change within the Citizens Information Service. Organisationally the issue finds expression in the management of the funding relationship between CIB and the CISs. The Area Executives and their Regional Managers are the frontline CIB staff in the constant negotiation of this relationship, in which, according to one participant in the Area Executive focus group, they 'have become very good at dancing on pins' and find themselves in the contradictory positions of being both 'friend and enforcer'.

Some of the volunteers in the focus groups, who had Board of Management experience and had reflected on the development of this relationship over recent years, noted that 'volunteers don't realise the strengthening grip of CIB over the service' and spoke of a paper mountain of reporting requirements descending from CIB on top of the CIS Boards. They characterised the relationship as a 'monologue' which interferes

with the CIS core function of providing an information service to the public. They argued that there is no independence of the CISs, with their governance responsibility relating solely to the management of budgets. They offered that even in this role the CISs' freedom of action is limited, so that while they operate individual units on a day-to-day basis, they require clearance from CIB to employ a new staff member. In the context of this relationship, the role and authority of the National Association of Citizens Information Services (NACIS) is seen by these volunteers as being at a very early stage of development.

These varying views do not reflect the manner in which the relationship between CIB and the CISs has been progressed over the years. This is a relationship, which is continually developing in a positive direction and is leading increasingly to a relationship of partnership in the delivery of service between CIB and the CISs (see CIB Strategic Plan 2009- 2012).

#### 4.3.5 The three-channel service

In the fulfilment of its statutory responsibilities CIB has put in place a three-channel approach to the provision of a national Citizens Information service. While the face-to-face work of the CISs represent one channel, the Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) and the Citizens Information website [citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie) constitute the other two. CIPS and the website are fully staffed by full-time paid staff. Viewed from a citizen's perspective, the three channels together offer a single nationwide response to the service need, to which the individual citizen self-selects into those elements which best meet their own need and context.

One indication of the presence of strains in the relationships between CIB and the CISs arises in the views expressed within the volunteer focus groups regarding CIPS and the Citizens Information website.<sup>67</sup> The general tenor of these views characterised CIPS and website as in some manner competitive, rather than as complementary and additional. Perhaps there are two aspects to this perception. Firstly, the extent to which volunteers identify with the local service rather than the national service

67 See Chapter Three Table 3.26 Sources used by volunteer information providers.

and secondly, a belief, among some volunteers, that the relative performance and efficiency of the different channels of the service are being compared to the detriment of the face-to-face service in the CISs. Volunteers in the focus groups countered any proposed comparison of the efficiency of the CIPS (4 minutes per query) with the face-to-face (19 minutes per query) as based on an assumption that the nature of the service delivered is similar<sup>68</sup>. They argue that CIPS provides a basic informational response without any of the supportive relational service which the face-to-face mode of information provision offers. In effect they argue that not only is the face-to-face information service qualitatively different but that many of the clients they see would not be capable of effective interaction with CIPS. In some instances volunteers seem to fear that an efficiency comparison will be employed to justify the reduction, if not the elimination, of the CIC-based service. The fact that CIPS is subjected to ongoing evaluation of the quality and accuracy of the information it delivers is thus seen as an additional threat rather than as a pointer to how evaluation might serve to improve information accuracy within the face-to-face service.<sup>69</sup> Indeed a suggestion by one volunteer focus group participant that a 'mystery shopper' approach, as reportedly utilised by CIPS for the measurement of service quality, might be extended to the CIS, was met with resistance from the other members of the volunteer focus group.

#### 4.4 The future for volunteering with the Citizens Information Service

Across the Citizens Information Service, from the CISs through to CIB, there is recognition, a desire, and an intention, that volunteers would continue

68 In fact such a comparison has not been made by CIB, but this is beside the immediate point here.

69 This perception, on the part of some volunteers, that a comparison is being made between CIPs time per client query and CIC face-to-face time is erroneous. Such a comparison has not been made. Rather CIPS time per client query has been compared to the time involved in handling phone queries in the CIS. Of course, the important learning here is of some of the negative relationship consequences that may arise as a result of misinformation flows within the service.

to play an important role in the operation and development of the Service. Yet, if the views variously expressed in the focus groups are indicative, the extent of the understanding that this desire and intention is shared across the service is limited.

Some volunteers in the focus groups argued that the negative economic environment alone necessitates the retention of a volunteer-based information service delivery and that the recession has served to halt a CIB drive towards the 'professionalisation' of the service. Rejecting such 'professionalisation', they further argued that volunteers are core to the 'humanising' of the service and that this is irreplaceable. They contended that as the infrastructure of the State becomes more complex, a service like that presently provided by the CISs is of increased value in linking the individual to the State. Indeed they suggest its absence would simply lead to the emergence of new voluntary initiatives to service this need. Despite this sense of the value of their contribution they feel relatively powerless to have any say in their future. They believe they will be excluded from the decision making process and that decisions will be handed down to them without consultation<sup>70</sup>.

Within CIB a commitment to the principle of a volunteer role within the future Citizens Information Service is strongly articulated. What is questioned, however, is the match between the present functioning of that volunteer role and the present and future needs of the Service. One voice in the Regional Manager focus group argued that CIB has failed to invest specifically in the management and development of the volunteer corps of the Citizens Information Service. It was further argued that once the Development Managers were put in place, the responsibility for volunteers was devolved to them, and that they currently operate an approach limited, in the greater part, to volunteer recruitment and co-ordination. There are strong voices within CIB which look to a future ideal of a well trained, well motivated volunteer corps, committing

70 As noted at 4.3.4 the issue of agency, the role and capacity of the National Association of Citizens Information Centres (NACIS) in representing the views of the CICs is seen by these volunteers as being at a very early stage of development.

to six hours per week, and offering a flexible and adaptable service. They argue that if you want a consistent and universal quality within the service, you need to set and implement standards at a national level and that the present mode of operation is unsustainable. To achieve such a future they argue for substantial changes in identifying the variety of roles volunteers might fill in a future service, the development of training to meet these roles, and the structuring of new approaches to volunteer recruitment, development and management within the service.

## 4.5 Reflection

This chapter has reported on the discussions within a series of focus groups as well as taking account of some of the views expressed in one-to-one conversations with senior CIB staff. It was noted that the particular structure of the focus groups, in terms of single role participants and the non-identification of specific individuals, was likely to enhance the expression of views in more strident terms than might otherwise be the case. The benefit to the research of implementing such structures related to the freedom and confidence which they gave to participants to express their views.

However, in reflecting on the findings presented in this chapter, it is useful to keep in mind the potential emphases which the focus group conditions may have given rise to. In the process of discussion, a focus group forms its own identity as a distinct group. This sense of group identity is likely to be arrived at more quickly, and to a greater degree, where the participants have a common identity and the discussion relates to their experience of this identity vis-à-vis some external other, exactly the conditions which pertained in these cases. In such a context, whether the focus is that of volunteer information providers talking about their experience of CIB, or of CIB staff talking about their experience of CISs, a framing of the discussion in terms of 'them' and 'us' is likely to arise. Further, it is likely that such a framing of a discussion in terms of 'them' and 'us' will be characterised by criticisms directed at 'them' or at their perceptions of 'us'. Given these issues, it is important that this chapter is considered

both in the round and within the wider context of the full research report.

Considered in the round, this chapter does speak to some particular issues.

1. There are tensions in the relationships between CIB and CISs. These tensions appear to have their origins in the historical development of the various elements of Citizens Information Service and in the identification of individuals with their local service. Perhaps, to varying degrees, such dynamics also feed off themes of regional versus capital present in a more general discourse in Ireland and in an anti-managerialism which can occur in voluntary organisations.
2. There are organisational issues across the service which relate to the inter-play of statutory responsibilities on the part of CIB, historical independence on the part of CISs, and the funding relationship between CIB and the CISs.
3. There are challenges and concerns in relation to developing and ensuring consistent and uniform levels of service provision across the Service. These concerns are heightened in the face of increased demand, both quantitatively and qualitatively, for information and advice services during the current economic downturn.
4. These issues (1-3 above) invariably impact the experience of volunteers within the service and their perception of their relationship with CIB.

However, this chapter also notes these positive aspects:

- » A deep commitment on the part of the volunteers and staff of the CISs, and of the staff of CIB, to the provision of a quality information and advice service at the point of need.
- » A clear and articulated commitment by the senior staff of CIB to the centrality of the volunteer contribution in the local delivery of a citizens' information and advice service.

- » A shared concern across the Citizens Information Service with the quality and consistency of service provision and with how best to achieve and maintain improvements in service provision.
- » A very good relationship that typically exists between volunteers and paid staff within the CISs.
- » A widespread view regarding the particular value and effectiveness of a mixed volunteer and paid staff model of information and advice delivery at local level.
- » A broad recognition that information and advice provision is becoming increasingly complex and varied, that the demand for services is increasing, and, that under these conditions, the present approach to volunteer recruitment, development, and role performance may not suffice.
- » A growing recognition that increased unemployment levels in Ireland have potentially generated a large new pool of possible volunteers for the service.

Such common ground offers a firm basis for addressing the future development of the role of volunteers within the Citizens Information Service. This question is considered in detail in Chapter Five.



## Chapter 5

# Observations and Recommendations

### 5.0 Introduction

#### 5.0.1 A point of arrival

Our investigation of the role and contribution of volunteers in the Citizens Information Service has been developed through a series of stages.

Firstly, we have considered the general practice of volunteering in Ireland (Chapter One). Evidence shows that volunteers are drawn from particular groups in society and have different kinds of motivations for engaging in voluntary activity. From an organisational perspective, there are a number of challenges to be borne in mind, which this literature review indicates. The profile of volunteers is changing and volunteers may be engaging in short bursts of voluntary activity, rather than signing up to an organisation for life (NCV 2002). Organisations, therefore, need to be aware of the need to attract their volunteers differently and they may also have to consider a variety of maintenance strategies in order to keep their volunteers engaged. Organisations may also have to target different kinds of groups so that they are represented across society, and in so doing, can build better relationships with the clients that the organisations seek to serve. We have noted also a growing debate concerning an emerging trend of a reflexive style of volunteering. In such an approach individuals are seen to seek a biographical end in their volunteering. Such an orientation may be contrasted with a community-oriented volunteering style, although in practice both orientations may give rise to the volunteering action.

Secondly, we have considered the historical development of the Citizens Information Service (Chapter One). The CICs have, traditionally, been based in communities and their volunteers come from those communities. As communities change, there may well be a need for the Citizens Information Service, as a whole, to address the representation of those communities in which their CICs are based. The CIS has throughout its history demonstrated awareness of its reliance on volunteers and the centrality of volunteers to its operation and service provision (Comhairle/CIC 2002), and it has reviewed volunteer management and strategy on an ongoing basis (Comhairle/Citizens Information Board 2006, Citizens Information Board 2007). We have compared these developments with the operational models of volunteering involving citizen information services in Northern Ireland, England and Scotland and noted the variety of roles volunteers perform in these services.

Thirdly, we have conducted the first large-scale survey on volunteers in the Citizens Information Service (Chapter Three). Findings suggest that volunteers in the CIS are more likely to be Irish, female, married, aged 45 years or older, have been living in their locality for more than 11 years, have third level or professional educational qualifications and have been volunteering 3-5 hours on a weekly basis for up to 10 years. Their belief in the importance of the work, and its connection with the local community, were key factors in their decision to volunteer for the CIS. They broadly indicated that they received all the support they required in order to carry out their role in the CIS and were comfortable utilising the information technology supports provided.

They recognised a range of personal gains they received from their volunteering. While the majority of volunteers had undergone an induction period and various forms of training to support them in their role, there was substantial variation across the volunteer cohort in terms of the amount of training undertaken. While volunteers were confident in their capacity to act as information providers, they were less confident in regard to the development of an advocacy role or in their relationship to the social policy work of CIB. Approaches to volunteer recruitment varied between the CISs, but tended to be locally oriented. Relationships between volunteers and paid staff and volunteers in the CISs are reported as excellent by both parties. Volunteers appear less clear about the nature of their relationship with CIB. In general, the volunteers report a strong sense of their importance to the present and future functioning of the Citizens Information Service.

Fourthly, we have conducted focused discussions separately with groups of volunteers, CIS staff, and CIB staff, as well as one-to-one discussions with senior CIB staff and key external informants, in order to explore in greater depth their subjective experiences of involvement in the Citizens Information Service (Chapter Four).

Although tensions were present over communication and approach to service delivery, a number of positive findings were also identified. Such common ground offers a firm basis for addressing the future development of the role of volunteers within the Citizens Information Service. It is to this question that our discussion now turns.

### 5.0.2 Volunteers within the Service

The focus of this report has been on the role and contribution of information provider volunteers to the Citizens Information Service. This has been the case throughout, even where the discussion has been considering aspects of the Service more widely. One possible unintended result of this focus may have been to appear to give insufficient recognition to the central role played by the professional staff of the CISs and CIB in the shaping, directing and functioning of the service. In fact, it is clear from the feedback from the volunteer focus groups, that the volunteers

themselves recognise that their contribution to the service is only made possible by the commitment of the paid staff. However, because the use of volunteer information providers is prevalent throughout the service<sup>71</sup>, the discussion which follows in this chapter does not seek to address volunteer information providers in isolation. Our approach is one of considering the potential development of the role of volunteers within the service together with the implications of such development for the operation of the service more widely.

### 5.0.3 Common perspectives

The discussion in Chapter Four concluded by highlighting the dynamics arising from the pattern of historical development of the Citizens Information Service and of current environmental change. These dynamics were contrasted with the strength of the Service in terms of a common perspective on the organisational challenges it faces and a shared commitment to service at the point of need, which is held across the service delivery partners. The presence of these strong foundations is a tribute to the commitment of the volunteers, the CIS staff and CIB staff. In particular, we can identify the positive impact of CIB's approach to organisational change and their respect for the requirement to manage the interplay of the dynamics of voluntary independence and statutory responsibility. In fact, this attitude on the part of CIB (of commitment to the service and of respect for their service partners) is evident in their commissioning of this research in the first instance. It has been displayed repeatedly throughout the research process in their openness to a research design which provided space for the raising of multiple voices, and in the reporting of the same. Such an approach reflects on the leadership of CIB senior staff, their long experience, deep knowledge and understanding of the Service's history at local and national levels and their ongoing commitment to its future development for the benefit of the citizens of Ireland.

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71 It is recognised that there are CICs without volunteer information providers.

### 5.0.4 Outline of proposals

In the remainder of this Chapter we set out a series of ideas, suggestions, proposals, or recommendations for consideration. We are aware that there may be implementation difficulties and we therefore propose the use of pilot projects in the introduction of new service operation systems. All these proposals are ultimately directed towards one end, the agreement nationally of the form and standard of a service that is supported centrally and delivered locally.

The remainder of this Chapter is structured in four sections, 5.1 to 5.4. The first section, 5.1, identifies issues in the present context of the Citizens Information Service which are particularly relevant to the presence and utilisation of volunteers within the Service. The second section, 5.2, identifies a set of points of departure in relation to the consideration of recommendations regarding the further development of volunteering within human resource strategy of the Citizens Information Service. The third section, 5.3, details a set of recommendations directed towards achieving a volunteer involving Citizens Information Service offering the provision of a nationwide service of constant standard and quality. The recommendations are presented in summary form in Table 5.1 below. The fourth and final section, 5.4, offers a brief conclusion to the discussion in this chapter.

## 5.1 The present context

### 5.1.1 A changing Ireland

The social face of Ireland has changed dramatically since the first local Citizens Information initiatives were established over 35 years ago. Economic growth and the increase in employment, national and personal wealth<sup>72</sup> have been the most obvious manifestations of these changes. Other marked transformations have included increased urbanisation, a population of diverse national origins, and a revolution in forms of connectivity on the back of new information technologies. Less obvious perhaps has been a marked change in the framing of the discourse on the nature of the relationship between the individual and the State, such that this discourse is increasingly concerned

72 Notwithstanding the present recession and increases in personal indebtedness.

with the rights of the individual as citizen<sup>73</sup>.

The traditional value system of charity which informed much of the earlier voluntary action in Ireland is perhaps less in keeping with this new context where citizens increasingly expect high and uniform standards of service delivery from voluntary organisations and the State alike.

### 5.1.2 A proud history

The various organisational elements of the Citizens Information Service have a proud history of local initiative, community orientation and service to those with an informational need. The past and present role and commitment of volunteers in this service delivery is an important aspect of this pride in service achievements. However, it can be difficult for those who identify with this earlier tradition of service to perceive that the transformations, referred to in 5.1.1 above, may require a different response than in previous decades. Specifically, citizens' information service delivery should be characterised by established quality standards and be accessible by all citizens equally.

### 5.1.3 Complex organisational challenges

In responding to these new needs, the Citizens Information Service faces a complex set of organisational challenges. These challenges are framed by a range of dynamics that interact at different levels. These dynamics include resource constraints; the increased demand for, and increased complexity of, information provision; the delivery of advice and advocacy in addition to information; the local and varied origins of many of the CISs and related issues of identity, independence and loyalty; a problem regarding the clarity of agency across the elements of the service; and a requirement for an information service which delivers to a national standard and quality. Responding to these challenges requires the development of a shared view of the proper response across the elements of the Citizens Information Service and the development of a co-ordinated approach to the operation of this response. CIB's intention towards this end is set out in its Strategic Plan for 2009-2012, *Pathways to Services: putting Citizens at the Centre*.

73 For example in the increasing attention in the discourse to the articulation and delimitation of social rights and as exemplified by CIB's concern with facilitating clients 'in securing access to their rights and entitlements' (CIB Strategic Plan 2009-2012: 15)

**Table 5.1 Proposed core elements of a national volunteer development strategy for the Citizens Information Service**

**Elements of a shared meaning**

*Expressed conceptually*

- » Volunteering as both principle and necessity.
- » The integrated nature of the three strands of the Service.
- » The essential unity of the service, whilst recognising range of origins and associated loyalties.
- » The idea of citizenship uniting staff, volunteers and clients in the exercising of rights and responsibilities

*Expressed organisationally*

- » Creating a stronger national identity for the Citizens Information Service.
- » Re-envisioning the potential roles of volunteers within the Service.
- » The creation of a direct and ongoing line of communication between CIB and the volunteer cohort.
- » CIB to institute and lead the development of a national volunteer strategy for the Service, consistent with the Strategic Plan 2009-2012.

**Operational elements of a volunteer strategy**

- » Creation of volunteer database.
- » The specification of nine volunteer roles within the Service, including related training requirements.
- » Institution of a national volunteer recruitment strategy directed to the nine specified roles.
- » Enlargement of the CIB Training Programme, to cater for the increased training needs of the additional volunteer roles.

**Attending to the volunteer experience**

- » Forging a sense among volunteers that they belong to national cohort.
- » Instituting a national volunteer service recognition system.
- » Instituting an e-zine to support the sense of a national cohort and to provide a platform for the sharing of experiences and knowledge.
- » Supporting volunteers in the development and advancement of their own volunteer biography within the Service.

**Structural adjustments proposed for implementation**

- » Assignment of responsibility at a senior management level within CIB, supported by a dedicated Volunteer Development Team and budget line.
- » Enlargement of CIB Training Programme, to cater for the increased training needs of the additional volunteer roles.
- » Deepening the processes of collaborative development between CIB and the CISs. This will increase the task of the Regional Managers and Area Executives.
- » Assigning specific responsibility for volunteer development to the Development Managers within the CISs.
- » Instituting the role of volunteer co-ordinator at CIS/CIC level, where such is necessitated by the number of volunteers.
- » Consider the structural approach to be taken to the involvement of volunteers in the development of the advocacy services and social policy.

#### 5.1.4 Volunteering, a principle or a necessity?

Part of the tradition, referred to at 5.1.2 above, is held within the organisational memory of what is now the Citizens Information Board, was formerly Comhairle, and was originally the National Social Services Board. This tradition has a principled attachment to a substantial volunteer involvement in the Citizens Information Service. The perception among some members of the present volunteer cohort that they are maintained out of economic necessity shows a lack of awareness of this principled attachment. The degree to which such a principled commitment to a volunteer-based information delivery can be consistent with the goal of a nationwide system of quality and standardised information service is not a function of the presence of volunteers per se but is rather a function of the type and amount of resources committed to volunteer development and management. Thus, there is no necessary contradiction between the idea of a volunteer-based service provision and the delivery of high and universal standards of service. Indeed, there are several national organisations which achieve this most effectively. However, the notion, held by some within the volunteer cohort, that volunteers constitute a 'free resource', is incorrect and ignores the substantial costs associated with the appropriate recruitment, training and management of volunteers.

#### 5.1.5 A perceived gap between articulation and practice

Despite this tradition of commitment to and support for volunteering and the voluntary delivery of services, and despite the verbalisation of this principled commitment within CIB, it has been argued that there remains a gap between this principle as articulated and this principle as operated within CIB. The close and appropriate attention to the strategic goal of placing the citizen at the centre of the organisational endeavour (and the associated identification of service standards) which has shaped recent CIB strategic plans and operational goals (CIB Strategic Plans 2006-2009 and 2009-2012) may have contributed inadvertently to the emergence of this gap. Whether or not this is the case, it is important that CIB recognise there are some

doubts within the wider Citizens Information Service as to the strength and basis of CIB commitment to a major volunteer involvement in the provision of a national citizens' information service.

#### 5.1.6 A common concern and commitment

Throughout the Citizens Information Service, and articulated at all levels from local volunteer up through the ranks of the paid staff, is a real concern and commitment to the future development of the service as the provision of a quality service to a client population. Although not always expressed in similar terms, and indeed priorities regarding the future service are not necessarily shared, this concern and commitment is an important base and necessary foundation for the creation of a shared vision for the future of the service.

#### 5.1.7 Agency as an inherent challenge

The statutory responsibilities of the Citizens Information Board are defined within the Comhairle Act 2000, the Citizens Information Act 2007, and the Social Welfare (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2008. The CIB delivers on this remit via direct provision, by supporting a network of delivery partners and facilitating project-based interventions' (CIB Strategic Plan 2009-2012: 22). The network of CISs constitutes a central element of these 'delivery partners'. As such they are supported by CIB via 'core developmental supports and direct funding' (Ibid. 22). Although the individual CISs are incorporated as independent voluntary organisations, their relationship with CIB, as expressed in funding lines, service delivery agreements, service standard protocols, and developmental supports, is both quantitatively and qualitatively different from the general relationship between an independent voluntary organisation and a funder. As appropriately expressed within the CIB Strategic Plan 2009-2012, the relationship is one of partnership in the design and delivery of service. This partnership, however, is an evolving one, and this, taken together with the varied origins of the individual CICs, means that the development of the relationship seems not to be consistent across the entire service.

The problem of shared, conflicting and conflated agency, present in a service composed of elements with very different origins and orientations, constitutes an inherent challenge to the creation of a shared vision and commitment to the future direction of the service. It appears that this problem has been handled, in the past, through degrees of conflict management<sup>74</sup>. Such an approach is unlikely to suffice for the future management of this issue in the light of ongoing and increasing demands on the service. However, a top-down and directive approach is unlikely to achieve an intra-service consensus. An approach which moves separate elements towards a fuller engagement with the task of building a national and uniform standard of service is required.

A related issue is the growing concern in Ireland regarding standards of transparency and accountability within public life in general, and by extension, in public services. This forms a public discourse backdrop to the governance of the Citizens Information Service as a whole and of discrete elements of the Service. There will be a need for greater attention to the quality of governance in the system arising from the increasing demand for, and complexity of, citizens information provision (see section 5.1.3) and the rights-based dynamic in the citizen/State relationship (see section 5.1.1), together with this demand for transparency and accountability.

## 5.2 Points of departure

### 5.2.1 An institutional dilemma

The institutional dilemma present in the Citizens Information Service arises from the combination of voluntary organisations on the one hand and a State agency (bureaucracy) on the other. The voluntary organisation inherently pays close attention to the experience and meaning of volunteers in the organisational context. In contrast, bureaucracies act through the systematisation of operational processes. These organisational paradigms constitute different cultures and value systems with different force at different levels within the system of the Citizens Information Service. The tension between the two paradigms finds a range of expressions. This is clearly evident in the repeated articulation, by volunteers, of the human value of the

face-to-face relationship with clients and of respecting the long-term commitment of volunteers – versus concerns, expressed elsewhere, with standards, efficiency, and the capacity for directing action. It is also evident in volunteer complaints regarding the 'paper mountains' of bureaucracy, or the complaints of others regarding resistance to training and the evaluation of service delivery among volunteers. In its more extreme articulations, such a culture clash finds expression in a dismissing of the other, their values and attendant goals.

Of course, to view the two organisational cultures as inherently antagonistic to each other is to miss the point. The potential for very positive and synergistic outcomes to arise from the partnerships of voluntary and state agencies have long been recognised (Salamon 1987). The basic argument is that the strengths and weaknesses of one are the corollary of the strengths and weaknesses of the other, and hence in combination they provide a formidable offering. In short voluntary action, while exhibiting the strengths of rapid response, innovation and flexibility, also exhibit a set of weaknesses, namely insufficient resources, paternalism, particularism and amateurism. In contrast to voluntary endeavour bureaucracies have deep capacities of organisation, systematisation, impartiality, standardisation, universality; what they are typically criticised for are lack of flexibility and speed of response. Combined, the efforts of voluntary association and state bureaucracy can complement each other to generate what has been described as an interdependent relationship in welfare service provision (Salamon 1995).

In relation to the Citizens Information Service, the question is whether this combination of organisational paradigms, which arises from the manner in which the service has been constructed historically, will serve as a destructive or progressive force within the Service. It is our contention that the opportunity remains for this combination, and the energy it generates, to be at the very core of the distinctiveness of the Citizens Information Service and to act as a very real force towards the establishment of mission and attainment of goals. However, to achieve

<sup>74</sup> As articulated within the Area Executives Focus Group.

this harnessing of energy requires leadership throughout the Citizens Information Service, that is not constrained by formal power, and is open to a synthesis of values and their attendant goals. The point of departure is recognition of the range of organisational cultures and the potential value that lies within this diversity. However, the harnessing of this value requires, in the first instance, the improvement of processes of communication through the Citizens Information Service.

It should be noted that aspects of this work are already well under way. Increasingly, in CIB organisational documents the relationship between CIB and CISs is being articulated and characterised in term of partnership in the delivery of services to the citizen. Nevertheless, views articulated by volunteers in the context of this research indicate that this orientation towards understanding the relationship with CIB as being one of partnership has yet to inform all levels within the Citizens Information Service.

### 5.2.2 The citizen and the Citizens Information Service

Whereas in the 20th Century the CIS was framed by need and local geographical community, in the 21st Century, it is increasingly being framed in the changing relationship between the individual and the State, as mediated through the locally based organisation. There are two dualities at work here: the first at the level of the individual, and the second at the level of the organisation. The first is the conceptualisation of citizenship as combining a set of rights and a set of responsibilities. The CISs exemplify this on both the volunteer and the client side of the information provision relationship. The second duality, of rights and responsibilities accruing from citizenship, finds expression in the CISs as a combination of local initiative and of State provision.

One of the important roles played by voluntary organisations, at times directly and at times inter alia, is that of mediator between the individual and the State. Such mediation is necessary because the relative distance between the individual and the State which is generated by disparities of scale and power, make a direct relationship difficult and can lead to the alienation of the individual from the State.

### 5.2.3 Promoting an understanding of the three-channel approach

CIB ensures the meeting of its statutory functions in relation to the provision of information and advice to citizens via a three-channel<sup>75</sup> approach designed to present an information service at the point of need. Hence, CISs offer a mode which caters for those who require more support in the process of information provision and advice: the less empowered in society, many older people, people with disabilities, those isolated by the digital divide, the economically disadvantaged, people facing relational or other forms of stress, those who, for whatever reason, are excluded from accessing information in any other manner, or simply those who are oriented more locally than nationally. The Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS) and the Citizens Information website may cater better for a different type of need, and may offer a service to a different segment of the population. Of course these distinctions are over-stated here and there is much over-lap between the two. What is important, however, is that within the Citizens Information Service as a whole, the strengths and values of each channel are recognised and celebrated and that individual involvement in the provision of service in any of the strands leads to a pride and sense of ownership relative to the whole service. At present, among some volunteers, a lack of understanding of the three delivery vehicles as together constituting a single response to the national requirement for the provision of Citizens Information, has led to the sense that, in some manner, their service is being compared unfavourably, in terms of efficiency, with the other delivery vehicles. While such a comparison is not being made by CIB, which recognises differences in service style and service recipients between the different vehicles, that such a view is held by some volunteers suggests a message of negative competition rather than complementary and collaborative service is present within elements of the Citizens Information Service.

75 The three information and advice delivery vehicles are (i) the Citizens Information Services / Citizens Information Centres, (ii) the Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS), (iii) the Citizens Information website.

The promotion of an understanding of the three-channel delivery system as constituting a single system design to provide information at the point of need is fully consistent with Priority 1 of the CIB Strategic Plan 2009-2012, namely *'To ensure that we deliver seamless access to information, advice and advocacy services across all delivery channels to meet citizen's needs'* (CIB 2009: 13).

#### 5.2.4 Creating unity in diversity

This task of shaping the unity in diversity of the service is already well underway and will be further advanced through delivery of the 2009-2012 CIB Strategic Plan. At a very basic level it requires a new organisational language to capture the underlying concepts. An example of this is the framing of the relationship between CIB and CISs in terms of a partnership in service delivery and development which is clearly articulated in the 2009-2012 CIB Strategic Plan. However, the nature and direction of this relationship remains disputed within some parts of the service, so that one person's partnership is another person's takeover. Building a new understanding within the service is a substantial leadership challenge, which, although it must be shaped and led by CIB, as the national authority, requires the alignment of leaders throughout CISs.

We note that there is a possible tension, felt and articulated by some volunteers, in volunteering in a State-funded service during an economic downturn. Specifically, their fear is that such volunteering might constitute a degree of employment substitution. The centralisation of effort and control required to give effect to universal standards of service delivery may serve to heighten this fear insofar as it, in some manner, diminishes the sense and experience of the 'local' for the volunteer. The importance of local identity to the CICs, together with the potential strength of synergies across the varied organisational cultures within the Citizens Information Service (see 5.2.1 above) suggest that the maintenance of local and regional pride in the quality of service delivery should remain an important element of the national effort as a whole.

#### 5.2.5 Communicating a volunteering strategy

We note that CIB has an overall framework for engaging with CISs as delivery partners. The approach includes liaison with Development Managers, Boards of Management, the National Association of Citizens Information Services (NACIS), and the use of joint working groups. There are a variety of fora set up for regular exchanges, for example, the biannual Regional Exchange days with Development Managers and Chairs of Boards, the biennial Conference, Memoranda of Understandings and MOU review meetings and so on. The NACIS, as a representative body, has a core function of liaising with CIB. Given these structures, systems and processes, a tension exists between whether it is the CIB role to support volunteers in any direct way or whether it is a function of the local organisation with backup resources from CIB. In practice however some of these boundaries are already a little blurred with the increasing CIB role in establishing service standards and providing key operational resources. It seems obvious that, as the national agency with statutory responsibility, CIB does need to provide a coherent vision and take a lead role in relation to the articulation of volunteering strategy vis-à-vis the service. However the distinction between the direct line management and operational responsibility of the development Managers and the Boards of Management is very important and must be maintained. This should not preclude CIB communicating directly with volunteers as a group concerning volunteering within the Citizens Information Service, their role and importance in the service, the service standards aspired to, and the opportunities for personal development in a range of volunteer roles.

### 5.3 Recommendations

The recommendations which follow are directed towards achieving a Citizens Information Service that involves volunteers in the provision of a nationwide service of constant standard and quality, shaped by a commitment to service at the point of need, and characterised by innovation, flexibility and a pride in service membership. All these recommendations are ultimately directed towards one end, the agreement nationally of the form and standard

of a service that is supported centrally and delivered locally. We do not identify nor propose a single optimum model for the involvement of volunteers within an individual CIS nor within the Citizens Information Service as a whole. Nor are we convinced that such a model is identifiable. The task environment of the Citizens Information Service is dynamic. Individual CISs face specific local contexts and conditions and have distinct development histories. These recommendations are developmental in nature and their implementation may require adaptation to maintain innovative responses to local needs and conditions while instituting adequate formalisations regarding service quality and standardisation.

### 5.3.1 Orientating towards the future

Many of the discussions within the focus groups in this research (although not all and not consistently across all organisational levels) regarding the Citizens Information Service and the various challenges it faces seem to be framed with a view to where the service has come from, rather than where it might go to. Such a framing of the problem needs to be re-oriented towards a future sensing approach. This would move the discourse within the service from reference to an idealised historical past to a view of a future characterised by higher standards of service and programmatic development. Organisational change can be traumatic, especially if it challenges aspects of identity and personal comfort zones. Making such change desirable and providing ownership throughout the service is vital. Clear articulation of the intended future of the service and the benefits to be derived from it are necessary. The generation of a sense of unity of identity and purpose is a basic organisational requirement. This work is already under way but particular and increased attention needs to be given to communicating these messages to the volunteer cohort. How this might be achieved is examined at 5.3.5 below.

### 5.3.2 Placing citizenship at the heart of organisational identity

The CIB Strategic Plan 2009- 2012 is focused on placing the citizen at the heart of the work of CIB. What this appears to mean in practice is that the information, advice and advocacy needs of the citizen are placed as the central

driver of the organisational endeavour. This orientation emphasises the role of the citizen as the consumer of information and advice, or, as articulated there, as the client, of the Citizens Information Service. This approach is fully and appropriately consistent with Government thinking as set out in the policy statement *Transforming Public Service* (2008) and the concern in that document with public service performance.

Of course, insofar as citizenship entails a range of rights and responsibilities, the relationship between the citizen and the State is richer than one of service provider and service recipient. A slightly broader conceptualisation of citizenship can be utilised to present the relationship as dialectic in nature in that the citizen interacts with the State. Specifically, this may be articulated in terms of rights of citizenship and responsibilities of citizenship. These responsibilities include an engagement with the functioning of the State, so that the State, in the fuller sense, is conceived as the State apparatus and the citizen acting in concert, not one solely of the State acting on behalf of the citizen. Hence citizenship is described as 'belonging to a society or community with prescribed rights and responsibilities in legal, social, economic and cultural domains'. (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, Background Working Paper, 2008:18). The fuller engagement of the individual in the exercise of their citizenship, or 'active citizenship' has been described as involving:

- (i) An awareness of interdependencies and common concerns: 'they inform themselves of the social conditions of their fellow citizens and pay attention to political issues, contributing to policy decisions directly or indirectly
- (ii) An attitude of civic self-restraint: 'giving more weight to common interests than prevails in the contemporary culture of individualism
- (iii) An openness to deliberative engagement (Honohan 2005: 175)

In practical terms voluntary action and the act of volunteering is typically understood as a mode of expression of an orientation to active

citizenship (UK Home Office 2004; Deakin 2001). It is most important, however, to understand volunteering as but one form of individual engagement with the idea of citizenship. The practice of citizenship is relevant to all of an individual's engagement with the formal structures of governance (as broadly understood) of society. Hence, for example, we find in Ireland that paid staff in nonprofit organisations have greater identification with the meaning of their work than employees in for-profit organisations. Specifically, nonprofit sector employees identify more with the organisation and the service it provides, they value more the aspect of serving society, and seek particular work goals to a greater extent, when compared with employees of for-profit organisations (Basini and Buckley 1999). In other words, the concept of citizenship is of equal relevance to all volunteers and the staff of the Citizens Information Service. Indeed in the context of this research, the concern expressed, by volunteers and staff across the CIs and CIB, with the provision of the highest possible quality of service to citizens at the point of need is testament to this. Similarly, the concept is relevant to the clients (as citizens) which these volunteers and staff seek to serve.

We propose that CIB consider the merits of placing the concept of citizenship at the heart of the identity of the Citizens Information Service. The concept of citizenship, in its balancing of rights and responsibilities, strikes a position between the paradigm of the voluntary agency and that of the State agency. Such an identity may offer a route to resolving aspects of the institutional dilemma referenced earlier (see 5.2.1) insofar as citizenship is held equally by all, staff, volunteers and clients, within the service. Citizenship not only places the concerns of the citizen as 'client' at the heart of the organisational endeavour, but serves also to recognise the appropriateness and legitimacy of the actions of the citizen as 'volunteer' within the service. Within an Irish context, the concept of citizenship is somewhat under-developed in public discourse, yet it is likely to become of increasing importance as Irish society searches for social and economic solutions. Thus, for the Citizens Information Service, placing citizenship at the heart of its public identification may serve to tap a post Celtic Tiger spirit as our public discourse moves to re-

articulate the nature of the relationship between the citizen and the State.

Positioning the concept of citizenship at the heart of the organisational identity of the Citizens Information Service potentially has multiple advantages for the Service including:

- » Articulating a clear basis for shared meaning between the public and voluntary elements of the Citizens Information Service to providing access for citizens to public and social services.
- » Presenting a vision for the role of the volunteers within the context of the CIs relative to the provision of a quality service.
- » Generating a clear and distinct brand identity with relevance and attraction (we would argue) to both internal and external stakeholders.
- » Articulating the multi-faceted role of the Citizens Information Service in the mediation of the relationship between the individual and the State.
- » Positioning volunteering, not as an act of altruism, but as an act of active citizenship, which serves to reframe the volunteer-organisation relationship and removes any notion of volunteering (where such exists) as being service of a higher moral order than paid employment. In so doing, it implies quality of service provision as the only valid measurement of the value of volunteer action in the service.
- » As a corollary to the point directly above, serving to identify the organisational responsibility to the active citizen in terms of supporting their capacity to volunteer effectively within the service and indeed to increase their capacity over their volunteer biography. We see this as being consistent with the State's concern with the promotion of the concept and practice of active citizenship.

We proposed that positioning the concept of citizenship as an important element in the organisational identity of the Citizens Information Service is consistent with the intention set out in the CIB Strategic Plan 2009-2012 to 'actively play our part in achieving the Government's vision for a more citizen-centred

public service - building on our considerable experience so far' (CIB 2009: 10). It is consistent also with Strategic Priority 3, as set out in the CIB Strategic Plan 2009-2012, namely, 'to serve as a pivotal and trusted intermediary between citizens and public services' (CIB 2009: 20).

### 5.3.3 Strengthening the national identity of the Citizens Information Service

In this scenario the Citizens Information Service is seen to be for citizens, informed by citizens, run by citizens<sup>76</sup>. With such an identity, the Citizens Information Service is placed within the public imagination as an example of an organisational expression of citizenship in practice. This supports the transition within the service from local loyalty to national identity.

The strengthening of a sense of national identity throughout the Citizens Information Services supports the development of a nationally recognised brand identity for the Citizens Information Service. The generation of a nationally recognised brand opens the opportunity for the development of, and is a necessary prerequisite for, the recognition of that brand as a quality mark in and of itself. This offers one solution to the issue of distinguishing the Citizens Information Service from other information services available to the public.

The strengthening of the national identity of the Citizens Information Service is consistent with the intention expressed under Priority 5 of the CIB Strategic Plan 2009-2012, namely, to 'strengthen the Citizens Information and MABS brands and identities both internally and externally' (CIB 2009: 29).

### 5.3.4 Re-envisioning the role of volunteers

The ongoing and fuller involvement of volunteers in the delivery of a national information and advice mission will require a re-envisioning of the potential role and contribution of volunteers beyond the focus on information and advice provision, administrative services and board membership. The importance of the present contribution and future potential contribution of volunteers needs to be articulated at national level as well as at local level. Part of this re-articulation

at national level should include an understanding that the inherent value of volunteering is subservient to the value of service standard. This opens the basis for the articulation of the criteria for the operational assignment or re-assignment of volunteers, the conclusion of a volunteer's service in a particular operational area, or the declining of an offer of service from a particular volunteer. Or, to put it another way, there is absolutely no contradiction in the idea of a volunteer-delivered service and the delivery of a service to a 'professional' standard.

We note that CIB has invested substantial resources in recent years in relation to the development of operational systems and standards. While this investment is vital, it will be hampered in its capacity to generate consistent standards of provision across a volunteer cohort without clear and explicit commitment on the part of this cohort.

This attention to quality of service provision and the role of the volunteer in its delivery is consistent with, and serves to legitimise, the various ways of structuring human resources across the range of CISs. Hence CICs which do not include volunteers, CICs which include some volunteers and CICs which are volunteer dominant are all appropriate means of service delivery subject only to meeting service quality standards. In this context we would note the frequently expressed view within the focus groups that a CIC functions best with the combination and partnership of volunteers and paid information providers.

While in practice a range of roles within the Citizens Information Service are performed by volunteers, the volunteer as face-to-face information provider remains the dominant volunteer mode within the service. In Chapter One we saw that volunteers involved in information provision in Northern Ireland, England and Scotland played a number of varied roles in the service. Framing the idea of the volunteer within the Citizens Information Service as engaged and active citizen, moves the attention away from the volunteer as information provider and instead is consistent with, and makes sensible the volunteer acting in multiple roles. Such multiple roles need to be specifically

<sup>76</sup> The term citizen provides a single identity for the volunteers and the staff of the CISs/CICs and the CIB.

articulated and promoted, and could include, but not be limited to, volunteers acting as:

- » *Receptionist and administrator:* Volunteers are already active in these roles in some CISs. In others, CIS volunteers are specifically 'restricted' to these roles.
- » *Information provider:* While this remains the typical volunteer role within the service, the increasing performance demands of the role are requiring increased volunteer commitment to personal skill development. Given this, there may be merit in considering the value of recognising this role at two levels, that of *Information Provider* and *Advanced Information Provider*; where advanced information providers had completed specific training requirements. This distinction would serve to emphasise organisational recognition of training achievement and skill development pathways.
- » *Outreach worker:* The increased attention to serving the information needs of vulnerable groups are leading some CISs to become involved in outreach work. While some groups in the population may be under-represented within the client population, other groups in the population are not in a position to travel to a CIC to access information and advice in a face-to-face mode, for example, people house-bound, in hospital, in nursing homes or other institutions. Volunteers could perform roles in the development and delivery of outreach services to such groups.
- » *Volunteer co-ordinator:* In CISs with large numbers of volunteers the simple act of co-ordinating their shift arrangements to ensure appropriate staffing of the CIS can be time consuming for the relevant Development Manager. The potential capacity of a volunteer to perform this scheduling role should be considered. This question is discussed further at 5.3.6 below.
- » *IT support worker:* the Citizens Information Service is increasingly reliant on information technology systems for the effective running and management of the service. While this is evident within the work of the information providers and their increasing use of the web as an information portal, it is also seen in developments in internal communication within the service, for example, the Oyster

System. Consideration should be given to the potential role of volunteer information technology support workers who would assist CIS staff in their operation of the necessary information technology systems.

- » *Board Member:* The role of Board Member is an important position in the governance and further development of the Citizens Information Service as a whole. This importance and the attention it requires from individual Board members would be advanced by signalling the role as standalone rather than additional to other roles (see 5.3.9 below).
- » *Advocacy worker:* The capacity of volunteers to act as advocacy workers is contested within the Service. The main themes in this debate relate to a discussion of (a) the capacity and interest of the present volunteer cohort to carry out the role effectively and (b) the capacity of any individual to perform the role as a volunteer *per se*. The skills and time required in the performance of the role need to be considered relative to present and potential future volunteers (see 5.3.10 below).
- » *Social policy worker:* The capacity and interest of volunteers, either members of the present cohort or potential future volunteers to support the social policy remit of CIB should be considered within the context of this re-envisioning exercise (see 5.3.11 below).

In identifying, describing and promoting these roles, care should be taken to ensure that the impression of a hierarchy of volunteer roles is not created. Such an impression would be a disservice to the Citizens Information Service and an injustice to the individual volunteer. The measurement of the value of the contribution of any given volunteer should reflect firstly and primarily, the professionalism they bring to the performance of their given role and secondly, the personal value they draw from their volunteering.

It is appropriate that the promotion and development of volunteering within the Citizens Information Service, together with the consideration of the possible roles volunteers may perform within the service, should be done in a manner which is consistent with the ideals of equality and of the valuing of diversity which

are inherent in the concept of citizenship. In particular, in view of the principle articulated in the CIB 2009–2012 Strategic Plan to 'prioritise the needs of particularly vulnerable people and customise service to meet their needs' (CIB 2009: 11), and, in consideration of CIB's recognition that 'social inclusion is a clear Government priority with an extensive and wide agenda' in which it has an important role to play (CIB 2009: 7), consideration should be given to how the development of volunteering within the Citizens Information Service might be pursued in a manner which is consistent with and supportive of these wider organisational goals.

### 5.3.5 Instituting a volunteer development strategy

In the context of volunteers continuing to form a core part of the human resource utilised in the delivery of the Citizens Information Service, CIB should consider constituting volunteering as a core part of the value basis of the Citizens Information Service. In so doing CIB should seek to bring together and to integrate both the top-down and the bottom-up dynamics within the service. In practice this requires that CIB leads the institution of a volunteer development strategy within the Citizens Information Service. The core aim of this strategy should be to create a consistency between the strategic aims of CIB as expressed in the CIB 2009–2012 strategic plan and the development of the volunteer cohort within the Citizens Information Service.

One of the aims of a national approach to a volunteer development strategy should be to create a sense of community across the volunteer cohort as a whole. In this manner the individual volunteer should be encouraged to consider themselves a member of a national cohort of volunteers. The creating of a national identity for the Citizens Information Service based on the idea of citizenship, as discussed at 5.3.2 and 5.3.3 above can only serve to facilitate this. Such an identification with the national, on the part of the individual volunteer, serves also to support the increased sharing of knowledge and experience among volunteers across the service. It also supports an increased understanding, on the part of the individual volunteer, of the face-to-face information service as an integral part of a three-channel approach

to the delivery of an information, advice and advocacy service to the citizens of Ireland.

The development of a stronger relationship between CIB and the individual volunteer will be pivotal to the creation of a sense of national volunteer cohort. It is important to clarify that such a relationship is not concerned with line management but rather is concerned with articulating the meaning of volunteering with the Citizens Information Service and with developing pathways to volunteering within the service.

In instituting a volunteer development strategy within the Citizens Information Service, it is particularly important that it is clearly articulated that the function of a volunteer development strategy is to act as a resource to the achievement of operational and organisational goals across the service. In this context, the operational goals as set out in the CIB Strategic Plan 2009–2012 are paramount and take precedence. It is important also that a volunteer strategy should be fully consistent with the principles which frame the CIB strategic plan and supportive of the organisational goals in relation to supporting vulnerable constituencies and the social inclusion agenda.

The shaping of a volunteer development strategy may be considered to have two dimensions. Firstly, there is an operational dimension which is directed towards volunteer development to support the implementation of the CIB strategic plan. The second dimension involves attending to the experience of volunteers within the Citizens Information Service. These two dimensions are discussed below.

### 5.3.6 An operational dimension

#### Volunteer database

CIB should consider the necessity for and the advantages of creating a volunteer database for the Citizens Information Service. At present CIB has little ongoing information regarding the volunteers within the Service and no means of directly communicating with all the volunteers within the Service. The creation of such a database is consistent with the increased utilisation of Information Technology within the Service. The ongoing development of the Oyster

System (a client relationship management system) within the service could be extended to this end. A CIB database of volunteers should be a vital tool in the initiation and operation of a volunteer development strategy and could serve:

- » To assist in the ongoing analysis of the volunteer cohort in the Citizens Information Service in terms of experience and skill sets, training needs, areas of interest, etc
- » To be utilised for ongoing communication and development of the relationship between the volunteer cohort, individual volunteers and CIB
- » To be utilised for the sharing of experience and knowledge among the volunteer cohort by means of an electronic newsletter - with ongoing information regarding roles, training, case studies of volunteer bios within the CIS
- » To assist in the institution of procedures for the vetting of volunteers.

#### **Re-visit potential roles of volunteers**

The information which could be provided from a volunteer database could inform the re-envisioning of the potential roles of volunteers within the service as discussed at 5.3.4 above. Specifically, it would indicate the gap (if any) between the capacities of the present volunteer cohort and the range of potential volunteer roles identified as possible and desirable. Such information would be a necessary pre-requisite to designing the type of training and recruitment programmes needed to support the operation of a volunteer development strategy.

#### **Changing environment**

The Citizens Information Service operates in a dynamic and changing environment. In this context the subject matter of the demand for information and advice can vary dramatically relatively quickly. For instance, the increase in the number of foreign nationals in Ireland brought a distinct client group, often with a specific and particular set of information and advice needs, to the Citizens Information Service. More recently the rapid rise in unemployment has resulted in a substantial increase in employment /unemployment related queries, often of considerable complexity. The deployment of volunteers within the service,

and particularly the capacity to target new volunteers with specific skills enables rapid adjustment to changing information and advice needs. A volunteer database, by providing detailed information on the training, skills and experience of volunteers, would assist in the managing and directing of this response.

#### **Recruitment of volunteers**

At present the practice of recruitment into the Citizens Information Service is locally based and may not be that well targeted. This research has provided anecdotal evidence from the focus groups and the face-to-face interviews that:

- » There is an increased interest in volunteering for the Citizens Information Service
- » Increased demands by CISs on potential volunteers at the point of recruitment in relation to volunteers' commitment to specific training and increased hours of service is being met in instances with a positive response
- » The profile of prospective volunteers is changing, with younger and more educated individuals seeking experience in particular types of work. While such individuals may offer shorter volunteering periods (linked to unemployment for example) they may bring a very specific skill set to their volunteering

Consideration should be given to how a national volunteer recruitment programme might assist the strategic recruitment of volunteers to an increased range of roles within the Citizens Information Service. Such a national volunteer recruitment programme would leverage the national identity discussed at 5.3.3 above, would reflect the re-envisioning of volunteer roles discussed at 5.3.4 above, and would seek to build a volunteer cohort consistent with the human resource requirements for the implementation of the CIB Strategic Plan 2009–2012.

#### **Training programme**

At present the Training Programme offered by CIB acts as a developmental support to CISs. The Programme is designed to cater to the varied training needs of both volunteers and paid staff within CISs. The shape and curriculum of the Programme is informed by requests from the CISs and by feedback from

Programme participants. The CISs also have their own in-house training. This varies in extent across the CISs. Indeed some CISs have such a commitment to their own training that they appear to be limited in their accessing of the CIB Training Programme. Such an approach does not support the establishment of standardised skills and service delivery across the network of the Citizens Information Service. The absence of established national training requirements makes implementation of national service standards more difficult.

CIB should consider the development and implementation of an enhanced training programme consistent with the institution of a strategy for the development of volunteers for multiple roles within the Service and a needs analysis of the CISs. The design of such a Programme would be influenced by the re-envisioning discussed at 5.3.4 above and informed by the volunteer information database. Such a Training Programme would move from being a support to the CISs to being a key element in the planned strategic development of the Citizens Information Service.

In the context of an enhanced Training Programme, we note that the Information Providers Programme has been referenced by information providers (volunteer and paid) in this research, as a valuable foundation or route to a group identity and to the sharing of experience and knowledge regarding the performance of the role (Chapter Four, section 4.1.5). We suggest that an enhanced Training Programme, consistent with the institution of national standards for role performance, would assist in supporting identification with the Citizens Information Service at the national as well as the local or regional levels.

### 5.3.7 The volunteer experience

The second dimension to be taken in account in the shaping of a national volunteer strategy is the nature of the individual's experience in the act of volunteering for the Citizens Information Service. Volunteering is, by definition, a voluntary action, and its continuance depends on the individual's perception of the benefits they derive from their volunteering experience. In Chapter One, the community and biographical

orientations in volunteering were noted. These orientations are not mutually exclusive and any individual volunteer may combine elements of both in their own volunteering orientation. While the evidence from the volunteer focus groups indicated the importance of the community orientation within the present cohort of volunteers, the biographical orientation was voiced as well. In developing a volunteer development strategy, attention requires to be given to ensuring the positive experience of volunteers within the Citizens Information Service. It may be noted in passing that the biographical orientation finds an echo in the principle of applying a life-cycle to the planning and delivery of services, as set out in the CIB Strategic Plan 2009-2012. The following recommendations are designed to address both community and biographical orientations.

#### **Part of a national cohort**

The generation of an enhanced national identity for the Citizens Information Service, as discussed at 5.3.3 above constitutes an important element in forging a sense among volunteers that they belong a national cohort of volunteers.

#### **Recognition of voluntary service**

Such identification with a national endeavour needs to be supported by some system of recognition of voluntary service. A national voluntary service recognition system for the Citizens Information Service should be tailored to the kind of volunteering which is sought in the national volunteer development strategy. In this manner the recognition system enhances the delivery of the volunteer strategy.

#### **Volunteer e-zine**

The generation of a sense of belonging to a national cohort of volunteers may be enhanced by the provision of ways for volunteers to share their experience and knowledge within this community. This may be facilitated by instituting a volunteer e-zine on the back of the establishment of a volunteer database. Such an e-zine could act as a vehicle for the publication of client case studies, the provision of up-to-date information of service figures, highlighting the service of particular volunteers, giving publicity to pilot initiatives in the service, the link between the volunteer and the CIB social policy advice

role and so on. Such a communication tool for volunteers could be developed within the context of the general intranet for CISs which is planned.

### **Volunteer biography**

A national volunteer development strategy which increases the range of volunteer roles and widens the demographics of the volunteer cohort will serve also to increase the range of patterns of volunteer biography within the Citizens Information Service. In practice, good communication regarding increased training and role variation will enable volunteers to envisage and plot their own biography within the service. Similarly, it may also serve as a route to supporting a volunteer to close out their commitment. In the longer term, a volunteer development strategy should consider how, within the service, an individual's 'volunteer biography' might be managed and promoted. The likely outcome of such an approach should be a longer commitment together with increased skill development among new volunteers to the Service, than would otherwise be the case.

### **5.3.8 Implementing this strategy in structural reform**

The implementation of a national volunteer development strategy will require the commitment of specific and sustained resources. Such a strategy will only have effect within the complex organisational structure of the Citizens Information Service if positional responsibilities are assigned across the various organisational units of the Service. Therefore, consideration needs to be given regarding how such responsibilities might be expressed and assigned across the organisational levels of CIB and the CISs. While it is not appropriate for such organisational matters to be dealt with before the development of a national volunteer strategy, the following observations may be of value:

- » The institution, development and oversight of a CIB national volunteer development strategy for the Citizens Information Service require the assignment of responsibility at a senior level within the CIB Executive. Such a responsibility might necessitate the creation of a separate post with associated support staff and budget line. This group might constitute a Volunteer Development Team. If

a national volunteer recruitment strategy was initiated, this task could be held within the same set of responsibilities.

- » The development of an enhanced Training Programme to support the operation of a CIB national volunteer strategy could be placed within the responsibility of the present Training Team within CIB, subject to the necessary resources and close collaboration with the Volunteer Development Team. Such an enhanced Training Programme should play close attention to the distinct training requirements required by the development of new volunteer roles within the Citizens Information Service.
- » The implementation of a volunteer development strategy depends on close collaboration with the CISs, and through the CISs with the CICs. The management of a volunteer development strand within the CIB – CISs relationship will increase the workload of those in CIB tasked with over-sight and functioning of this relationship.
- » At the CIS level, and particularly in those CISs with a large volunteer cohort, the institution of a national volunteer development strategy will require the assignment of specific responsibilities within the CIS staff. As under such a strategy the task of managing and developing the volunteer input will assume increased strategic importance for an individual CIS, it is important that the Development Manager see this task as a core part of their duties.
- » At CIC level the co-ordination and development of volunteers can become over-burdensome where there are large volunteer numbers. There are differing views on the capacity of volunteers to act in a volunteer co-ordination role. These differing views are likely to be experientially based and linked to the number of volunteers within a given CIC. Consideration should be given to the institution of the role of volunteer co-ordinator within those CICs where the numbers of volunteers make such a post a requirement. Where possible, the placing of a volunteer in this role should be promoted and the task of volunteer service scheduling constituted as a distinct volunteer role in itself.

### 5.3.9 The performance of staff and governance roles by volunteers

The present practice of having acting volunteer information providers serving on the Boards of CISs can place them and their Development Managers in a difficult position. While the argument for the voice and perspective of volunteers to be heard at Board level is well and appropriately made, this requirement neither necessitates, nor is it well served, by an individual performing Board and staff roles at the same time. During the interviews with key informants from Volunteer Centres, who have expertise in the area of volunteer management, it emerged that best practice dictates that volunteers should not play such dual roles. We recognise that the practice has precedents in a number of other areas of organisational life but wonder if the challenge facing Development Managers of dealing with both volunteers and paid staff in the same roles is not nuanced enough already. We would also note that the argument might be made that the governance role needs a substantial commitment on the part of a volunteer. We recommend therefore that the practice of volunteers serving both staff and governance roles at the same time be reviewed.

### 5.3.10 Volunteers and the development of advocacy services

CIB has a statutory responsibility to 'support the provision of, or directly provide, advocacy services for people with disabilities' (CIB Strategic Plan 2009-2012: 22). In recent years, the demands on the service have increased in number and complexity, particularly in relation to advocacy and CIB have put in place a number of initiatives to enhance this service for clients. These include the Advocacy Resource Officer (ARO) Pilot Programme which has been in operation since 2005 and the Community and Voluntary Advocacy Programme for People with Disabilities. An evaluation of the ARO Pilot Project was completed in 2008<sup>77</sup> and building on recommendations from this report a new advocacy support programme has been developed to cover all CISs and is planned for implementation in 2010. This programme, however, will mainly concentrate on paid

information providers. The evaluation report recommended that some volunteers may wish to engage in advocacy work and may have the skills to do so and that in such instances training and appropriate supports should be provided.

The national volunteer development strategy should include attention to how the development of advocacy services may be supported through the involvement of volunteers. The changing pool of potential volunteers in the present environment, combined with the re-envisioning of the roles volunteers may perform, presents the opportunity for a substantial volunteer involvement in the provision of advocacy services. It may be that the present operational structure within the Citizens Information Service, based as it is upon CICs as the basic service providing unit, is not best suited to the organisation of the skills required for higher level advocacy. Consideration should be given to organising advocacy services at a CIS, regional or national level. This is in line with recommendations from the evaluation report where the potential for AROs to become part of a national panel of support for the CIS network was highlighted and the need, in the longer term, for a number of specialist advocates who would take on particularly complex cases (Browne et al. 2007).

### 5.3.11 The social policy role

CIB has a statutory responsibility to support, promote and develop the provision of information on the effectiveness of current social policy and service to highlight issues which are of concern to users of those services. The changing pool of potential volunteers in the present environment, combined with the re-envisioning of the roles volunteers may perform, presents the opportunity for the development of a substantial volunteer involvement in the delivery of CIB's social policy role. Although the Oyster System is used presently by volunteers to submit information which is analysed later relative to issues of social policy, the feedback from the volunteer focus groups indicates that many volunteers have little sense of their relationship with CIB's social policy role. The use of volunteers in such a role could support CIB's intention to 'develop our approach to learning from client experiences to produce objective, fact-based evidence', and help inform 'public sector

<sup>77</sup> Browne et al (2007). *Advocacy Resource Officer Pilot Projects: Final Evaluation Report*. Dublin: Citizens Information Board

bodies to understand emerging service needs and issues with regard to rights and entitlements within their remits' (CIB 2009: 22).

### 5.3.12 Piloting the change process

The implementation of the changes directed at the institution of a national volunteer development strategy for the Citizens Information Service should take cognisance of the present diversity within the service structure and operations. Consideration should be given to the use of pilot projects, run in partnership between CIB and appropriate CISs. Such an approach would serve to institute change in the first instance where such change was most welcome. It would serve also to tap into the local orientation and innovative leadership of the CIS and take advantage of the current variation in CISs. Where pilot projects are instituted it is important that examples of programme success and the associated learning are communicated throughout the service. Any local or regional competitiveness which arises can serve to advance the demand for the extension of the programme. In the context of pilot programmes, it may be that advocacy and social policy related initiatives, utilising volunteers, offer useful starting points by virtue of being additional to the services presently offered.

### 5.3.13 Sources of expertise

We note that there are a number of agencies in Ireland who have gained some expertise in the development and management of volunteers and specifically identify Volunteering Ireland and Volunteer Centres Ireland in this context. Beyond the Republic of Ireland, the Volunteer Development Agency in Northern Ireland and various agencies in Britain all have longer organisational histories and institutional experience, which has resulted in the development of good practice standards in the management of volunteers. In the context of framing a volunteer development strategy appropriate to the operational needs of the Citizens Information Service, consideration should be given to sources of expertise in the practice and management of volunteering in Ireland and abroad.

## 5.4 Conclusion

Under the leadership of the Citizens Information Board, acting in the furtherance of its statutory obligations, the Citizens Information Service has developed into a well regarded national service. The extensive network of CISs is united by a commitment to service delivery and ongoing development. This work is strongly supported by the volunteers in the service, and in some instances is greatly dependent on volunteers for delivery.

The environment in which the Citizens Information Service operates is very dynamic. The present economic recession, as well as the previous economic boom, has given rise to an increasing demand for and complexity of, citizens information services which present challenges.

These environmental challenges are being met by a strategic focus on placing the citizen at the centre of the organisational endeavour. This focus places increased emphasis on co-ordination across the service and on working in partnership. At an operational level this is leading to the development of universal standards of service delivery and evaluation, as well as attention to the institution of new programmes of service in the area of advocacy.

Voluntary action and volunteering has played a core role in the historical development of the service. This voluntary action has had a strong local identity in many instances. The continuing importance of such voluntary action in the future delivery and development of the service may be considered as a matter of principle and necessity.

The capacity of such voluntary action to perform an ongoing role in the further development of the Citizens Information Service, as it addresses its goals of quality and consistency of service, is likely to be weakened, if the orientation and direction of such voluntary action is limited to the local context.

We suggest that maintaining voluntary action as a key element in the delivery of increased and upgraded services requires an integrated series of actions aimed at:

- » Articulating an organisational identity for the Citizens Information Service as a national service which encompasses CISs and CIB, volunteers, paid staff and clients.
- » Generating a shared meaning across the service delivery partners that clarifies the operational steps needed to deliver on shared mission and goals, particularly in relation to service quality within a citizen-centred approach. This shared meaning should be maintained through improved communication throughout the service.
- » Developing and instituting a national volunteer strategy, designed to support operational requirements, that is characterised by multiple roles, targeted recruitment, specialised training and attention to volunteer biographies.

Such action should be framed and carried in a manner which is consistent with, directly supportive of, and subservient to the Key Priorities<sup>78</sup> and associated operational goals of the Citizens Information Board, as set out in their Strategic Plan 2009-2012, namely:

- » To ensure that we deliver seamless access to information, advice and advocacy services across all delivery channels to meet citizens' needs
- » To ensure that our service users receive consistently high quality services that meet their individual needs and requirements
- » To serve as a pivotal and trusted intermediary between citizens and public services
- » To ensure that we are organised to deliver quality service to our clients, with clear referral pathways between channels while demonstrating value for money

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78 Four of the five strategic priorities as identified in the CIB Strategic Plan are directly relevant here. A fifth priority is directed towards the functioning of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service and, as such, is not directly relevant to the discussion here.



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# Appendices

## Appendix A:

# Additional services provided by the Citizens Information Board

### Regional services and specialised services

The development of information services throughout the country is co-ordinated and managed by the Citizens Information Board's five regional service teams. These teams are based in Cork, Galway, Kilkenny, Dublin and Tallaght (Dublin 24). The Citizens Information Board offers support in relation to organisational development, company law requirements, strategic planning, budget plans, financial reporting, HR management, premises issues and monitoring and evaluation of service delivery. Citizens Information Board representatives attend CIS board meetings. The Citizens Information Board provides boards with resource materials and guidelines such as handbooks for employers and staff, and a *Volunteer Resource Pack*.

The Citizens Information Board also gives financial support to a range of national and voluntary organisations that provide information in specialised areas<sup>79</sup>. Citizens Information Services facilitate the availability of other specialist services for their customers through providing clinics in partnership with other organisations such as Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS). Other CISs have clinics for Consumer Advice, the Equality Authority, Office of the Ombudsman and Threshold<sup>80</sup>.

### Other initiatives

*Joint working groups:* The Citizens Information Board's partnership with the network of CISs is key to delivering services nationwide. Joint working groups with representatives from the Citizens Information Board and CISs co-operate on specific issues related to the development of the network and service delivery.

<sup>79</sup> These include: Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC); DeafHear.ie, formerly the National Association for Deaf People (NAD); Refugee Information Service (RIS); The Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI); and Treoir.

<sup>80</sup> It should be noted that these specialist services are not offered by all CISs.

## Appendix B:

### A note about training in the Citizens Information Service

CIB is a FETAC registered provider and delivers an accredited training programme in information provision called 'Information Providers Programme' (IPP) which is designated at level six on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The programme is comprised of two locally devised modules; L32072 Information Advice and Advocacy Practice and L32073 Social and Civil Information. The aim of the programme is to equip information providers (paid and volunteers) with the skills, knowledge and attitudes in the provision of a free, impartial, confidential and non-judgemental information, advice and advocacy service to the public with regard to rights and responsibilities (Citizens Information Board 2009d). The Programme is delivered in three formats, taught (classroom), Distance Learning (using a CD-ROM) and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

RPL is the process through which an information provider can demonstrate that they already have the appropriate knowledge and skills to warrant recognition via certification. The programme is delivered at regional level in the three formats based on identified needs in consultation with Development Managers.

In response to the increased demand (from customers) for the provision of advocacy services CIB developed the Advocacy Practice Programme (APP) for Information Providers. This course is accredited as part of a *Continuous Development Certificate* which is validated by the Dublin Institute of Technology, and recognised at Level 7 on the National Framework of Qualifications. This Advocacy Studies course is undertaken by distance learning and requires a considerable commitment from participants over a two year time frame. The course provides practical in-depth training for experienced information providers. The first APP was delivered over eight training days in 2008 at different venues

throughout the country. Completion of the IPP is an essential entry requirement for the applicant and/or at least 2 years work experience as an information provider/advocate. To date the majority of participants in this programme have been paid staff.

In August 2009 an Induction Training Programme was produced and is now being used by Development Managers at local level to support a structured and consistent induction to the work of the Service.

## Appendix C:

### Introduction to the Centre and the work of a volunteer: checklist for Development Managers

Checklist	Covered
Explain Health and Safety procedures, Fire Procedures and location of fire extinguishers, exits etc.	
History of the organisation and how the service works on a day to day basis.	
Relationships between different roles within the Service (who is responsible for what, lines of communication, communications policy).	
Outline initial training schedule, training policy, probation period and organisation's expectations. Give clear guidelines on the role of the Volunteer.	
Confirm volunteer's hours and what to do if the person can't make their shift.	
Explain rate of expenses and procedure for claiming these.	
Explain phone system. Explain telephone policy and usage including recorded greetings, out of office message, call divert, message taking, telephone etiquette, dealing with clients on the phone.	
Outline filing system and reference material.	
Show stationery and supplies.	
Point out location of locally produced publications, leaflets, Annual Reports (both CIS and CIB).	
Procedures for written communications, use of standardised templates for letters.	
IT policy, Internet usage, (email usage guidelines if appropriate to role).	
Procedures for naming and storing documents on the file management system.	
Explain relationship with relevant external agencies, especially local agencies with which there is a lot of ongoing contact.	
Strategic and development plans and future direction of service.	
Supply Copy of Volunteer Handbook and when reviewed, have volunteer sign sheet regarding accepting procedures and confidentiality (if appropriate).	

## Appendix D:

### September to December Training Programme (2009)

Bullying and harassment – the employers responsibilities – Gorey
Dealing with challenging behaviour – Dublin
Dealing with employment law cases – a case study approach –Sligo
Delivering a quality customer service –Dublin and Cork
Developing an effective staff support and supervision programme – Carrick-on-Shannon
Enhancing reception and administration skills in an information centre – Dublin
Family law and relationships with a focus on the role of the information provider – Balbriggan
Family law – separation and divorce – Portlaoise
Family law and relationships – legal issues – Carlow
Finding your way around <a href="http://www.citizensinformation.ie">www.citizensinformation.ie</a> and getting to know its special features better – Dublin
Health Service Executive appeals and complaints – Delgany
Immigrants Rights and Entitlements – Dublin, Cork and Claremorris
Introduction to work permits and workplace rights – Kilkenny
Interculturism and service delivery – Limerick
Job loss and unemployment – a case study approach – Dublin, Cavan, Newbridge and Glasthule
Making presentations using Powepoint – Carrick on Shannon
Managing a domestic violence disclosure – Tullamore
Providing information, advice and advocacy to people with intellectual disability – Dublin
Public and private pensions – Dublin
Rent supplement, mortgage interest relief and other HSE payments – Thurles
Rights and entitlements of the unemployed – a case study approach – Claremorris, Limerick and Cork
Self employment, focus on welfare, start up, cessation and main taxation – Navan and Maynooth
Social policy in practice – Seminar – Dublin
Social welfare appeals - a practical approach – Dublin and Waterford
SWA payments including rent and mortgage interest supplement – Focus on habitual residence condition – Ardee and Dublin

## Appendix E:

# Online Volunteer Questionnaire

### Letter to volunteers

Dear Volunteer,

As you know a large number of committed volunteers provide information to the public in Citizens Information Centres all over the country. Currently over 1,000 CIS volunteers provide some 2,700 hours of direct service weekly.

The Citizens Information Board has commissioned research on the role and contribution of volunteers in CISs in order to understand the perspectives of volunteers more fully and to explore how volunteering can be developed and enhanced. The research will focus primarily on volunteers in day-to-day service delivery as distinct from those involved in voluntary membership of CIS Boards of Management.

A research team from the Centre for Non-Profit Management at Trinity College Dublin are carrying out the research. A Steering Group which includes representatives from the CIB, CISs and volunteers is liaising with the research team. We hope to circulate the findings in a research report by autumn 2009.

Volunteers are being asked to take this opportunity to express their views and participate in this research by completing a questionnaire. Findings from this questionnaire will provide a comprehensive picture of who the CIS volunteers are and their views on their roles in CISs. All information provided by you will be treated with strict confidentiality and it will not be possible to identify responses from any single participant. We are asking all volunteers to fill out a web-based questionnaire online. You can do this in your centre (your Development Manager will provide access to a computer) or from your home or other location with access to a computer (you will need an email address in order to do this). Replies from the questionnaire are returned directly to the researchers and will remain anonymous and confidential. If you are not in a position to fill out the questionnaire online an alternative paper copy will be provided for you.

The researchers will also carry out in-depth focus group discussions with a sample of CIS volunteers. These groups will be formed after the preliminary questionnaire results have been analysed.

If you have any questions about the research please don't hesitate to contact us. Thank you for your co-operation and assistance with this project. It is hoped that the outcomes of this research will add significant value to supporting the work of volunteers.

## NOTES BEFORE YOU BEGIN THE SURVEY:

- » Do not begin the survey unless you can complete it in one sitting.
- » That means that you must stay at your computer for 25 – 30 minutes.
- » If you close the survey when you go back to it you will need to begin the survey over again.
- » You can use the back arrow at the top of your computer screen to review your responses to a previous question BUT by doing this you will lose some of the information you have already entered.
- » It is best not to use the back button and to take your time with each question as you progress.

### Volunteering information

#### 1. This first section seeks to gather some general information about your volunteering experience in the CIS.

Please indicate the **Citizens Information Centre** that you currently volunteer in

.....

#### 2. Please indicate how long you have been volunteering with the CIS, (If you are unsure please give an approximate number of years)

- |   |                                      |  |                                    |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> less than one year | <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 years   | <input type="checkbox"/> 3-5 years     | <input type="checkbox"/> 6-9 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 10-14 years        | <input type="checkbox"/> 15-19 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 20 plus years |                                    |

#### 3. Please indicate on which basis you currently volunteer.

- |                                 |                                      |  |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weekly | <input type="checkbox"/> Fortnightly | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|

#### 4. Please indicate the average number of hours per week that you currently volunteer with the CIS.

Note: If you work on a fortnightly basis please indicate the number of hours per fortnight that you work.

- |                                     |                                    |                                    |  |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1- 2 hours | <input type="checkbox"/> 3-5 hours | <input type="checkbox"/> 6-9 hours | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 plus hours |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|

#### 5. Do you think that volunteers in the CIS should be asked to volunteer for a minimum number of hours every week?

- |                              |                             |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

Please give a reason for your answer .....

.....

#### 6. Would you like to increase the number of hours per week that you currently volunteer in the CIS?

- |                              |                             |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

If yes, is the CIS able to offer you the extra hours you would like? .....

## About the role and experience of the volunteer:

This section asks a number of questions that are related to your role and experience as a volunteer in the CIS.

### 7. The following are a number of reasons why people get involved in voluntary work.

Please indicate the importance of these reasons in YOUR decision to become a volunteer with the CIS.

Please use the numbers between 1 and 6 where 1 = 'least important' and 6 = 'most important'; n/a = not applicable

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a	
Least Important					Most Important		

You were asked to help out in the CIS.

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

You believe in the importance of the work carried out by the CIS.

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

You had some spare time and wanted to volunteer in some organisation.

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

You had volunteered in other organisations or groups and enjoyed the experience.

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

You had used the CIC service yourself and wanted to work there to help others.

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

You wanted to gain experience and skills and/or further your career opportunities.

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

### 8. Below are a number of statements about your understanding of the role of A VOLUNTEER in the CIS BEFORE you became a volunteer.

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the statements by using numbers between 1 and 6 where 1 = 'disagree strongly' and 6 = 'agree strongly'; n/a = not applicable

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a	
Disagree Strongly					Agree Strongly		

Before I began volunteering with the CIS they provided me with a clear understanding of the job that I would be expected to carry out.

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

I was told that I would be required to undertake specific training before I became a volunteer with the CIS.

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

Prior to becoming a volunteer I had to agree to take on specific training so that I would be able to carry out the job.

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

When I was accepted as a volunteer with the CIS someone sat down with me and explained the different roles, such as information provider, receptionist, that volunteers carry out in the CIS

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

**9. Below are number of statements about your perception about the support you received ONCE YOU BECAME a volunteer in the CIS.**

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the statements by using the numbers between 1 and 6 where 1 = 'disagree strongly' and 6 = 'agree strongly'; n/a = not applicable

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a	
<b>Disagree Strongly</b>					<b>Agree Strongly</b>		
I believe that the CIS view me as an unpaid member of staff who provides a service to the public.							
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a	
I currently get all the support I require to carry out my role as a volunteer in the CIS.							
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a	
I get regular feedback from other CIS staff on the work I carry out in the CIS which leads me to believe that my work contributes to the work of the CIS.							
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a	
I enjoy volunteering in the CIS but find the lack of appropriate facilities, for example, desk space and a computer, frustrating.							
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a	

**10. Below are number of statements about your perception OF YOUR CURRENT ROLE as a volunteer in the CIS.**

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the statements by using the numbers between 1 and 6 where 1 = 'disagree strongly' and 6 = 'agree strongly'; n/a = not applicable

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a	
<b>Disagree Strongly</b>					<b>Agree Strongly</b>		
I see my role as a volunteer as one of connecting the local community with the services provided by the CIS.							
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a	
My volunteering in the CIS is valued by other volunteers in the CIS.							
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a	
I feel that my volunteering in the CIS is valued by paid staff in the CIS.							
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a	
I feel that my volunteering in the CIS is valued by the customers who seek information.							
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a	

**11. The following are various skills that volunteers could bring to the CIS.**

Please indicate the level of skill that YOU think YOU have brought to the CIS by indicating your level of agreement with each statement. Please use the numbers between 1 and 6 where 1 = 'disagree strongly' and 6 = 'agree strongly'; n/a = not applicable

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
<b>Disagree Strongly</b>					<b>Agree Strongly</b>	
Having good interpersonal skills, being able to get on with other people.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Having the knowledge to access the information that is required by CIS customers.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Having knowledge and information relevant to social service and other entitlements.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Being able to access and navigate citizensinformation.ie and other relevant websites						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Being able to work as part of a team and being able to ask others in the CIS for support or back up when needed.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Having good computer and telephone skills in order to deal with telephone queries						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a

**12. Below are a number of statements highlighting the possible benefits that volunteers gain from volunteering.**

Please indicate the benefits that you think YOU have gained from volunteering by using the numbers between 1 and 6 where 1 = 'disagree strongly' and 6 = 'agree strongly'; n/a = not applicable

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
<b>Disagree Strongly</b>					<b>Agree Strongly</b>	
I have enjoyed my volunteering and have met new people and/or made new friends through volunteering in the CIS						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I have gained new skills by volunteering in the CIS						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I have an increased knowledge about services available to people						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I have gained experience that has enabled me to take on a job since I became a volunteer in the CIS						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I have gained more self-confidence and a sense of achievement through volunteering in the CIS						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I feel that I have contributed to society by volunteering in the CIS						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a

**13. Below are a number of benefits that the CIS could gain from having volunteers involved in its service.**

Please indicate the benefits that you think THE CIS has gained by using the numbers between 1 and 6 where 1 = 'disagree strongly' and 6 = 'agree strongly'; n/a = not applicable

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
<b>Disagree Strongly</b>				<b>Agree Strongly</b>		

Volunteers provide the C1S with an unpaid workforce.

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

Volunteers offer the CIS a means of connecting to the local community.

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

Volunteers manage the organisation through the boards of management and provide the organisation with legitimacy.

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

Volunteers bring specialist knowledge and skills to the CIS (e.g. taxation)

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
---	---	---	---	---	---	-----

**Training, support and recruitment:**

This section contains a number of questions that are related to induction, training, support and recruitment of volunteers in the CIS.

**14. Did you have to undergo a period of induction before you began to volunteer in the CIS?**

Yes  No

**15. Which of the following methods of induction have you received in the CIS? Please tick all that are relevant.**

- General induction (background to CIS, organisation structure, health and safety etc.)
- Trial period (period to try out volunteering role)
- Working with an experienced information provider
- Working under a supervisor

**16. Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the overall induction you received applicable**

1	2	3
<b>Not at all satisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat satisfied</b>	<b>Very satisfied</b>

**17. Which of the following forms of training are you currently undertaking (or have you undertaken in the past) in the CIS?**

- IPP FETAC taught accredited training
- FET AC distance learning programme
- Recognition of prior learning
- In house training on general topics
- Other, please specify .....

**18. Did you opt to take the IPP FETAC training or were you told it was compulsory?**

- Opted for IPP training
- Told IPP training was compulsory
- Other, please specify.....  
.....

**19. When did the IPP FETAC training take place?**

- Within the last 8 months
- Within the last year
- More than one year ago
- Don't remember

**20. How satisfied were you with the IPP FETAC training you received?**

1	2	3
Not at all satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied

**21. Do you feel that the amount of work required to complete the IPP FETAC training is ...**

1	2	3
Too little	Just about right	Too much

*These questions are with regard to training OTHER THAN the IPP FETAC accredited training.*

**22. When did this most recent training take place?**

- Within the last week
- Within the last month
- Within the last year
- Number of years ago

**23. Where did your most recent training take place?**

- At my local CIS
- Through Citizens Information Board training calendar
- Other, please specify .....
- .....

**24. How satisfied were you with the training (other than IPP FETAC) you received?**

1	2	3
Not at all satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Very satisfied

**25. Do you receive training on an ongoing basis?**

- Yes
- No

**26. Are there areas in which you feel you need further training in order to carry out your work in the CIS?**

Yes  No

If yes, please highlight the areas .....

.....

**27. Below is a list of possible supports that volunteers can expect to receive in the CIS.**

For each of the supports listed please indicate the level of support you have received in your CIS by ticking 'never', 'occasionally' or 'regularly' where indicated; n/a = not applicable

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Never</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Regularly</b>
Working as a pair with a more experienced person		
1	2	3
Mentoring from people with experience		
1	2	3
Regular staff meetings		
1	2	3
Part of a sub-group to deal with volunteer issues		
1	2	3
Newsletters and other communication methods		
1	2	3
Meetings with Development Managers		
1	2	3

**28. For each of the supports that you have received, please indicate your level of satisfaction by ticking 'not satisfied', 'somewhat satisfied' or 'very satisfied' where indicated; n/a = not applicable**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Not at all satisfied</b>	<b>Somewhat satisfied</b>	<b>Very satisfied</b>
Working as a pair with a more experienced person		
1	2	3
Mentoring from people with experience		
1	2	3
Working with a supervisor		
1	2	3
Regular staff meetings		
1	2	3
Part of a Sub-group to deal with volunteer issues		
1	2	3
Newsletters and other communication methods		
1	2	3
Meetings with Development Managers		
1	2	3

**29. Below is a list of possible barriers that could be important in a person's decision to become or remain a volunteer in the CIS.**

Please indicate how important YOU think each of these barriers are by using the numbers between 1 and 6 where 1 = 'least important' and 6 = 'most important'; n/a = not applicable

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
<b>Least Important</b>			<b>Most Important</b>			
Lack of support from other volunteers in the CIS.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Lack of support received from CIS paid staff.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Lack of adequate facilities such as a desk and computer available to all volunteers.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Lack of training to enable volunteers to give information to customers.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
The increased complexity of the information required and the increasing needs of customers						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Costs involved (for example. travel and food)						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Lack of stimulating work or activities						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a

**30. Below is a list of possible ways in which new volunteers could be recruited into the CIS.**

Please indicate your level of agreement with these methods by using the numbers between 1 and 6 where 1 = 'disagree strongly' and 6 = 'agree strongly'; n/a = not applicable

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
<b>Disagree Strongly</b>			<b>Agree Strongly</b>			
New volunteers could be recruited using targeted recruitment campaigns.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
New volunteers could be recruited by the CIS making appeals through other voluntary organisations.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Advertising locally is one way to recruit new volunteers.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
The CIS could use its outreach services to recruit new volunteers.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
New volunteers could be recruited by word of mouth from existing CIS volunteers.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Members of the board of management could invite people with specific skills (e.g. taxation) to volunteer						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a

### 31. Below is a list of possible incentives that could be used to encourage people to volunteer in the CIS.

Please indicate your level of agreement with these incentives by using the numbers between 1 and 6 where 1 = 'disagree strongly' and 6 = 'agree strongly'; n/a = not applicable

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
<b>Disagree Strongly</b>			<b>Agree Strongly</b>			
Volunteering in the CIS offers a social outlet for individuals.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Volunteering in the CIS is a way of showing support for the work that the CIS does.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Volunteering can help people to feel better about themselves and provide them with a sense of self-fulfilment						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
The CIS offers people the opportunity to gain further skills and training.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Volunteers in the CIS often have the opportunity to change their career path.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Volunteering in the CIS offers people the opportunity to help people in their local community.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a

### Accessing and sourcing information and information provision:

This section of the survey deals with your experience of accessing and sourcing information in the CIS.

### 32. Volunteers play a number of important roles within the CIS. Please indicate in which of the following roles the MAJORITY of YOUR volunteering time is spent?

Please tick ONE only.

- Information Provider
- Reception, Administration (accounts, filing, dealing with Visitors)
- Board Membership

### 33. Please indicate your level of knowledge in each of the service areas outlined below by using the numbers 1 to 4 where 1= 'I have least knowledge' and 4= 'I have most knowledge'.

1	2	3	4
<b>Have least knowledge</b>		<b>Have most knowledge</b>	
Information provision, which includes identifying problems, sourcing appropriate information and giving accurate information.			
1	2	3	4
Provision of advice, which includes exploring options with customers and directing customers to other sources of advice			
1	2	3	4
Provision of advocacy, which includes covering different types of advocacy such as negotiating on behalf of a customer and attending meetings on their behalf			
1	2	3	4
Social policy feedback, which includes identifying queries with a social policy dimension, identifying types of social policy issues and carrying out other types of social policy work.			
1	2	3	4

**34. The following is a list of sources that volunteers may need to use in providing information to customers. For each source listed please indicate how often you use this particular source of information.**

	<b>1</b> <b>Daily</b>	<b>2</b> <b>Weekly</b>	<b>3</b> <b>Monthly</b>	<b>4</b> <b>Less often</b>
Citizens Information Website (www.citizensinformation.ie)	1	2	3	4
Citizens Information Board publications (e.g. Employment Rights Explained)	1	2	3	4
Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS)	1	2	3	4
Expert Query Service from the Citizens Information Board	1	2	3	4
Specialist support from voluntary agencies who have particular information expertise (e.g. FLAC, Treoir, Immigrant Council)	1	2	3	4
Government publications (e. g. social welfare leaflets)	1	2	3	4

**35. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about volunteers' experience in accessing information from the internet in order to answer customer queries.**

Please use the numbers between 1 and 6 where 1 = 'disagree strongly' and 6 = 'agree strongly'; n/a = not applicable

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>n/a</b>
	<b>Disagree Strongly</b>			<b>Agree Strongly</b>			
I find it easy to access citizensinformation.ie and find the information I need to answer customer queries.	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I find it easy to access other websites and find the information I need to answer customer queries.	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I find it easy to access other websites but find it difficult to find the information that I need on the sites.	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I find it difficult to navigate other websites and often have to ask a colleague for help on the internet.	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I find it difficult to navigate other websites and often have to contact other organisations or agencies by phone in order to answer a customer queries.	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a

### 36. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about volunteers' experiences answering customer queries.

Please use the numbers between 1 and 6 where 1 = 'disagree strongly' and 6 = 'agree strongly'; n/a = not applicable

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Disagree Strongly			Agree Strongly			
I may not know the answer to the query but I can find it easily on the Citizens Information website.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
If I don't know the answer to a query I am happy to consult a colleague to find an answer.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Most of the time I am comfortable about my ability to answer queries.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I would like more support in order to be able to deal with difficult queries.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I would like more training in order to feel that I can answer common queries.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
If a customer needs advice or advocacy I feel comfortable in my ability to provide this.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I am happy and feel that I have all the skills and information that I need in order to deal with customer queries in the Centre.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a

### 37. Below is a list of possible sources that you could seek support from in answering queries on information issues for customers.

Please indicate the importance of each of these sources for YOU by using the numbers between 1 and 6 where 1 = 'least important' and 6 = 'most important'; n/a = not applicable;

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Least Important			Most Important			
Other volunteers						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
CIC or CIS staff						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Development Manager						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Citizens Information Phone Service (CIPS)						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Expert Query Service from the Citizens Information Board						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
Specialist support from voluntary agencies who have particular information expertise (e.g. FLAC. Treoir. Immigrant Council)						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a

**38. In the last few months all queries are being recorded with the Oyster System. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about the Oyster System. Please use the numbers between 1 and 6 where 1 = 'disagree strongly' and 6 = 'agree strongly'; n/a = not applicable**

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
<b>Disagree Strongly</b>			<b>Agree Strongly</b>			
I have received training in how to use the Oyster System and feel confident using the system.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I have not received sufficient training with the Oyster System so I still rely on the paper recording system.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I have received training on how to use the Oyster System but there is not always a computer available when I am volunteering so I have to rely on paper recording.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
The Oyster System is straightforward to use and makes recording queries easier.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
The Oyster System adds to my overall workload in the Centre.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I would like further training in how to use the Oyster System.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a

### Relationships and communication in the CIS

This section allows you to express your views about your experience of relationships and communication within the CIS.

**39. During the course of your work as a volunteer you will engage to some degree with the Citizens Information Board, Development Managers and other CIS staff and volunteers. Below are a number of statements about your relationships and communication. Please use the numbers between 1 and 6 where 1 = 'disagree strongly' and 6 = 'agree strongly'; n/a = not applicable**

1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
<b>Disagree Strongly</b>			<b>Agree Strongly</b>			
I believe that I am kept informed about developments in my CIS such as changes in the service and training opportunities that are available.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I am very involved in discussions about the future plans of my CIS.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I feel that if I am unhappy with any aspect of my work in the CIS there is someone that I can talk to.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
I feel there is a tension between the volunteers and some of the paid staff in the CIS.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a
The Development Manager in my CIS is in regular contact with the volunteers and keeps us informed about the service.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	n/a



**41. Are there any additional comments that you would like to make about the future direction of Citizens Information Services?**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Before you submit the survey we would appreciate if you could complete this final section and provide us with some background information about yourself.

**42. Gender**

Male  Female

**43. Age Range**

Under 25 years  25 - 44 years  45 - 65 years  66+ years

**44. Do you have dependent children?**

Yes  No

If yes, how many?.....

**45. Marital Status**

Single  Married  Living with partner  
 Widowed  Separated  Divorced

**46. Nationality**

Irish National  EU National  Non-EU National

**47. Please indicate the length of time you have been living in your current locality.**

Less than one year  1 - 3 years  4-10 years  11 plus years

**48. Current Employment Status**

Full-time employed  Part-time employed  Self-employed  Work at home  
 Full-time Student  Unemployed  Retired

**49. Highest Educational Qualification**

Primary Education  Group Certificate  
 Junior/Intermediate Certificate  Leaving Certificate  
 Third level (Diploma/Certificate)  Third level (Primary Degree)  
 Third level (Post graduate Degree)  Professional Qualification  
 Other, please specify.....  
.....

**50. Please indicate which of the following statement best describes your use of the internet and email at home.**

- I have access to a computer at home AND frequently use it to send emails, book tickets, get information or purchase items over the internet.
- I have access to a computer at home BUT seldom use it to send emails, book tickets, get information or purchase items over the internet.
- I do not have access to a computer or internet in my home.

**51. Finally, do you have special needs requirements to support your volunteering activities with the CIS?**

- Yes
- No

If yes, what are these needs and are these requirements being met? .....

.....

.....

.....

**Note: This is the last question. Please click on the continue button to submit your survey.**

**Thank you.**

## Appendix F:

### Number of volunteers in each CIS and each region (2009)

Region	CIS in Region	N (Total CIS Volunteers)	N (In each CIS)
<b>Region 1</b>	Blanchardstown/Dublin 15		15
	Dublin North West		9
	Dublin City Centre		1
	Co. Meath		17
	Co. Louth		20
	Co Monaghan		12
	Fingal (North County)		54
	Dublin City North Bay		10
	Northside		13
	Co. Cavan	165	10
<b>Region 2</b>	South Kildare		53
	Dublin 2, 4 and 6		0
	Clondalkin		3
	Co. Longford		3
	North Kildare		4
	Tallaght		0
	Crumlin		2
	Co Westmeath		23
	Ballyfermot		3
	Co. Laois		10
	Co. Offaly		32
	Dublin 8 & Bluebell CIS	164	0
	<b>Region 3</b>	Co. Carlow	
Co. Wicklow			76
Kilkenny			46
Co. Wexford			25
Dun Laoghaire/ Rathdown			83
Co. Waterford			49
Co. Tipperary		398	88
<b>Region 4</b>	Cork City (North)		47
	Co. Limerick		57
	North & East Cork County		94
	Cork City South		71
	Kerry		44
	West Cork		20
	Co. Clare	339	6
<b>Region 5</b>	Co. Sligo		11
	Co. Donegal		7
	Co. Mayo		10
	Galway		59
	Co. Roscommon		14
	Co. Leitrim	109	8
<b>Total</b>		<b>1,175</b>	<b>1,175</b>

## Appendix G:

### Additional tables

**Table 1: Period of induction by each region**

Period of induction	Region 1 %	Region 2 %	Region 3 %	Region 4 %	Region 5 %
<b>No</b>	54.2	17.1	34	17.7	31.6
<b>Yes</b>	45.8	82.9	66	82.3	68.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2: Kinds of training undertaken by each region**

Kind of training undertaken	Overall sample %	Region 1 %	Region 2 %	Region 3 %	Region 4 %	Region 5 %
In house training on general topics	87.6	86.4	87.5	86.4	88.5	92.1
Recognition of prior learning	19.7	18.6	15.3	19.5	17.7	34.2
IPP FETAC taught accredited training	13.7	11.9	19.4	17.8	6.3	7.9
FETAC distance learning programme	10.1	10.2	15.3	6.5	11.5	13.2

## Appendix H:

# Topic guides used in focus groups and key informant interviews

### 1. Topic guide for group discussion with CIS volunteers

#### Role and contribution of the volunteer in the CIS

##### Contribution

1. Understanding of the main role of the volunteer
2. Advantages and disadvantages of having volunteer information providers in CIS
3. Advantages and disadvantages of having volunteers working with paid staff
4. Contribution that volunteers bring to the day-to-day service
5. The overall significance of volunteer involvement in the day to day running of services

##### The skill/role 'match'

6. Skills of volunteers – best usage of current skills
7. Matching skills of volunteers to the four service areas – issues facing volunteers
8. Issues in trying to involve particular categories of volunteer (e.g. young men, specialist knowledge, and foreign national volunteers)
9. Volunteering as information providers vs. volunteering as member of Board

#### Challenges faced by involving volunteers

##### Volunteer challenges

10. Do volunteers feel they are sufficiently supported in their role?
11. Extent of clarity re: respective roles of volunteers and paid staff.
12. Training and support implications for the CIS of having volunteer information providers

13. Do volunteers in different centres share experiences re: volunteering e.g. how they are managed, the work they do etc.

#### External relations

14. Possible perceptions of public bodies/service providers towards volunteers and dealing with them as third parties
15. Distinctions if any between the experience of urban/rural centres and other variables that impact on volunteer engagement/participation.

#### Implementing a volunteer strategy in the CIS

16. CIS built on a strong volunteer ethos – how to ensure that this ethos continues to underpin the work of the CIS is going forward?
17. How to develop the contribution of volunteers?
18. Development of further supports for volunteers – what kind and how?
19. Recruiting and retaining volunteers – how and issues?
20. How can CIS ensure (1) equality (2) diversity and (3) social inclusion in respect of volunteer involvement?
21. Future perspectives of volunteers - where they see services going and their role in that scenario?

### 2. Topic Guide for group discussion with CIS Development Managers/paid staff

#### Role of the volunteer in the CIS –topics to be covered

1. Understanding of the main role of the volunteer

2. Advantages/disadvantages of having volunteer information providers
3. Advantages and disadvantages of having volunteers working with paid staff?
4. How could CIS develop/increase the recruitment of volunteers
5. Development of further supports for volunteers – what kind and how?
6. Issues in trying to involve particular categories of volunteer (e.g. young men, specialist knowledge, and foreign national volunteers)

### **Contribution of the volunteer in the CIS – topics to be covered**

7. Contribution that volunteers bring to the day-to-day service
8. Skills of volunteers – best usage of current skills
9. Matching skills of volunteers to the four service areas – issues facing managers
10. How to develop the contribution of volunteers
11. Volunteering as information providers vs. volunteering as member of Board

### **Challenges faced by involving volunteers – topics to be covered**

12. Recruiting and retaining volunteers – how and issues
13. Training and support implications of having volunteer information providers
14. Resource implications of managing volunteers and providing adequate supports for them?
15. Implementing a volunteer strategy in the CIS – what would be required?
16. How are CIS ensuring (1) equality (2) diversity and (3) social inclusion in respect of volunteer involvement?
17. CIS is built on a strong volunteer ethos – how to ensure that this ethos continues to underpin the work of the CIS going forward?

## **3 Face to face interviews were carried out with a range of CIB staff, key informants and other stakeholders**

### **General introduction for all topic guides**

The CIB has commissioned this research into the experience of volunteers and the utilisation of volunteers in the CIS. The primary research plan involves three main elements:

- (i) A survey of volunteers
- (ii) A series of focus groups with volunteers and CIS and CIB staff
- (iii) A number of face-to-face interviews with CIB staff, external stakeholders and key informants. This interview takes place as part of the third element of this research.

The survey of volunteers has produced data on the demographic make-up of the CIS volunteer cohort, their experience of volunteering in the CIS, their perception of their role and functioning, and their engagement with the various elements of the training programme. The focus group work has enabled a deeper exploration of these and related issues regarding:

- (i) The role and functioning of volunteers within the CIS
- (ii) Their relevance in the context of the challenges of increasing service demand and information complexity now facing the CIS
- (iii) The possible shape and management of the volunteer contribution to the future delivery of a national CIS.

### **Additional topic guides for interviews with CIB staff\***

The purpose of the face-to-face interviews is to deepen this process of investigation further. Interviews with CIB staff are directed at

- (i) Gathering the experience of CIB of its relationship with the CIS
- (ii) Understanding the impact of the dynamics of that relationship on the delivery of elements of the strategic mission of CIB.

\* Specific questions were addressed to the relevant staff

In the interview we wish to explore the following matters from a CIB perspective:

- » The nature, extent and basis of CIB's commitment to a volunteer-resourced citizen's information, advice and advocacy service.
- » The management challenges of increasing demand for and complexity of citizens' information, advice and advocacy, with particular reference to achieving specific standards and universality of provision via a volunteer human resource.
- » The nature and functioning of the relationship between CIB and the elements of the CIS with particular reference to issues of independence /dependence and the locus of responsibility for the development of service delivery and standards.
- » The functioning of the CIB/CIS relationship in the delivery of the objectives of the CIB strategic plan insofar as this was impacted on by the use of volunteers.
- » The CIB's view on the relative importance of the individual elements of the information, advice, advocacy, triad and the potential future role of volunteers in the delivery of these elements.
- » The management challenges of increasing demand for and complexity of citizens' information, advice and advocacy with particular reference to achieving specific standards and universality of provision via a volunteer human resource.
- » The relevance of utilising volunteers in the delivery of a citizens' information service in light of the Government's concern with the promotion of active citizenship.
- » The present role of volunteers in the future development and delivery of these services.
- » The potential role of volunteers in the development and delivery of citizen advice and advocacy services.
- » The type of supports and structures required to ensure the capacity and quality of an advice and advocacy service partially or wholly delivered by volunteers.

- » The CIB's experience of the take up of, and participation in, the IPP Training by volunteers.
- » The CIB's estimation of the motivation to volunteer and the impact of this motivation on the disposition of volunteers towards training opportunities.
- » The type of training supports and skill development required by volunteers to ensure their effective involvement in the ongoing delivery of a quality national information and advice service.
- » CIB's view of the range of potential 'volunteer life-cycles' with the Citizens Information Services.
- » The potential role of volunteers in the development of advocacy services and the type of training supports which might be required to support such volunteering.

#### **4 Topic guide for face-to-face interview with representative from Department of Social and Family Affairs**

##### **General introduction**

In the interview we wish to explore the following matters from a Departmental perspective:

- » The importance and extent of CIB's commitment to a volunteer resourced citizen's information service.
- » The nature and functioning of the relationship between the CIB and the elements of the CIS with particular reference to issues of independence /dependence and the locus of responsibility for the development of service delivery and standards.
- » The management challenges of increasing demand for and complexity of citizens' information, advice and advocacy with particular reference to achieving specific standards and universality of provision via a volunteer human resource.
- » The Department's view on the relative importance of the individual elements of the information, advice, advocacy, triad and the potential future role of volunteers in the delivery of these elements.

## 5 Topic Guide for face-to-face interview with representative from Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

### General introduction

In the interview we wish to explore the following matters from a Departmental and policy perspective:

- » The current state of policy thinking regarding the role of volunteering in Irish society.
- » The relevance of volunteering within the wider active citizenship policy discourse.
- » The view on the supports required for volunteer engagement and development.
- » The Department's view on the relative importance of the Citizens Information Service as a locus and vehicle for the expression of 'active citizenship.'
- » The extent of the interest in and commitment to the utilisation of a volunteer resource within the Citizens Information Service.

## 6 Topic Guide for telephone interview with Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Bureau (Northern Ireland)

Introduction and thanks for taking the time to talk to me. Brief summary of the research we are undertaking looking at the role and contribution of volunteers in the Citizens Information Service. Groups we are engaging with and key issues arising (historical context of development of CICs, training, quality issues and organisational structure and relationships).

Looked at the brief history of CAB on your website and other relevant information, perhaps you could clarify your organisational structure for me? Probe about relationships among the various organisational elements.

Have the CAB offices throughout the North emerged organically by volunteers out of a local need or were they set up by CAB out of an identified need?

Ask about funding structure - I see that you have a number of sources of funding, what are these and does your core funding still come from 'Department of Social Development' in Northern Ireland?

**Ask about** the 'Opening Doors' strategy that was announced in September 2007 – implications for the service of reduction in number of local councils considering these are key funders?

Implications for the service of the need to develop shared policies and strategies for training and development in the service – what about volunteers within the service?

Ask about information quality – refer to quality report 2008 – standards and guidelines developed since then? Framework for measuring quality?

Looking at the varied roles that volunteers can take up in the CAB (from website) I am mainly interested in the 'advisor' role - recruitment and training of advisors?

**Ask about:** training (existing older volunteers, pre-requisite and pre-advice giving?), minimum hours, minimum commitment, development of training across the bureaux, specific advocacy training?

What about the other roles that volunteers play – administrator, receptionist, IT support coordinator, campaigners

Trustee board members – induction process? Are volunteers on the Board also volunteers in the bureaux?

Recruitment and retention of volunteers – mixed cohort to represent all groups? Take up of training?

Management of volunteers – see from website that there was funding for two volunteer development officer posts in 2007 until June 2008 – have these roles been maintained or did they cease with funding? What about the role of volunteer co-ordinator – full-time paid staff member?

Strategy for the inclusion of volunteers in Citizens Advice Service? Do they have one? What does it entail?

## 7 Topic Guide for telephone interview with Chairperson of NACIS

(National Association of Citizens Information Services)

Explore the role of NACIS – what does it do and how does it do it?

Relationship of NACIS with CIB – what kind of relationship exists between the two organisations.

Other relationships of relevance for NACIS – particularly in CAB Northern Ireland

Volunteers – explore the role of volunteers in the CIS from the perspective of NACIS.

Also, discuss matching skills of volunteers to the service, targeted recruitment and management of volunteers

Issues around the use of volunteers – quality measurement, training, advocacy element of the service

Strategy for the involvement of volunteers in the CIS – explore what this should include particularly with regard to the four areas of service; information provision, advice, advocacy and social policy.

Explore issue of active citizenship and the contribution that CIB can make to this agenda.

The future of Citizens Information provision – explore.

## 8 Topic Guide for face-to-face interview with Volunteer Centres

Information giving is a very specific kind of volunteering - explore this idea with Volunteer Centre – also note here the historical context. [Also issue of quality measurement and professionalisation of the service]

Matching the skills of the volunteers to the four different aspects of the service, information provision, advice, social policy and advocacy – explore.

Targeted volunteering – explore value and use of this by CIS.

Challenges faced by involving volunteers in information provision?

Organisational structure of CIB and the implications of this for the management of volunteers? (Discuss BOM roles here also)

Resource implications of management of volunteers?

Any learning or practice models that could be of use to the CIS?

Strategy for involvement of volunteers in the service – how to develop and what kind of role should/ could volunteers play?

How can CIB contribute to the overall active citizenship agenda?



The Citizens Information Board provides independent information, advice and advocacy on public and social services through [citizensinformation.ie](http://citizensinformation.ie), the Citizens Information Phone Service and the network of Citizens Information Services. It is responsible for the Money Advice and Budgeting Service and provides advocacy services for people with disabilities.

#### Head Office

Ground Floor t +353 1 605 9000  
George's Quay House f +353 1 605 9099  
43 Townsend Street e [info@ciboard.ie](mailto:info@ciboard.ie)  
Dublin 2 w [citizensinformationboard.ie](http://citizensinformationboard.ie)

