



# **VOLUNTEERING AND ACCESS PANELS**

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**RESEARCH STUDY CARRIED OUT BY VOLUNTEER  
DEVELOPMENT SCOTLAND (VDS) ON BEHALF OF  
SCOTTISH DISABILITY EQUALITY FORUM (SDEF)**

**REPORT**

**30 November 2005**

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## BACKGROUND

In 1981, the Secretary of State for Scotland recommended that each Local Authority nominate an Access Officer and encourage the setting up of an Access Panel with the purpose of improving disabled peoples' access to the built environment. Since that time, Access Panels have been set up across many Local Authority areas in Scotland.

The key function of Access Panels is to improve disabled people's access to the built environment. Access Panels are generally regarded by building control officers, disabled people and other stakeholders as having an important role in promoting and facilitating a barrier free community, although they are not always visible to the wider community.

Scottish Disability Equality Forum (SDEF) exists to promote greater social equality by working to remove the disabling barriers to equal access for people affected by disabilities in Scotland. During 2003, SDEF was elected as the umbrella body for Access Panels in Scotland and now has an Access Panels Project which works to support the work of all Scottish Access Panels.

There are currently forty-five Access Panels in Scotland, all of which have been started up in the period since 1981. Some have changed to Access Panels having previously existed in other forms, and others have gone in and out of existence in that time. At this stage, not all Local Authority areas have an Access Panel and others have more than one due to the geographical spread of the area e.g. Aberdeenshire and the Highlands.

## INTRODUCTION

Volunteer Development Scotland (VDS) was commissioned by SDEF to undertake this research study into volunteering and Access Panels on their behalf. The study aims to look at the sustainability of Access Panels from the point of view of good practice in volunteers' management. The findings will inform the SDEF Access Panels Project in its work to set standards, offer support and information, and to help to develop the reputation of Access Panels as professionally run, volunteer led, sustainable centres of excellence.

There is a great deal of available information on volunteer management practices, which Access Panels can tap into to assist them in fully engaging with volunteering. Volunteering contributes to Scottish society in a variety of ways; from growth of the economy to building stronger communities. Volunteers should recognise the value of their contributions, and Access Panels can assist with this in the ways in which they engage.

## METHODOLOGY

The study fieldwork took place between May and September 2005 and made use of three research methods: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and group discussions.

At the time the study commenced, there were forty-three Access Panels in existence, thirty-four of whom chose to take part in the study. A return rate of 79% is high for questionnaire based research and indicates the willingness of the Access Panels to support and assist SDEF in its role.

Two questionnaires were used; one for Panel members and one for Panel chairs. The Panel chair questionnaires focused on the function of the Panel and how the Panel organised its work while the Panel member questionnaire focused on the experiences of individual Panel members; from how they became involved, through to their perceived training and skills needs. Chairs were asked to also fill in a Panel member questionnaire, to gauge their views as members of the Panels.

Some Access Panels returned the full set of questionnaires, while others contributed the chair questionnaire, or a few Panel members' questionnaires. Of those who did not return, some indicated that they would not be taking part and provided reasons for this, while others simply did not return the questionnaires. Shortly after the initial questionnaire deadline a second run of questionnaires was distributed to those who had not responded to encourage the return of the chair questionnaire, if nothing else, which would provide key facts about the Panels. This second run initiated a few extra responses.

Four case studies took place across Scotland, involving Panel members, Panel Chairs and Local Authority personnel. These took the form of semi-structured interviews, which were recorded and the transcripts sent to those who took part for approval. The case study areas were: Angus, Clackmannanshire, North Aberdeenshire and South Ayrshire. Angus was chosen to find out more about the impact of having premises on the panel's work. Clackmannanshire: to explore their being called 'access volunteers', North Aberdeenshire: to find out about its engagement with volunteers management practices and South Ayrshire: due to its relationship with the Local Authority. Case studies investigated questionnaire responses more thoroughly in addition to in-depth discussion on the specific circumstances of the Panel. The case study transcripts are not used in full in the report, instead a summary box of the key issues is included.

Initially, a variety of focus groups were planned in different geographical areas across Scotland. However, a lack of interest in attending these meant that an alternative event was arranged for all case study members and other interested parties to attend, where they could take part in discussions about the initial findings of the study. The content of these discussions was taken into account at the redrafting stage and helped form the conclusions and recommendations.

In addition, some background reading was carried out which considered previous study in the areas of volunteering, social capital and community planning, amongst others. Please see the bibliography for further details.

## PANEL WORK

### *Panel Function*

Despite sharing the similar goal of a barrier free community, the functions of the Panels vary considerably. Some Panels felt that their role was a campaigning one, some to respond to enquiries, some to carry out audits and others to advise the Local Authority on Access matters.

“Commenting on relevant planning applications, addressing area disability access issues”

“Auditing buildings, responding to requests from the public”

Some Panel functions were similar to that of a written mission statement while others were simply a list of activities undertaken:

“To secure, establish and maintain good access provision for disabled people throughout the area of Tweedale, regarding the built and open environment”

“The relief of stress and suffering of disabled persons in the South Ayrshire area through suitable access provision being made for all classes of disabled people”

“Pressure group for improving access, especially physical”

“The Panel offers informed comment to improve access to the built environment, access to approaches and access to information”

“Independent auditing of built environment. Inspections of relevant plans and comment on them”

It is important to note some of the words used by Panels in describing what they do: independent, informed, improve, and respond. These words indicate the professionalism of Panel work, the base of skills and knowledge of Panel members, and also demonstrate the professional attitude that Panels take to carrying out these important roles within the local community.

### *Current Work*

Some Access Panels are currently involved with specific campaigns or regular competitions in their local area. For example: Pavements are for People in South Ayrshire, Orchard Project in Clackmannanshire and Rod McFarlane award in Angus. Others are increasing their communication with stakeholders

by updating local Access guides; e.g. Isle of Lewis, Dundee and Shetland Panels; some providing Disability Awareness training and others developing websites; e.g. East Renfrewshire, Skye and Lochalsh and Nairn Panels. Some Panels have been raising awareness in the local community; e.g. Inverness, Tweeddale and West Lothian. In addition, some Panels are reacting to concerns and enquiries in their local area as they arise. Only one Panel state that it had no current projects, while one stated that its current project was trying to spend their Scottish Executive grant.

Panel members undertake a very wide range of tasks for their Panel. It is important to note that these tasks are usually in addition to attending regular Panel meetings. Tasks vary between Panels as they have different functions and therefore engage in quite different activities, all of which offer a variety of roles for members to undertake:

“Advising on Building Standards, commenting on general Access issues”

“Site meetings – where problems have been brought to us and we arrange meetings to see what can be done to solve the problem”

“Give advice based on experience and good practice recommendations. Raise awareness of local Panel and its value to this community and visitors to the area”

“Inspecting drawings of planning or building warrant public building submissions”

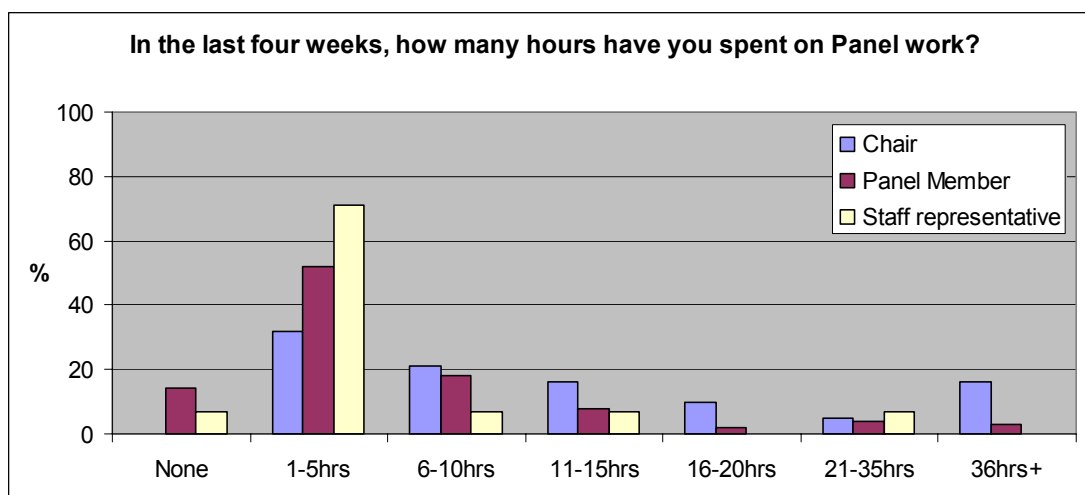
“Liaise with the local MS branch, bringing issues to the attention of the general public”

“Advisory, including site inspections and I hold the database of our members and our project”

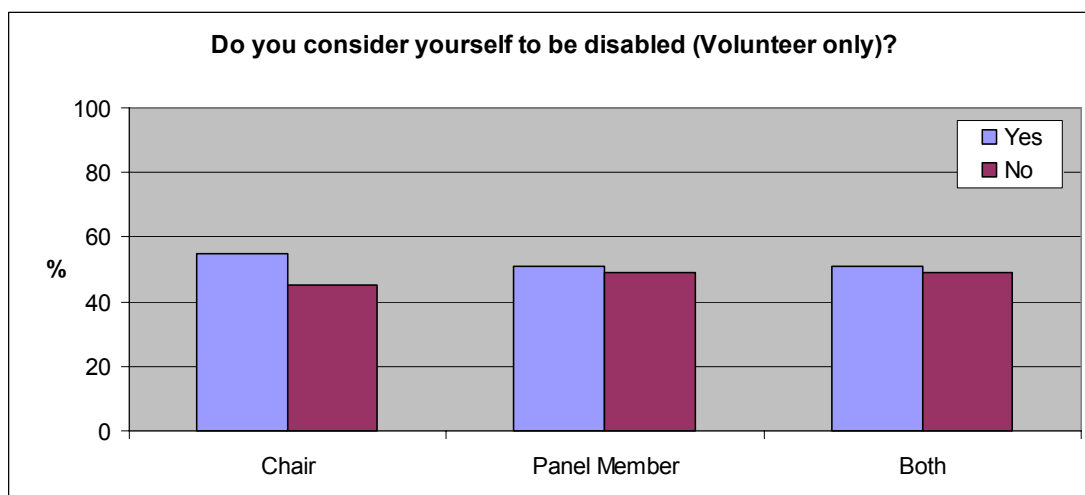
In addition to hands on access roles, all Panels have members who undertake specific administration roles such as correspondence and meeting minutes and the majority of Panel members carry out specific tasks on the Panel whether or not they hold an office bearer position.

### ***Time Spent***

The majority of Panel members, regardless of whether they are chair, staff representative or ordinary Panel member, spend between one and five hours per month on Panel work. This is similar to the findings of previous VDS research which indicated that 63% of volunteers spend up to five hours per month on their volunteering (VDS: 2004).



As can be seen from the graph above Access Panel chairs all spend a minimum of one hour per month on Panel work. A significant number of chairs, as well as some Panel members, spend over 36 hours per month; more than ten times the average amount. This indicates that some Chairs may be taking on a high volume of Panel work which will have implications for the individuals holding this position, in particular if they have poor health, which more than half identify themselves to have, as can be seen on the graph below.



Members of Panels where the Chair spent over thirty-six hours per month on Panel work tended to spend between zero and ten hours per month on Panel work. Interestingly, members of some of these Panels did not enjoy their Panel work or felt it was not making a difference. Perhaps it is the case that Chairs are taking too much upon themselves rather than delegating. This is not sustainable, in particular when there is a change of personnel on the Panel, and may lead to poor experiences for the volunteers and burnout for the Chairs.

Most Panels meet monthly, although some Panels meet more or less frequently than this, dependant on both the workload and availability of those involved. In addition to Panel meetings, some Panels have additional sub-committee meetings or meetings with Local Authority representatives in between. These additional meetings usually include a smaller group of Panel members who are interested in a particular piece of work, or have experience to bring to it.

Just over half of Panels showcase their work in the local area. This showcasing takes a variety of forms including giving talks to local groups, appearing at volunteer fayres and making use of leaflets and websites:

“Reports and photographs in local paper”

“We attend networking and show days to promote both the Panel and its work”

This may be an additional route for recruiting volunteers, although few Panels specified that they used it as an opportunity to recruit.

### ***Volunteer Management Practices***

Access Panels are more likely to have volunteer management practices in place than to have written policies. It may be the case that such practices have never been written down as policies, although they are adhered to. Take, for example, the reimbursement of out of pocket expenses which many Panels feel is important. Panels are more likely to have policies or practice on this than any other aspect of good practice in volunteers’ management. Paying of expenses is recognised as good practice across the sector, SDEF could provide a model policy for Panels.

“It’s wrong to say that there is a policy and procedure: it’s just something we do. I doubt we would have it written down anywhere. It’s just we have always taken the view that if someone goes to a conference for us, we pay the expenses – phone calls for official business and so on. It’s fair to be reimbursed”

Panels are least likely to have policies and practices on support; either one to one support or support for Panel members to move on. The majority of Panels with members who did not feel supported did not have either policy or practice on member support.

Five Panels had no policy or practices whatsoever, and these Panels all had members who either didn’t enjoy Panel work, did not feel supported, were not thanked, or didn’t feel they had a choice of tasks on the Panel.

## **Case Study – Volunteer Management Practices**

### **North Aberdeenshire Access Panel**

North Aberdeenshire Access Panel has been in existence for just over one year and in that time it has become a well respected group with a high profile in the local community. The Panel has seven members who are augmented by a large circle of other volunteers who feed in to the work of the Panel when they can or where the activity or project has a particular resonance with them. This flexibility means that volunteers can choose the level of their involvement depending on time availability and health status without feeling guilty about not being active.

The principles of volunteer management have been at the forefront of the Panel right from the start, indeed even from before its first meeting. The founders of the Panel refused to hold the first meeting until funding to reimburse volunteers' expenses had been secured from the local council. This was achieved by encouraging the council to implement its own volunteering policy.

Whilst the Panel follows the principles of volunteer management, the structures are informal. The Team Leader, as the Chair of the Panel is known, is the only position within the group. She had been a volunteer in a number of different settings before becoming involved in the Panel and her experiences of being a volunteer have influenced her approach to the involvement of Panel volunteers. In addition the local council Access Officer, who supports the Panel, has a background in volunteers' management which also brings strength to the volunteer management practices of the group.

The Panel meets monthly and by all accounts meetings are egalitarian in nature. Meetings are open to all those connected to the Panel, and all correspondence is available 'Everyone gets to see what is on the table', all jobs are passed out, and everyone gets the opportunity to carry out the activities. The decision making is collective, the Team Leader brings the issue to table for the group to discuss and reach a consensus. People feel involved and fit their Access Panel volunteering into their everyday lives, e.g. if an access audit is required somewhere outside Peterhead and a Panel member has a previous arrangement to go there they will combine the two.

Training is valued and the panel chose to spend some of the £10,000 grant they received from the Scottish Executive on local training. Interest was so great, every Panel member attended.

Most of the Panel members are involved with other groups in the local area such as the Community Council, and the Disabled Persons Housing Service Aberdeenshire (DPHSA). These connections have helped the Panel communicate, influence and work together with other groups sharing an interest in the issues faced by disabled people.

The DPHSA office provides a base for the Panel. This means that there is somewhere for Panel members to come to use computers and other equipment and as a venue for their meetings.

### **Case Study – Volunteer Management Practices (cont)**

As the Panel is young with a good number of volunteers there hasn't been the need for a recruitment drive. However, the group never misses an opportunity to encourage others to join them. There is always something for someone to do.

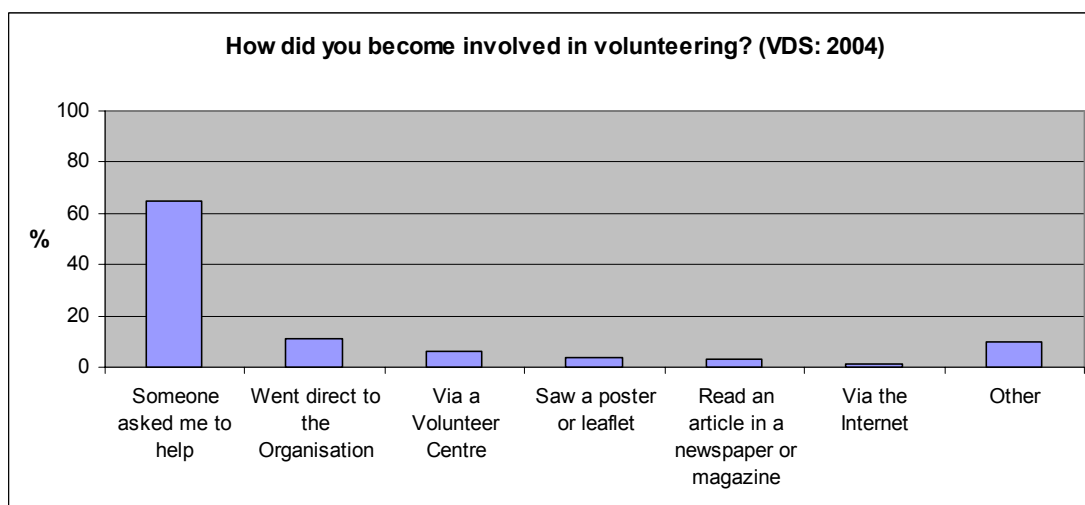
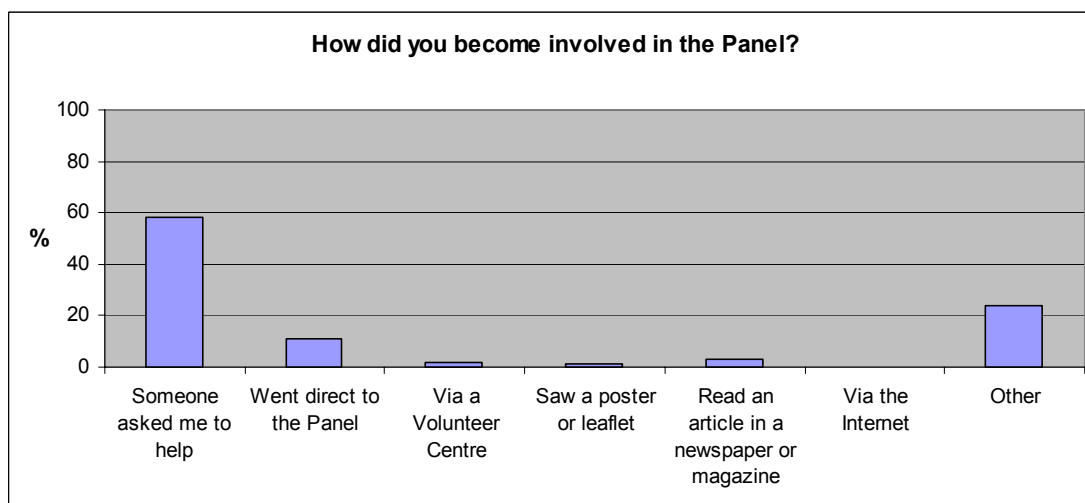
The Panel put their success down to the fact that they are volunteers all of whom have a disability. They believe that it is this and their proactive, constructive approach to access issues that have made them a valued and respected resource in the local community. They produced leaflets and posters inviting local businesses to get in touch for advice on access issues and the implications of the DDA. They receive requests regularly from shopkeepers, council officials, individuals and others for advice on access matters. Whenever the Panel comes across something that is good in terms of access they will highlight it through their communication channels.

How does the Panel see itself in five years time? Still active making life better for disabled people in North Aberdeenshire by continuing to be involved in all aspects of access, not just buildings, but transport and other public services, and generating income from conducting access audits.

## RECRUITMENT/RETENTION

### *How Panel members become involved*

The first graph below shows the response from Panel members when asked how they became involved in the Panel. The second graph shows the latest statistics on how people in Scotland become involved in volunteering, and makes for an interesting comparison.



The majority of Panel members became involved through being asking to help. This is similar to findings of previous research into volunteering in Scotland (VDS: 2004) which indicates that most people become involved in volunteering through being asked to help.

“Our volunteers tend to be from existing volunteers: friends of theirs who are interested”

No one became involved in an Access Panel via the Internet, which is similar to the findings of research previously carried out into Volunteering and

Disability (Reilly: 2005) which suggested that there were barriers around the accessibility of some websites. There may also be issues around access to IT equipment. Several Access Panels have websites and should consider using these as an additional means of stating that they need new members.

Some Panel members were involved in the Panel through setting up the Panel and remaining involved as a volunteer. Others had gone along as a representative of another organisation, and were either still involved in that capacity, or had ceased being a representative but had remained involved as a volunteer:

“It was part of my job to support the development of a Panel and now I am a volunteer member”

In some cases, individuals had become involved through having encountered an issue in their local area and approaching the Panel for assistance:

“Following a fall on a Local Authority pathway, I was referred by the council official to the Chairman of the Access Panel”

### ***Panel Membership Levels***

Most Panels have between six and twenty Panel members. Some Panels expressed that this number accounted only for those who attended meetings and that there were more people involved who did not regularly attend meetings but regularly received information from the Panel, or took part in other ways:

“...we do have a wide network of individuals who are associated with the Panel but not full members (this is how they want to be involved)”

Having a second tier of Panel members may be a good option for Panels who wish to be flexible with the involvement of local people, as it enables people to play an important role in Panel work without having to commit to attending regular meetings. It can also supply the Panel with additional resources during busier periods or times of ill health or holidays.

Some Panels have far fewer members than the average, e.g. Stirling and Aberdeen City; while others have more than the average, e.g. West Lothian and West Dunbartonshire.

Interestingly, according to the Scottish Household Survey (Scottish Executive: 2005), Stirling and Aberdeen City have levels of volunteering equal to or higher than the Scottish average, whereas West Dunbartonshire and West

Lothian have levels lower than the Scottish average. However, according to the 2001 Scottish Census (GROS: 2001), Stirling and Aberdeen City have lower levels of permanently sick/disabled people than the Scottish average. This indicates that Access Panels in areas where there are higher levels of permanently sick/disabled people have higher membership. In addition to this, those Panels in urban areas tend to have higher numbers and better volunteer retention than rural Panels. This may indicate that Panels should be representative of the population of the area they are representing e.g. an urban area such as Glasgow might have more than one. However numbers and distribution of disabled people, as well as transport links should be taken into account when considering if large conurbations should have more than one Panel.

### ***Panel Member Recruitment***

Just over half of Panels actively advertise for new members. Methods of advertising used include: talking to local groups, making use of local press, leaflets and posters, and the Internet. Of those who took part, 6% of Panel members became involved through these means of direct and indirect advertising (and as previously mentioned none through the Internet).

The advertising that is done by the Panels is for general Panel recruitment, rather than for specific roles on the Panel, although Panels were keen to attract people with additional skills:

“We approach people we feel would add to our skill base”

One Panel mentioned using their local Volunteer Centre to recruit:

“IAC leaflets invite new members to apply through Volunteering Highland who screens applicants/give references”

Those Panels with lower than average membership say that they advertise for new members through newsletters and talking to groups. However, as can be seen from the graphs above, few Panel members became involved in this way: the majority became involved through being asked to help, which indicates that ‘asking’ may be a route for struggling Panels to try. Recent research by VDS indicates that 60% of adults in Scotland (VDS: 2004) have never been asked to volunteer, although they would consider it if asked directly:

“Indeed, being asked face to face by a trusted source was the most effective method of recruitment and their preferred method”  
(VDS:2005)

One Panel had tried out using leaflets as a recruitment tool:

“It was mostly word of mouth until we started this, although this hasn’t been as successful as we had hoped it would be...I doubt if we have had many members who have actually come down that route”

Although it is not feasible for Panels to ask each member of the local community to become involved, some thought could be given to different ways of asking than general advertising, which does not seem to make much impact on people becoming involved. Indeed, asking members of the local community to help with specific roles or tasks could be advantageous to all Panels, even those who feel they have enough members, as having additional Panel members could broaden the skills base and increase flexibility for members. It is also important to provide opportunities that individuals would be able to undertake in addition to the other things in their lives:

“Volunteer involving organisations need to provide positive experiences for volunteers and offer voluntary opportunities that fit with the lifestyle and needs of people”

Those Panels which were established in the last five years seem to have had little trouble in recruiting Panel members; numbers range between seven and fifteen. The majority of these Panels also have paid support and Local Authority representation. It may be the case that because they are new, the community has more of an interest in being part of it. This is not to say that Panels who have been in existence longer cannot recruit new members, but they may need to be inventive with other means of doing so as they do not have the newness as a means of attracting people along.

Most Panels had recruited some new members in the last twelve months. For some Panels this was one or two people, while for others the numbers were much higher; between seven and twelve. Some of the higher recruiting Panels were around a year old and so the number of new members accounted for all members recruited to those Panels. Some other Panels had high levels of recruitment despite not actively recruiting, in contrast with other Panels who struggled:

“None, several people were asked and agreed but so far have not attended”

“We are known to local groups but cannot generate new members”

## *Panel Member Retention*

More than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Panels have lost at least one Panel member over the last twelve months. Reasons given for this included both death and sickness, which may be due to the average age of Panel members being over fifty-five.

"I think you'll find that all Access Panels will tell you the same thing, that because of the very nature of the group, lots of members have either died or their condition is such that they are no longer able to participate in the group"

Some Panels stated that their members simply took a sabbatical in times of ill health and therefore were still counted as Panel members:

"Member who had major health issue has taken sabbatical, therefore is still counted within Panel"

This practice in still involving members during periods of ill health is in line with flexible volunteers' management practice. (Reilly: 2005):

"Some people worry about reliability when they have fluctuating levels of health...organisations can help to minimise problems by being flexible, perhaps having a Plan B....this would benefit everyone, as not only disabled people need flexibility in their lives"

In the case of Access Panels, this flexibility might involve ongoing support, a larger pool of available volunteers or deputies to undertake others duties in times of ill health.

Panel members have been involved in their local Panel for varying lengths of time although more than half have been involved for between one and three years. It seems for many Panels, that once individuals become involved, they seem to stay involved for long periods of time. This can be positive in that it means that they become experts in their field and can help to get new recruits up to speed, but can also have the negative effect on the individual of weariness of being on the Panel, and feeling unappreciated.

It is important that Panel members are supported, both in their work on the Panel and in preparing them to move on. Volunteers should be able to move on when they want to and to not feel that the Panel would struggle without them, therefore feeling guilty about no longer being a part of it. For the Panel, it is also important that it is not reliant on one or two individuals, and that there is a form of succession planning in place, should key members move on. This would ensure that Panels do not fall apart when certain

individuals are no longer able to be involved.

Most chairs have been involved with the Panel for at least three years with some having been involved for more than ten years, and having held the chair position for over ten years also. Just under a fifth of chairs had held the position for less than one year although this number will have been affected by a number of Panels holding their AGM's in the period prior to questionnaire return.

### **Case Study – 'Access Volunteers'**

#### **Clackmannanshire Access Volunteers**

The Access Panel started in 1993 with a mixture of lay-people with personal experience of disabilities and professionals who worked with people with disabilities. The Panel was originally called a District Access Group but when the local authority set up a Council Access Panel, the Access Panel was asked if they would change their name to avoid confusion. The group then became known as Community Access Volunteers.

The Secretary of the Panel believes that there are some benefits to being called 'volunteers';

"Shopkeepers ... are going to be more open to training by a voluntary group who actually have problems rather than just being told by the Council that you must do this or you must do that. Hopefully they'll be more sensitive to why they're being asked and why it's important that they don't just pay the DDA lip service, but the reasons *why* it's there and we're not being unreasonable asking for it".

The members of the Panel don't see themselves as 'volunteers' but do the work because they want to make a difference not just for themselves but "so many of their friends all have problems, they want to make it better for everybody".

"I personally think it's a really good mix having able-bodied people and people with disabilities because I can see what we're doing from the point of view of a carer and the problems I have ... whereas the other members of the group with disabilities, they can see it from their point of view".

The Panel currently has seven active members, four of whom have been on the Panel since its start. As well as a Chair, Secretary and Treasurer, it also has two Vice-Chairs, both with disabilities. Originally the rules of the Panel were that it had to be disability-led and the Vice-Chairs "wouldn't be able to fulfil the functions of the Secretary, Chairperson or Treasurer without help ... whatever they do they go along with either myself or the Chairperson or the Treasurer to enable them to represent the group. They always go along with a personal assistant". Because the Panel is small, tasks are distributed to whoever is available to carry them out. When the Panel first started and numbers were bigger, the tasks were carried out by members with specialist knowledge or skills, for example a member who was partially sighted did audits for people with sight problems, and someone with a converted wheelchair specialised in access to countryside paths and transport. "...we tried to take a particular aspect that was of particular interest to us. As I say, at the moment that's not possible".

## Case Study – 'Access Volunteers' (cont)

The Panel made a decision to meet during the day as they felt that this was more accessible to current and potential members; "almost everybody who was initially involved with the group said day meetings were better for people with disabilities because lots of people with disabilities don't like coming out at night and a lot of people with disabilities are at the day centre which is why we meet [there]".

Adverts for new members are placed in the local newspaper and leaflets are distributed in, for example, health centres and libraries. These advertise for Panel members but not specific tasks on the Panel. Events organised by the Panel are also advertised in local newspapers. Despite this, no one new has joined the Panel in the last year.

The Panel has been involved in some successful projects, for example the renovation of a walled garden, and has been pioneering disability awareness in the area by training local shopkeepers. They are hoping to work on a local access guide in the future but would need more volunteers with different expertise for this. The Panel recognises that a specific project such as this might be an ideal way to attract more volunteers; "They think 'oh that sounds a good idea – I'd like to get involved in it'".

The Secretary is determined that the Panel will work but is also aware that it's currently struggling especially with the potential increase in planning consultations.

"There are so many people who go to the Day Centre, or even people who don't go to the Centre that we're aware of, and that don't really want to get involved. And I think they feel that in some ways it would be really good to get more support from the local community of people with disabilities. Because when we were just saying that people like to get involved on a particular issue, very often that involves saying yes we'll get people from voluntary agencies who are expertise in... whatever, but they themselves do not necessarily have a disability. And I think that the feeling of the group is that they would just like to get more disabled people in the area to come along to the meetings".

## SKILLS AND TRAINING

### *Skills of Panel Members*

Access Panels are made up of highly skilled individuals who bring a great deal of experience to Panel work. Some Panel members do not recognise that they have skills, and so feel that they just bring themselves along to attend meetings, which is of course, a skill in itself. Individuals have a variety of non-specialist skills that can be of use to a Panel from letter writing and making tea to being reliable and turning up to meetings regularly. A training needs analysis of Panel members might help Panels to identify the skills that they have on board, in particular those skills that individuals do not identify themselves to have, or do not identify to be a useful skill.

The skills that Panel members bring to Panel work range from employment based skills to personal experience. As some members became involved through employment, or links to employment, there are Panel members across Scotland with skills gained from their time in various roles such as Architect or GP:

“Registered and chartered Architect, approximately 40 years in practice”

“40 years experience as a GP”

“40 years experience as a building surveyor who specialises in the DDA”

“Planning and conservation experience and qualifications”

“Long career in business management as a director of a public community”

Also, Panel members bring transferable skills such as communication, IT and committee experience:

“Ability to assist in open discussion with the Panel and help brainstorm any new ideas”

“Decision making, conciliation, networking, ideas, solutions, practical skills, e.g. word processing, contacting via telephone, email etc. Educated to degree level”

“Administration, knowledge of the voluntary sector and training/development”

Many members also bring knowledge of the local area and its issues as well as knowledge of disability:

“Being hearing impaired myself, I am very much aware of the need for visual aids in public places, e.g. visual smoke alarms, loop systems in conference rooms etc.”

“[I bring] knowledge of disability discrimination legislation and experience of policy formulation relating to service delivery to disabled people and people with mental health issues”

“Because I have mobility and sight problems I can see things differently from someone who has not”

In particular, Chairs mainly feel that they bring similar skills to other Panel members although in addition, some have management experience, some have experience of chairing meetings as well as other relevant experience:

“Able to control meetings, know this vast area well”

“Experience of voluntary and statutory bodies, experience as a self managed trainer”

“I communicate well, can delegate to others and share knowledge”

Generally speaking, Chairs are more aware of the skills that they bring to the Access Panels and more likely to state them than other Panel members. This may be an issue of confidence in being able to state your positive qualities, and perhaps Chairs, have more confidence than the individuals on the Panels due to their length of time involving and experience.

Some other members however, feel that they do not bring any skills to the Panel:

“Not much”

“I don’t know yet. I still feel I have need of more experience”

### ***Skills needs***

Interestingly, when asked what skills they felt they needed to develop, many Panel members suggested skills that other members had already mentioned that they brought:

"Would like to become proficient in the undertaking of access audits"

"My understanding of the problems encountered by other disabled people"

"Computer skills, improving working relationships"

This indicates that the skills the Panel members need are already in existence in other (and possibly the same) Panels. As such, opportunities to share existing skills and knowledge should be developed between, and within, the Panels. Other skills mentioned included practical knowledge in legislation and building plans, through to soft skills such as time management and communication. There were quite prominent mentions of the need to attract new members and to retain existing Panel members:

"Leadership and enthusiasm to keep our members motivated in our very active Panel"

"More experience in consulting and involving disabled people in a formal structured way so that all those affected are reached"

Specific skills needs mentioned by Chairs included mention of recruitment needs and specific chairing skills:

"Anger/frustration management at lack of assistance and low numbers"

"How to chair the meetings better"

"Continual upgrading of my skills in all areas, and not any specific one"

Chairs have a volunteer management role to undertake in terms of managing Panel roles, succession planning and identifying strengths of Panel members. The Chairs would require skills to undertake this, which in turn SDEF could help to develop.

Some Panel members feel that they had no skills needs for carrying out their role on the Panel. This could be attributed either to having had training or experience in the tasks undertaken as a panel member and therefore feeling that there is no skill need, or perhaps bringing their viewpoint to Panel meetings is the extent of their Panel involvement and therefore requires no additional skills:

“It is time rather than additional skills I believe I need”

“Nothing as I have had all the training, but it would be helpful to get top ups each year”

“None for my level of application”

It is important to note that Panel members do not always have to have skills in ‘doing’ a particular thing; knowing where to find information, or who to talk to is valuable to the Panel.

### ***Training Received***

Just over a third of all Panel members have not received training for their role. Some quantified this by saying that training had been organised for later in the year or that the Panel always made them aware of any training opportunities (and in many cases offered travel expenses) and that it was down to their own circumstances or choice that they had not attended, rather than the Panel simply not offering training:

“This Panel has not organised any specific seminars or training for members but does make members aware of events taking place throughout the country, and is willing to pay expenses for members to attend such events”

“Learning all the time. Team leader ensures that we all get training and support in all we do”

“I have not been able to attend any training except during Panel meeting times – a lot has been learned then, informally”

“Training sessions are in hand, both to travel to, and for tutors to come to Panel meetings”

“I have not been a member long enough to have benefited”

“None yet – but hopefully in the future as funding has now been allocated”

For some Panels, there was agreement in the importance of training, but the practicality of attending training was a barrier:

“yes, in principle we could do with training, but committing yourself to go on a residential course or day-long training for some of them just aren’t feasible”

The terminology of 'training' may lead people to automatically think of courses that take place outwith regular Panel meetings. This need not be the case, as peer training could take place during the course of Panel meetings or other Panel tasks. SDEF have been providing training for Panels in recruiting new members, which have been generally well attended.

Of those who had received some training, the most common was access audit training. A majority had attended JMU Access Audit training. In addition to this, some Panel members had started a course at Heriot Watt University on Disabled Access to the Built Environment. Other training mentioned varied widely, from committee skills to human rights and building regulations to first aid. Some members (mainly Local Authority representatives) indicated that they had had training from another source which helped with their Panel role.

"Conference on DDA (with JMU and DRC), access survey training, committee skills and funding application writing"

"Training has been ongoing with more experienced members e.g. chairman. Attended the DRC Scotland seminar and other forums. Keeping up to date on access in the Highland area. Our Panel is very well informed and professional"

"I have privately been to seminars on Parkinson's disease"

### ***Training Needs***

The majority of Panel members were able to indicate training needs for carrying out their tasks. A small number; just over 10%, felt they had no training needs at present, with some comments made about not having enough time to attend training in addition to the time spent on Panel work. Issues of transportation to training were also mentioned:

"Being disabled, I have no desire to travel to the Scottish mainland to a seminar/training venue"

Of those training needs identified, some closely matched the skills needs that had already been identified, and also were similar to some of the training that other Panel members stated they had received. These included training on Access Audits, DDA/legislation, finance and Information Technology.

Some others indicated a willingness to learn to increase the development of the Panel by stating that they would appreciate any training that was on offer:

"I would be grateful for any form of training that would help us develop our potential as an Access Panel"

“Anything to help with the smooth running of the Panel”

“Any training which would enable us to have a better understanding and be able to move forward as a Panel”

### ***Updates and Developments***

A further issue which arose in response to questions about training was the issue of updates and developments. Some Panels felt that it was the responsibility of SDEF to keep them up to date on issues which may affect their work.

“Continuous update with regard to case studies and legislative implications”

“Seminars to update me with present and future changes to building standards regarding access and facilities for the disabled”

“Liaising with other Panels and hearing about their problems and difficulties”

This discourse of ‘problems and difficulties’ is negative and focuses on the problems of the Panels rather than their successes. It may be the case that it is reassuring for a Panel with difficulties to hear that another Panel has similar difficulties. While it is positive that Panels see an advantage to having regular contact with one another, it might be useful to share successes as well as problems. This may help Panels generate ideas for their local area as well as helping each other to solve any problems which do arise.

Many Panel members felt that it was more important to have regular updates on legislation, national issues and the work of other Panels than to have ‘training’ per se.

“Training and seminars should be ongoing as there are always new challenges and developments, no Panel member will ever know enough”

“It is a constant learning curve re: disability issues”

There are different opinions as to who should provide updated information to the Access Panels. Some Panels would like information to come directly to them, while others like to find things out for themselves, through various means. Decisions have to be made by the Panels and SDEF to set up a system of knowledge exchange or information sharing which suits everyone.

## VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES

### *Support*

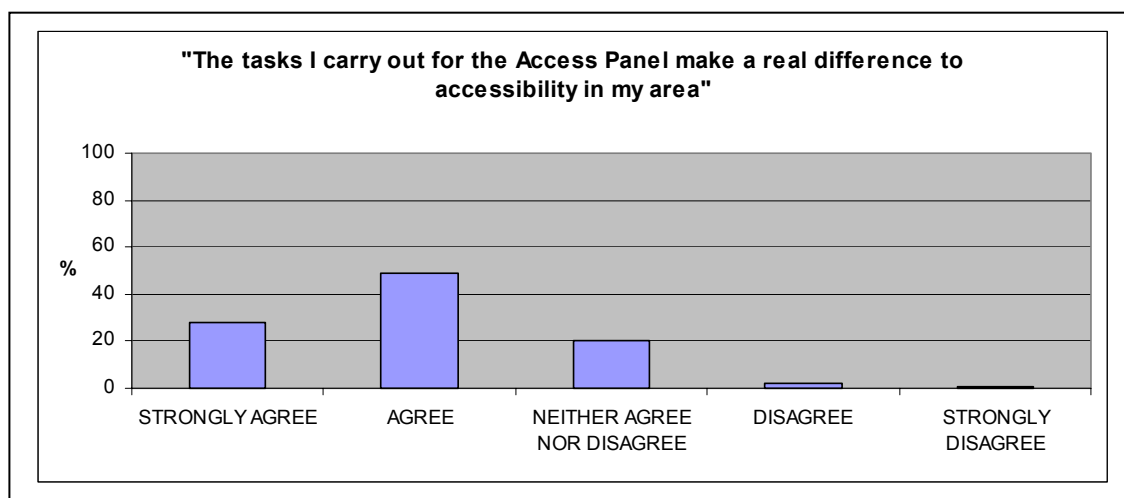
Support can take various forms; from informal chats with volunteers through to support in carrying out a particular role. Six panel members, including one chair, indicated that they did not feel supported by their Panel in carrying out their tasks. Of those Panels which had individual members who did not feel supported, only one had practice in supporting volunteers and none had policy on this. Of those members who did not feel supported, none had received training for their role, despite having been involved for at least a year and the majority spent more than eleven hours per month on Panel tasks. Panel members may feel that receiving some training would be an indicator of the Panel supporting them in developing.

### *Control*

A small number of Panel members feel that they do not have control in deciding which tasks they carry out as a Panel member. All Panels with members who did not have control over tasks were at least twelve years old. Members had been involved for varying lengths of time, from less than one year, to over ten. This indicates that there is no clear correlation between length of time involved and control over tasks. There was not a great deal of commonality of the tasks carried out although two of these people held the position of administrator. Most had not received training, which may mean that they are unable to carry out certain roles, making them feel that they have no control over what they do.

### *Making a Difference*

As you can see from the graph below, the majority of Panel members agreed that the tasks they carry out make a real difference.



Some Panels indicated that it wasn't always easy to judge whether they had made a difference as they mainly heard from people when there was a problem, rather than when there wasn't:

"It is very difficult to judge whether you have been successful at a campaign. People aren't going to come up to you and say 'by the way, the High Street looks fine now', you need to look yourself, see if shops have done what we have asked them to do"

Also, if Panels are not thanked, they may not think they are having any impact:

"No one's ever told us we do a good job"

This then brings up the issue of who should recognise the work of the Access Panels and their members.

### ***Recognition***

All Panel Chairs felt that the tasks they carried out were recognised by their fellow Panel members. More Panel members felt that their tasks were recognised by fellow Panel members more than by the chair. The chair is more likely than other Panel members to feel that their work is recognised by the Local Authority. This is more likely because they are most likely of all members of the Panel to be in regular contact with the Local Authority.

Staff representatives all stated that they had been thanked for their contribution to the Panel. More Panel members than Chairs had been thanked for their contribution, which raises the question of who thanks the chair? It would appear that it is the Chairs responsibility to thank the Panel members. Of those Panel members who had not been thanked for their contribution to the Panel, almost half held a specific post on the Panel such as Treasurer, or Chair. Only one had received training for their role and all had been involved for at least a year, with some having been involved for over ten years. Panels were not asked if they had policy or practice on volunteer recognition, so we cannot compare this with Panel policies as we did with the other aspects of the volunteer experience.

### ***Enjoyment***

Individual Panel members are more likely than Chairs to enjoy being Panel members, possibly due to the level of responsibility that comes with being Chair of the Panel. All staff representatives enjoy being Panel members. Of those who do not enjoy being Panel members, the majority had been involved for over 10 years and had not received training for their role. The majority had also not been thanked for their contribution to the Panel, which indicates that there is a correlation between recognition and enjoyment.

## *Training*

The issue of training seems to be a common thread throughout the various facets of the volunteer experience. Those who have not received training do not feel supported, do not feel they have control over tasks, have not received thanks and do not enjoy their role on the Panel. It is not to say however, that had training been received by all, these issues would not exist.

However, by providing training (and training does not have to be typical day course based) the Panel is indicating to its members, that it is willing to invest in their learning and development. Having attended training on a particular area of Panel work may give an individual a sense of expertise to bring to the Panel, thereby increasing confidence and perhaps, as a result, enjoyment.

## LINKS AND SUPPORT

### *Links to other Organisations*

Around half of Panels are directly linked to a disability organisation, while the other half are not. Many of those who have links stated that they were linked with SDEF or a local disability forum in their Panel area. Some Panels also have unofficial links with other Access Panels through sharing meeting minutes and campaigns or through slightly more formalised structures e.g. the Alliance of Highland Disability Access Panels.

Linking with other local Panels helps the Panels to know what is coming up in the other areas. The sharing of minutes can let other Panels know what is being discussed and then if need be, meetings can be arranged to tackle anything arising.

“Yes, we get regular minutes from Perth and Kinross and Dundee, and they get our minutes....we know from the minutes what is coming up”

Linking with other Panels does not have to mean a regular or official meeting. Some Panels link up with other Panels for one off events or issues, or to learn from their good practice:

“If we think there is something they are doing exceptionally well, we may emulate them and meet specifically to talk about that issue. But then that will drift apart again until we have another need to get together”

### *Financial Support*

The Scottish Executive wrote a letter to all Local Authority Chief Executives in 2004 asking for their support in either revivifying or setting up the local Access Panel. The significant majority of Access Panels have been allocated paid support by either the Local Authority or another organisation. The paid support from the Local Authority comes in many different forms, e.g. staff time, postage and printing or meeting accommodation:

“Enabling council officials to attend (evening) meetings”

“Council provides accommodation for meetings, mailing costs for agenda/minutes”

Some Local Authorities allocate a grant for the Access Panel rather than providing these other forms of support. It is not easy to equate the value of funding of a financial nature against the value of other types of support as

regards its worth to the Panel. There is no one model of Local Authority support that would fit all Local Authorities and Panels, and many existing agreements have been in place for quite some time.

In addition to this, some Panels have received administrative support from other local organisations:

“Lochaber Action on Disability provide secretarial services”

“Administrative support via Disability West Lothian which is council funded”

“Orkney Disability Forum provides secretarial services”

The Scottish Executive provided all Access Panels across Scotland with a development grant of £10,000 in financial year 2004/5. Some Access Panels have spent this on IT equipment, some on publicity, some on training for volunteers, and some have yet to decide how to spend it.

Some Access Panels have been successful in applying for additional grants from charitable trusts with one Panel having had support from Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland for a paid administrator.

### **Case Study – Panel with Premises**

#### **Angus Access Panel**

Angus Access Panel was set up around 1988 and started out because of a plan to refurbish swimming baths locally. A regional councillor, Rod McFarlane knew that the planned building was not going to be accessible for disabled people, and decided to do something about it. Rod got together a small group of local disabled people and raised a lot of money, which was put into the extra work that was needed to make the swimming baths accessible.

Once this was done, the group used the remaining money to buy the premises and set up a local Panel group. The group became Angus Access Panel, and covered the whole of Angus as it was given a grant by the council to cover the whole area. Since this time, the Panel has received support from the Local Authority, by way of grant funding.

The Panel members feel that having premises makes a tremendous difference to the work they can do in their local area. Angus Panel provides a drop in information service, provided by volunteers, in addition to access work. Having an office allows the Panel to react more quickly to issues that arise in the local area, without having to wait for a monthly meeting. The Panel also find the premises useful to store information, so that one individual isn't responsible for storing everything at home.

## **Case Study – Panel with Premises (contd)**

The volunteers, who provide the information service, are mainly separate from the Access Panel committee, known as the Executive Committee. There are eight information service volunteers, sixteen Executive Committee members, and a mailing list of over one hundred and thirty who receive regular information on the work of the Panel. The volunteers are all trained and attend team meetings together as a means of support and ongoing development.

The Panel is contactable in various ways; from the drop in service, to telephone and email. Telephone enquiries are the most common; for example from people who will be visiting the area, and are seeking accessible accommodation and services, which the Panel keeps a directory of.

The Panel has good relations with the Local Authority, as well as with the Panels in Perth and Kinross, and Dundee, with whom it shares its meeting minutes. The Panels used to meet regularly, but this fell by the wayside. However, they do meet when there are issues that they need to discuss – such as the parking at Ninewells Hospital.

The Panel puts its success down to have a good team, excellent communication with the council and having premises. They are able to generate additional revenue by hiring out their meeting room to other local groups for a small donation. Due to having premises, the Panel was able to spend the Scottish Executive grant on equipment such as a laptop, projector and camera.

The future of the Panel may include the setting up of a website, updating local access information and continuing the annual Rod McFarlane award and poster competition.

## LOCAL AUTHORITY

### *Representation*

The majority of Panels have some form of Local Authority representation on their Panel. Of those who did not, some indicated that they expected this situation to change in the next six months.

Some Panels have one Local Authority representative, while others have any number between two and six. These range across a number of Local Authority departments with the most common being Building Control and Planning. Other departments represented on the Panel include Social Work, Housing, Roads and Education. In addition, some Panels have elected members on their Panel, and feel that this is advantageous. This is further discussed in Ennis (2005).

This representation seems to take two forms; attending meetings and communication. Many of these representatives attend Panel meetings, either regularly or occasionally, in addition to keeping in touch with the Panel, while others do not attend meetings but keep in touch with the Panel.

Where there are a higher number of Local Authority representatives on a Panel, it seems that two or three attend Panel meetings regularly, while others keep in touch with the Panel by other means. In addition, these Local Authority representatives who attend meetings tend to have more regular contact with the Panel than their colleagues who do not attend meetings.

Taking this into account, the majority of contact between Access Panels and Local Authority representatives takes place on a monthly basis, although some state that they keep in touch as matters arise, rather than to any set timetabling. It is positive that no Panel selected 'never' when asked about the frequency of contact with Local Authority representatives.

Outwith Panel meetings, a variety of topics are discussed between the Panel members and Local Authority representatives. These include; planning applications, consultation and funding, as well as between meeting administration and regular updates of relevant information. Some Local Authority representatives also bring up to date information on planning applications to the Panel for consideration.

### *The role of the Local Authority*

Local Authority representatives play different roles on the different Panels. In some Panels they attend and provide advice during meetings, but do not take part in any decision making processes. In other Panels, they are more involved and play an influential role in the Panels work. Some also provide the sole link between the Panel and the Local Authority, and almost advocate for the Panel with their employer, ensuring that they receive their entitlements and that they are given all the assistance they need. It was felt

that the degree to which this took place was down to the personality of the individual, and their links with the Panel, rather than the job description they work under.

In some Panels, this individual played the role of lynchpin, and there was a fear that if they retired or left their Local Authority post, there might not be the same sympathetic ear from the new postholder. There is a need for the Local Authority to play a role in ensuring that their representatives at Panel level are fulfilling their job requirements, but also to ensure that the link is not kept to one individual. This leaves both the Panel and the Local Authority in a vulnerable position, in the event that they vacate their post.

The links between Local Authority and the Access Panel are of benefit to both parties; disabled people get to have a say in the accessibility of their local area, while the Local Authority get to call upon the expertise of local disabled people to assist them in meeting their duties and obligations as regards access. Therefore it is of importance that these links are well established. It is also important that those Local Authority staff who attend Panel meetings have a level of authority to ensure that work is carried out as agreed so that the Panel is not simply a talking shop. A report carried out on Disability Equality in England and Wales recommended that the Chief Executive and other senior staff should champion disability equality within the organisation.

## **Case Study – Relationship with the Local Authority**

### **South Ayrshire Access Panel**

South Ayrshire Access Panel was set up around 1982, by Building Control of the Council (then Kyle and Carrick district council). It was set up in response to the request from the Scottish Office, and an Access Officer post was created at the same time. The councils Access Officer is the link between the council and the disabled community and assists the Panel in arranging meetings.

The Panel feel that they have had great support over the years from the council and have used their experience to help councils in other areas to set up Panels. They do not undertake formal access auditing; they will give an opinion if asked, but feel that they are not adequately qualified.

The Panel members do not think they would be able to manage without the support of the council, as they assist the Panel in a variety of backroom work i.e. production of leaflets, production and circulation of minutes and administration. They also provide meeting space for the Panel.

A local councillor also attends Panel meetings regularly and provides assistance to the Panel in its work. He is able to help the Panel find the right people to go to for any specific issue. The Panel used to have a representative from the Social Services department but due to staffing issues, are now unable to send a representative. The Panel have tried to have this rectified but to no avail.

## **Case Study – Relationship with the Local Authority (cont)**

It is felt amongst Panel members that if the personnel of the council were to change, the Panel might not be as supported as they are at present. They feel that they have a rapport with existing staff and that new staff might not be as sympathetic, or as willing to help.

There is no written agreement between the Panel and the council although the Panels' constitution does specify that an Access Officer from the council will attend meetings. There is however a funding agreement; the Panel applies each year for a small amount of funding, usually around £500.

The council assists the Panel with campaigns by helping to produce materials e.g. Pavements are for People campaign. The taxi driver awareness project took a few years to complete due to a variety of issues, including changing personnel in the council and bureaucracy within the council.

There have been very few occasions on which the views of the Panel clash with the views of the council. The Panel tries to find ways to resolve this without going head to head. An example of this is street furniture on the High Street – the Panel holds a different view on this to the Council. The DDA means that the council has duties which it must carry out; therefore they are more likely to listen to the views of the Panel.

The Access Officer assists the Panel by ensuring they have up to date information with regard to building regulations. A system is in place, which involves the Panel contacting the architects who design the buildings, and this has had a good effect. The Access Officer does not hold a vote on the Panel, and is present to provide advice about who to talk to and where to go for information.

The Panel does not have specific plans for the future; it tends to be largely reactive to situations. However, it does aim to provide improvements to services for disabled people.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Based on the questionnaire returns, the typical profile of an Access Panel member in Scotland is female, white Scottish and over the age of fifty-five. Also, of those returning questionnaires there are two under the age of 34 and none of any ethnic origin other than white.

The majority of volunteers in Scotland are female and aged 35-54 years. Scotland has an ageing and declining population, and population projections suggest that there will be an increase in the 45+ age bracket over the next twenty years. As likelihood of disability increases with age, this may mean an increase in the disabled population of Scotland, which may imply an increase in the numbers of individuals interested in access issues.

However, Access Panels currently have problems recruiting younger people and this projected population change may mean this problem worsens as there are less volunteers to go around. However, there is little question that Access Panels need to consider ways in which new, and particularly younger, members can be recruited, in the present as well as the future.

Some Panel members suggested that the difficulty in getting young people involved was that young people like to do things for themselves, and wouldn't approach a Panel for assistance. Also, younger people have different attitudes to disability, and do not tend to take an interest until their middle years.

In addition to this, the lack of diversity of ethnic origin on Access Panels may be due to lower numbers of disabled people in these groups:

"...The four White groups [White Scottish, White Irish, White British and White Other] have a higher rate of disability and long-term illness than minority ethnic groups" (Scottish Executive: 2004)

Panels need to consider different means of recruiting individuals from different communities to be involved in the Panel, such as advertising flexible opportunities, recruiting in non-mainstream places and making informal links with other diverse groups.

## THE POTENTIAL OF ACCESS PANELS

Some Panels which took part in the case studies, in particular mentioned that they felt that they were receiving more recognition in the local area now and that people were more likely to approach them directly. This is very positive for Access Panels across Scotland and is something that Panels who do not currently feel their work is recognised can learn from.

“We find this year has been extremely busy, we are more and more being invited to attend AGM’s. We try to attend a few at least – we could be out every night”

“I’m getting more letters from different departments now asking us if we have any problems, really, to contact them. I think things are definitely improving – actually recognising that there is a local Access Panel”

Recognition in the local community may lead to increased interest in the work of the Panels and therefore increased membership. It was suggested by several Panels that perhaps people were not aware of the Panel until they had a need for it – increased awareness in the community can counteract this. It would be positive for Access Panels if they were brought on board automatically for various things in the community. For example, Angus Access Panel were requested by the Local Authority last year to inspect all the polling stations in Angus for election day. They sent their specialist officer to talk to all Polling Officers beforehand to ensure they were aware of access issues, and this was followed up by a check on the polling day.

Although recruitment is an issue for the majority of Panels, there are a variety of opportunities for Panels to attract new members by being flexible in involving people and also by using the skills that people can gain from being a member of the Access Panel as a means of recruiting new members. Raising awareness of the Panel in the local area is the first step in attracting new members:

“...because I think until people are disabled themselves, they are maybe not aware that there is any need for anything like that”

As previously mentioned, some Panels have a tier of membership who do not attend Panel meetings but who do assist the Panel in other ways. This may be an option for Panels whose members are geographically disparate, or unable to attend meetings:



“With the email situation now, it is quite easy for somebody to be involved in the Panel and not attend the meetings, as they can do everything else electronically”

North Aberdeenshire Panel has applied for funding for laptop computers for Panel members so that they can hold e-meetings, which will help address any issues of travel or bad weather. This would also help those who cannot leave the house to become involved.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Volunteers Management*

- The majority of Panels do not have volunteer management policies in place although some have practices; this seems to impact on the experiences of Panel members, in particular in their feeling unsupported. Panels should consider having volunteer management policies and practices in place, in particular regarding support of Panel members
  - SDEF should help to source training for Panel members in volunteer management policies and practices.
  - SDEF should provide example volunteer management policies e.g. reimbursement of out of pocket expenses, to assist Panels in the writing of such policies.
  
- Most Panel members became involved by being asked, although the majority of Panels advertise for new members through means such as newspaper and internet
  - Panels should ask individuals to become involved by explaining what a Panel is and what opportunities it would give them rather than blanket advertising
  - SDEF to source assistance for Panels in doing this
  
- Some Panels are struggling to recruit enough members
  - Panels should use existing knowledge on volunteering to target different groups to become involved.
  - Panels should offer flexibility of opportunity for members; one method of doing this would be having a 'second tier' of Panel membership for those who wish to help without attending regular meetings
  - Panels should make use of IT as a means of recruiting new members; stating on the Access Panel website that the Panel is made up of volunteers and that new members are welcome
  
- The majority of Panel members are female, over fifty-five and white. There are few young people involved
  - Panels should take a more strategic approach to involving a more diverse group of individuals; this could form part of an overall strategic plan for the future of each Panel.
  - Panels could consider the three models of involving Young People by Voluntary Arts Network which suggests ways in which young people could assist the Panel through different ways of becoming involved:
    - Mixed Age Groups
    - Separate Youth Wing
    - Partnership with Youth Groups
  - Panels could sign up with Project Scotland or Millennium Volunteers to attract young people to volunteering by promoting the skills gain of being a Panel member. This might be particularly attractive to those looking for a career in an associated field and could take the form of regular volunteering or a gap year.

- Panels members tend to stay involved for long periods of time
  - Panels should have succession planning in place to ensure that particular individuals are not the lynchpin of the Panel, therefore putting it at risk if they decide to cease being involved
- Panel members mainly spend between one and five hours per month on Panel work, while Chairs tend to spend more, with some spending over thirty-six hours per month
  - Panels must ensure that no one member is responsible for too many tasks and that tasks are delegated rather than being left up to one person
  - Panels could considering having a separate volunteer management post to develop succession planning and support of members
- Some members of Panels have not had positive volunteering experiences; this seems to correlate with a lack of volunteer management practices
  - Panel Chairs should be offered training in volunteers management and ensure that Panel policies and procedures are adhered to
- Some Panel members have skills and training needs in areas where other Panel members have had training or have existing skills
  - Skills should be shared within and between local Panels, facilitated by SDEF
  - Procedures should be in place for Panel members to share any training they attend with other Panel members
  - Individuals on Panels with a particular skill or knowledge could visit other Panels to train members, thereby reducing the cost of training for all Panels. This should be facilitated by SDEF
- Many Panel members have not received training for their role although a majority were able to identify training needs
  - Panels should be clear on the training needs for the roles they expect volunteers to carry out, and ensure that these needs are met. A training needs analysis may be the way to carry this out.

### ***Panel Promotion***

- Panels are undertaking professional roles within the community
  - The work of Panel members is to be recognised by the Local Authority, individuals in the community and organisations
- The majority of Panels showcase their work in the local area
  - This should be joined up with a recruitment strategy to maximise use of publicity for benefiting the Panel
- The majority of Panel members feel that the work they carry out makes a real difference to accessibility in their area
  - This could be used by the Panel for showcasing the work of the Panel as well as to recruit new members

- Access Panels are made up of skilled individuals who bring a great deal of personal and professional experience to the work of the Panels
  - This should be recognised by: SDEF, Local Authorities, individuals in the community and other organisations

### ***Local Authority Links and Support***

- Panels mainly receive some form of support from the Local Authority, either by means of a grant, or paid support such as meeting rooms or postage. The level and type of support varies widely across Scotland
  - Training in volunteers management for Local Authority representatives
- The majority of Panels have links with the Local Authority although this varies from area to area and seems to be down to individuals rather than requirements
  - Panels should firm up relations with Local Authorities for sustainability. This could be done by means of a Service Level Agreement, detailing what both parties expect from one another as regards the level and nature of support.

### ***Local Support***

- Panels in local areas sometimes work in isolation and have little contact with other groups in their local area, or other Access Panels.
  - SDEF should assist in the set up of a local support network for each Panel, comprising of other local Panels, the Volunteer Centre, CVS, Local Authority and other Disability groups.
  - SDEF should continue to develop, in consultation with Panels, a means of updating Panels on relevant issues in their field of work
  - SDEF should facilitate opportunities for all Panels to meet to share information about current work and strategies.

### ***Further Developments***

- In addition to providing conclusions on the study undertaken, this study has also uncovered some areas for further investigation, which could be undertaken by SDEF and the Access Panels in the future.
  - SDEF should ensure that further work is undertaken, looking into the attitudes of young disabled people to local Access Panels and their likelihood of becoming members
  - SDEF should ensure that a full training needs analysis is carried out on the range of Panel tasks to enable the development of a training plan for Panel members across Scotland
  - SDEF should ensure that further study is undertaken into the relationship between Access Panels and elected members

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