



# Evaluation report: Circuit Rider conference (Lasa)

28–29 February 2008, Birmingham

## Summary

This appears to have been an excellent event, which attracted its target audience, and all but achieved its goal of increasing attendance by 50% over last year's conference. The overall ratings are very good, and the atmosphere appears to have been very friendly and constructive. The ratings for most of the speakers and workshops are excellent, but there is variation with one or two letting the side down. Open source, as usual, provoked the most controversy. The Speedgeek idea was well received, and seems to have been productive.

Most participants had come to network with each other, as well as to learn, and for a staggering two thirds their aim(s) were wholly met. Almost all felt that the event would benefit their work a lot or quite a lot, with the majority of anticipated changes being the use or investigation of technology they had learned about at the conference. This event appears to make a significant contribution to the circuit rider community.

Opinions on the ICT Hub itself were very positive, with over 90% of those who gave a view feeling that it had been excellent or good, or that it had not had enough time to make its potential impact.

## Analysis of participants

The target number of participants for this event was set at 75, a 50% increase over the number who attended the previous Circuit Rider conference in January 2007. It attracted 71 (plus two who booked and didn't attend, and a number of visitors who came for a short while); this is a considerable improvement on 2007.

In all, 39 evaluation forms for the whole event were returned – over half of the participants – which is in line with other ICT Hub conferences. Unless stated otherwise, figures below are based on these 39 responses. (Percentages ignore non-response, unless indicated.) In addition, 82 workshop evaluation forms were returned (which are analysed under the 'Workshops' heading below).

At previous ICT Hub events, participants have been asked to identify the size of their organisation in financial bands, with suggested staff sizes as a prompt. Because of doubts about people's ability to answer this question accurately on the day, on this occasion participants were asked to provide the information on their booking form instead. The results are interesting. Because the data is on the booking form it has been possible to identify the organisation concerned. This shows that different people from the same organisation had often provided different answers. The organisations were therefore looked up on **Guidestar** to obtain more official figures for their turnover. Guidestar only provides information about charities and some related organisations, not about commercial organisations or social enterprises. Data was therefore not available for all participants' organisations, and for these the figure given was left unchanged. The results, however, are instructive:

### What is your organisation's annual income?

	Respondents	Guidestar-adjusted
Under £10,000 .....	9 (15%)	3 (5%)
£10,000 - £25,000 .....	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
£25,000 - £100,000 .....	11 (18%)	4 (6%)
£100,000 - £500,000 .....	11 (18%)	9 (14%)
£500,000 - £1,000,000 .....	13 (22%)	12 (19%)
Over £1,000,000 .....	15 (25%)	34 (54%)
Don't know or no answer .....	9	6

No one over-estimated the size of their organisation, and only three of those who gave a figure of under £1million, and whose data could be checked, were correct. There are two possible explanations for the discrepancy: either people do not know the turnover of their organisation, or they were interpreting the question to mean something else: trading income (as opposed to income from all sources), their part of the organisation (rather than the whole organisation), or their organisation's ICT budget are all possibilities.

**Recommendation**

Data in previous evaluation reports relating to the size of the organisations benefiting from the ICT Hub should be ignored in its entirety.

Assuming that respondents were better-informed about their organisation's and their own activities, we find that about a third are from organisations dedicated to ICT support and training. About half of these are funded, half social enterprise – a perhaps-surprising balance. Many people would not expect social enterprises to be so prominent. The other large group of participants were from infrastructure organisations, which one might have expected. Respondents could tick more than one option.

**What is your organisation's main role?**

<i>ICT support or training (funded, or mainly funded)</i> .....	11
<i>ICT support or training (social enterprise)</i> .....	12
<i>ICT support or training (commercial)</i> .....	1
<i>Regional, sub-regional or local infrastructure organisation</i> .....	11
<i>Software or hardware development and/or sales</i> .....	2
<i>Funder</i> .....	2
<i>Freelance or consultancy</i> .....	2
<i>Community centre</i> .....	1
<i>No reply</i> .....	4

Participants' own roles were quite evenly split between technical support for other organisations, development work and hands-on technical work. This question was also asked in a slightly different way on the booking form, giving an indication of whether our respondents are representative of the participants overall. The responses are consistent, though not completely comparable. Given that the event was aimed at Circuit Riders, it is reassuring that this was the largest category by far on the booking forms.

**What is your role(s) in your organisation? (from evaluations)**

<i>ICT technical support or training for other organisations</i> .....	16
<i>ICT development work or consultancy</i> .....	20
<i>Management (trustee, chief officer, coordinator, senior manager)</i> .....	5
<i>Technical work on ICT (e.g. web site or software development, in-house ICT support)</i> .....	18
<i>Commercial – sales, etc.</i> .....	1
<i>No reply</i> .....	4

**What is your role? (from booking form)**

<i>Circuit rider</i> .....	18
<i>ICT Development worker</i> .....	13
<i>ICT Consultant</i> .....	10
<i>Manager</i> .....	8
<i>Regional ICT Champion</i> .....	6
<i>Developer</i> .....	3
<i>ICT Support worker</i> .....	2
<i>No reply</i> .....	9

All of this suggests that the event was successful in attracting its intended audience.

**Quality of the event overall**

The overall rating of this event was very good, and considerably better than the 2007 event. One third of respondents rated it exceptional and all but one of the remainder rated it good.

**How was the event as a whole?**

*Exceptional* ... 13    *Good*..... 24    *OK — worth coming* . 0    *Not very good*.....1    *V. disappointing* .... 0

The ratings for the speakers were even more impressive, with two thirds of respondents giving the top rating (again an improvement on 2007), and no one rating them lower than 'worth listening to'.

**How good did you feel that the speakers were overall?**

*Experienced, etc* ... 26    *Worth listening to*... 13    *Mixed bag* ..... 0    *Disappointing*.....0

Most of the additional comments on the quality of the event were very positive, reinforcing the impression that this was a top-notch event. The only negative comments were two about the finish being too late, one about the lack of wireless, and one about the food. It is worth quoting all the comments, to get the full flavour.

**Please add any additional comments on the quality of the event:**

- Wonderful
- Best yet
- Loved it
- Very interesting event
- Highly organised, welcoming, inclusive of all communities
- Well organised – chock full of interesting concepts, ideas and activities
- Such nice people
- Felt like a group of friends talking about a shared interest
- Excited by wealth of knowledge and relaxed approach of speakers/organisers
- Refreshments were extremely generous
- Excellent food
- I am lacto vegetarian – had to eat out
- Finished too late in the day
- Great venue, late Friday travelling home not good
- Please can we have available wireless at the next one.

***The venue and practical arrangements***

Very few respondents had any problems with practical details.

**Which (if any) of the practical details were unsatisfactory?**

<i>The booking arrangements</i> .....	0
<i>The information sent out before the event</i> .....	1
<i>The location, accessibility or parking arrangements</i> .....	1
<i>The arrangements at the venue and provision for workshops</i> .....	1
<i>The refreshments</i> .....	0
<i>The temperature or any other environmental factors</i> .....	6

The temperature was the only feature that attracted more than one comment – several respondents found it too cold. The other comments (plus those already given above) were:

- Hotels in centre are dreadful
- Difficult to find out what time the course started – not enough warning of events
- Rooms a bit stuffy when full

None of these problems appears to have affected people's enjoyment of the event.

***The workshops***

Because the workshops again extended over two days, it was decided to continue the practice from last year of having separate evaluation forms for each day's workshops, which worked well. The main drawback of this approach is that the workshop evaluations were not associated with the respondent profiling information on the overall event evaluations. It is therefore not possible to look at whether different types of participant rated each workshop differently.

Eighty-two workshop evaluation forms were returned, providing 156 evaluations of ten different workshops, plus the 'speedgeek' sessions. Three of the workshops ran twice, the remainder once. The figures given here combine the results from both instances of those that ran twice (starred in the list below). For most of the workshops the number of evaluations returned was in double figures:

### Number of responses per workshop

Talking telephony.....	12
Web 2.0 and the non-profit world *.....	30
On line community building & engagement *.....	21
Open source – practical tools for the job.....	22
Circuit rider training & standards.....	14
Community wireless mesh networking *.....	17
Evaluating ICT support.....	7
Bringing your organisation to life: Digital media & the web.....	14
Circuit rider learning and skills development.....	10
Success factors for social enterprise.....	9

Overall, over 80% of the workshops were rated as excellent or good, split more or less evenly between the two. There were, however, significant variations – from the three rated as excellent by a majority of their respondents, through a middle band where a majority gave a rating of good, to the two anomalies – ‘Open source’, which was as controversial as ever, with wildly differing ratings, and ‘Evaluating ICT support’ which was clearly not up to the standard of the other workshops.

### How good was [the workshop you attended]?

	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>OK</i>	<i>Disappointing or poor</i>
<i>Digital media &amp; the web</i>	71%	21%	7%	
<i>On line community building &amp; engagement *</i>	62%	33%		5%
<i>Community wireless mesh networking *</i>	53%	47%		
<i>Circuit rider learning and skills</i>	40%	50%	10%	
<i>Success factors for social enterprise</i>	38%	63%		
<i>Circuit rider training &amp; standards</i>	36%	64%		
<i>Talking telephony</i>	33%	58%		8%
<i>Web 2.0 and the non-profit world *</i>	27%	57%	17%	
<i>Open source – practical tools for the job</i>	36%	27%	18%	18%
<i>Evaluating ICT support</i>	14%	29%	57%	
<i>Average</i>	41%	45%	10%	4%

On the question of how much participants had learned, the pattern is very similar to the previous conference. Around a quarter learned ‘a lot’ from their workshop, but around a third learned only ‘some things’ and 3% ‘not much at all’. These were spread between four workshops. The order of the workshops is similar to that for quality, but not quite the same. ‘Community wireless mesh networking’ did better on learning than one would have expected from its quality, and ‘Circuit rider learning and skills’ did worse than one would have expected.

### How much did you learn from [the workshop you attended]?

	<i>A lot</i>	<i>Quite a lot</i>	<i>Some things</i>	<i>Not much at all</i>
<i>Digital media &amp; the web</i>	36%	43%	21%	
<i>On line community building &amp; engagement *</i>	43%	33%	19%	5%
<i>Community wireless mesh networking *</i>	53%	29%	18%	
<i>Circuit rider learning and skills</i>	10%	50%	30%	10%
<i>Success factors for social enterprise</i>	25%	50%	25%	
<i>Circuit rider training &amp; standards</i>	21%	43%	36%	
<i>Talking telephony</i>	25%	42%	33%	
<i>Web 2.0 and the non-profit world *</i>	23%	40%	37%	
<i>Open source – practical tools for the job</i>	18%	36%	36%	9%
<i>Evaluating ICT support</i>		14%	71%	14%
<i>Average</i>	27%	38%	32%	3%

One innovative style of session carried forward from the previous conference (with minor changes to the format) was the ‘Speedgeek’ sessions: ten-minute slots for a range of topics all presented at the same time, with participants moving around from one to the next. This idea was generally well received, with over a third of respondents feeling that it worked very well, and a further half quite well.

### How well did you think the Speedgeek idea worked?

Very well .....	31	(38%)
Quite well .....	41	(50%)
Not very well .....	4	(5%)
Not well at all.....	0	
No reply .....	6	(7%)

Only half the respondents answered the question about the individual sessions (some because they did not attend one, others because they were presenting a session). Some of the sessions were added after the evaluation forms had been prepared, and were therefore not included. Although some people did write in the details of these, this was inconsistent and the figures are unreliable. The table below therefore only shows the assessments of those sessions that were given on the form. A quarter of the sessions were rated as excellent, ranging from 'Healthy computing', rated as excellent by a third of respondents, to 'Key software solutions' which was rated as excellent by only 13%. Over half the sessions were rated good (with not much variation between sessions), leaving just one in five to be rated OK or poor.

### What did you think of the Speedgeek sessions?

	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>OK</i>	<i>Poor</i>
<i>Healthy computing</i>	35%	59%	6%	
<i>Web-based office tools</i>	28%	62%	11%	
<i>Open source certification</i>	21%	54%	21%	4%
<i>Ubuntu</i>	16%	45%	29%	9%
<i>Key software solutions</i>	13%	62%	26%	
<i>Average</i>	23%	57%	18%	2%

When invited to give additional comments on the workshops, 32 responses were received, many mentioning the Speedgeek sessions. Several of the comments were positive, in general or about specific workshops, including:

- Very well organised, light and enjoyable – keep it up
- Made me think how my organisation is presenting itself online
- Good mix of experiences
- John [Kenyon's] enthusiasm is very refreshing

Others made general comments, covering a few different areas:

- The timing: More time for evening session; Slightly longer with a midway break; More time in the community wireless session; Earlier finish
- The approach: More practical workshops – more hands on; Putting people into groups to "have a think" is a poor way to educate; Prior consultation of attendees as to what they wanted to hear about; More practical; More interaction
- The lack of internet access

The only workshop to receive specific feedback from more than one person was the open source one.

Comments included:

- Very smart & experienced guys with *horrible* presentation skills. They are hurting their own cause by not improving their skills in presenting material and engaging an audience. I wish all presenters had to complete a presentation skills workshop before being allowed to present.
- Too much time spent slagging off Microsoft, not enough examples.
- Basically an anti Microsoft rant. I expected open source options and advantages/disadvantages.
- Perhaps a little more structure in open source session.
- Open source: less rambling, less anti-Microsoft preaching, more on what open source offers.

Talking telephony received one comment:

- Talking telephony was too lecture based – more activity.

The comments on the Speedgeek sessions revolved mainly around two issues – the noise and the time:

- Noise from other groups distracted
- Better in a separate room to be able to hear presentation

- Too noisy, not enough time for that group size
- More time – a bit hard to hear
- Longer sessions
- Perhaps 15 minutes not 10

One respondent 'would have liked the chance to revisit other Speedgeek sessions but got caught up in the break by networking'.

### ***Likely impact of the event***

For three quarters of the respondents, networking with other people was a main aim in attending the event. The next most popular aim, for about half the respondents, was to find out about a specific idea or technology, while finding out about the ICT Hub and about circuit riding were each aims for a quarter of the respondents. Sharing experiences and delivering workshops were less important aims.

#### **What was your main aim in attending the event?**

<i>To network with other people</i> .....	29
<i>To find out about a specific idea or technology that was on the agenda</i> .....	17
<i>To find out more about what is happening with the ICT Hub</i> .....	11
<i>To learn more about circuit riding, or how to set up a circuit rider service</i> .....	10
<i>To promote our own work or share an experience we have had</i> .....	8
<i>To deliver a workshop or Speedgeek session</i> .....	4
<i>Find out what people are doing and how</i> .....	1
<i>To contribute and learn from training and standards project</i> .....	1

For two thirds of the respondents, their aim was wholly met, and it was mostly met for all but one of the remainder. This is an excellent outcome. Those who wanted to promote their own work or learn about circuit riding were more likely to say that their aims had been met mostly rather than wholly, while the one respondents whose aims were only partly met had hoped to find out more about the ICT Hub.

#### **How far did the event meet these aims?**

<i>Wholly</i> .....	23
<i>Mostly</i> .....	11
<i>Partly</i> .....	1
<i>Not much</i> .....	0

In terms of the impact of the event, about a third of respondents felt that it would benefit their work 'a lot', with most of the rest saying that it would bring 'quite a lot' of benefit. These are also excellent figures.

#### **How much will your work benefit from this event?**

<i>A lot</i> .....	11
<i>Quite a lot</i> .....	21
<i>To a small extent</i> .....	2
<i>Not much at all</i> .....	0

About half the respondents gave more details about what they would now be doing differently. Many mentioned using or exploring new technologies that they had learned about, while others mentioned linking up with others or other organisational changes. Comments included:

#### **Please tell us what you will be able to do better or differently:**

- Investigate or use Web 2.0 technologies (eight mentions) – including rss, online calendar and web tools
- Link up with more people or organisations (three mentions)
- Will be looking at the potential of wireless network
- Knowledge of free software and rural broadband access
- Practice and share new knowledge and skills (three mentions)
- Explore Circuit Rider options ...

## **The ICT Hub**

The opportunity was taken to ask respondents to comment in general on their experience of the ICT Hub. Overall, the response is very positive for the ICT Hub. A third rate it as excellent, and another quarter as good, while a further 18% think it didn't have enough time to make its potential impact. This leaves just 8% thinking that some bits were not good, or that the whole programme was not worth it. If the 'don't knows' are excluded, the positive rating ('excellent', 'good' or 'probably good') is 30 out of 33, or 91%.

### **What do you think of the ICT Hub overall?**

<i>Excellent, a very valuable programme</i> .....	13 (33%)
<i>A good programme, worth having</i> .....	10 (26%)
<i>Probably good, but it didn't have long enough to make a real impact</i> .....	7 (18%)
<i>Some good bits, some not good</i> .....	3 (8%)
<i>Probably not worth it</i> .....	0
<i>A complete waste of money and effort</i> .....	0
<i>Don't know, or no answer</i> .....	6

When asked what could have made the ICT Hub better, four respondents just said that it should have continued, while three said that it should have started earlier, or took too long to get off the ground. The remaining comments cover specific aspects of the work and one suggesting that it didn't give enough direct support to smaller organisations. The comments included:

### **What could have made the ICT Hub better?**

- Different strands had different benefits – Circuit Riding was hugely beneficial
- Took too long to get off the ground – Knowledgebase is good.
- Continuity – just when it started to make a significant difference the funding ends.
- Earlier start on producing outputs – higher profile – better leadership.
- A filter down to smaller organisations of direct support and help.

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