Guiding small businesses
through environmental regulations

NetRegs
User Evaluation
Survey
2013

www.netregs.org.uk

Executive Summary

The NetRegs – www.netregs.org.uk - website provides web based sector specific advice for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) to help them understand their environmental responsibilities, adherence to regulations and encourages good general environmental practice.

This document reports the findings of an online survey carried out to identify how useful the NetRegs website is for its users.

The User Evaluation Survey 2013 was carried out by requesting NetRegs users to complete an online evaluation survey (Figure 4.1 – Appendix). The online survey received 81 responses from a variety of business sectors. The business sectors surveyed can be seen in Table 2.1; sectors included Agriculture, Hunting and Fishing, Construction, Manufacturing and Education to name a few.

The key findings of the survey are summarised below:

The survey revealed that 92% of business search for environmental information when complying with environmental legislation confirming the need for an easily accessible information service such as NetRegs. Around 45% of users felt that NetRegs had saved them money or made them more resource efficient with average savings per business found to be between £1,179 and £2,231. The majority of users agreed that the layout of the website was either good or excellent and that NetRegs was easy to use. To conclude the survey, users were asked to provide feedback and suggestions of improvement for the website. According to the survey feedback, NetRegs continues to be a well respected source of environmental information, with comments such as "Excellent Website" and "Fantastic Resource" appearing frequently. However there remains room for improvement with 41% of users (who provided suggestions,) requesting more information on legislation, with some users suggesting the introduction of "easily digestible" legislation summary sheets/fact sheets. In order for NetRegs to continue to be a well respected and well used source of environmental information it must be dynamic, taking in to account and addressing the feedback and suggestions made from its users.

Introduction

NetRegs is a web-based electronic tool; offering Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SME's) in Scotland and Northern Ireland, plain English guidance on how to comply with environmental legislation and reduce their environmental impact. The NetRegs.org.uk website is maintained and operated by funding pooled from a partnership between the Northern Irish Environment Agency (NIEA) and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).

Previous research has shown that NetRegs is considered a valuable resource (NetRegs Awareness Survey 2013), however there is little research that identifies the behaviour of NetRegs users and also how they value the current website. Therefore the main aim of the User Evaluation Survey 2013, was to collate a robust amount of information from users of the NetRegs website to identify the users behaviour and to understand the benefits that users receive from the website.

The 2013 survey received a total of 81 responses from businesses representing a variety of sectors, as shown in Table 2.1, and although NetRegs makes it clear that the guidance provided is for Scottish and Northern Irish businesses the survey received responses from businesses located throughout the UK. Not all respondents answered all of the questions in the survey, therefore the number of respondents (n = x) may differ between questions.

This report provides a summary of the results obtained from the 2013 NetRegs User Evaluation Survey.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

2.0 Main Findings

2.1 Characteristics of Respondents

The survey attracted responses from a variety of business sectors, as shown in table 2.1. As we can see from table 2.1 Manufacturing business represent the largest number of respondents accounting for 30% of the responses, followed by Construction with 17% and Offices with 11% of the overall responses.

Table 2.1: Business sectors represented in the survey

BUSINESS SECTOR	TOTAL	%
Agriculture, Hunting and Fishing	5	6%
Construction	14	17%
Education	2	2%
Energy	1	1%
Engineering	2	2%
Hotels and Restaurants	1	1%
Landscaping	1	1%
Manufacturing	24	30%
Mining, Quarrying, Electricity, Gas and Water Supply	4	5%
Ministry of Defence	2	2%
Offices	9	11%
Property	1	1%
Retail and Wholesale	2	2%
Telecommunication , I.T	2	2%
Transport	5	6%
Waste	6	7%
TOTAL	**81**	**100%**

N = 81
Base: All businesses

Table 2.2 below shows the survey respondents position within the company. The majority of responses were from Managers or Senior Staff (43%), closely followed by Professional / Technical Staff (42%), 14% Administrative or Secretarial Staff and 1% of the respondents were Unknown.

Table 2.2 Respondents position in company

POSITION	PERCENTAGE
Manager / Senior Staff	43%
Professional / Technical Staff	42%
Administrative or Secretarial Staff	14%
Unknown	1%

N = 81
Base: All businesses

Further analysis in to the characteristics of the respondents revealed that the majority of responses from Managers and Senior Staff were from SME's, where as larger companies were more likely to be represented by a Professional or Technical member of staff (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: Number of respondents by position in the company, by size band.

POSITION	NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES			
	0-9	10 - 49	50 - 249	(+) 250
Manager or Senior Staff	8	6	13	8
Professional or Technical Staff	2	3	9	20
Adimistrative or Secretarial Staff	2	7	1	1
Unknown	0	1	0	0

N = 81
Base: All businesses

The geographic locations of the survey respondents are shown in table 2.4. 63% of the businesses surveyed were located in Scotland, 23% in Northern Ireland, 11% in England and 1% in Wales. Although NetRegs makes it clear that the information provided on the website is only relevant to SME's in Scotland and Northern Ireland, we can see from the data in table 2.4 that businesses in England and Wales also use it. This is most likely due to cross boundary business operations.

Table 2.4: Geographic location of businesses interviewed

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF BUSINESSES	PERCENTAGE OF BUISNESSES
Scotland	51	63%
Northern Ireland	19	23%
England	9	11%
Wales	1	1%
Unknown	1	1%
TOTAL	**81**	100%

N = 81
Base: All businesses

2.2 Current Business Practice

Businesses were prompted with a list of actions and asked if they carried out any of the actions when complying with environmental regulation, the results are shown in Table 2.5.
The vast majority of businesses (90%) search for information whilst complying with environmental regulation, 56% contact either SEPA or NIEA and only 23% would ask for advice from a consultant or solicitor. A possible reason for businesses being less likely to contact a solicitor or consultant may be due to the cost implications associated with using such advisors.

Table 2.5: Actions carried out when complying with environmental regulations.

| ACTION	PERCENTAGE OF BUSINESSES
Search for information	90%
Keep records, files and general administration	86%
Co-operate with audits and inspections	79%
Check the reliability of environmental information	70%
Contact either SEPA or NIEA	56%
Compile and submit applications	43%
Provide information to 3rd party organisations	32%
Modify equipment and machinery	31%
Ask for advice from solicitor or consultant	23%
None of the above	1%

N = 81
Base: All businesses – Multiple answers allowed.

Businesses were next asked a number of questions to gain more detail on how they spend their time when complying with environmental regulations. To begin they were asked to provide information on how many hours per week (approximately) do they spend complying with environmental regulations. 37% of businesses stated that they spend between 1 to 5 hours per week and a quarter thought that they spent approximately 26 hours or more complying with environmental regulations (Figure 2.1). Following on from the last question users were asked how often did their company use the NetRegs website (Figure 4.2 in Appendix) and how many hours per week did the company save using the NetRegs website as opposed to sourcing similar information from different websites (Figure 4.3 in Appendix). Over half of the respondents visit the NetRegs website every month and 18% visit on a weekly basis. Of all of the respondents, 80% stated that using visiting Netregs saves their company between 1 to 5 hours per week, due to avoiding the need to trawl through multiple websites.

Figure 2.1: Hours per week (approximately) that businesses spend complying with environmental regulations.
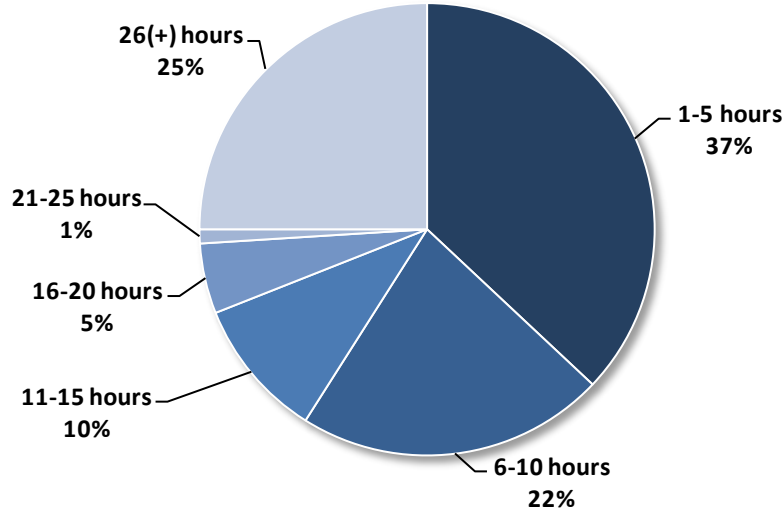
N = 79
Base: All businesses

2.3 Economic Value of NetRegs to Businesses

Businesses were prompted with a list of questions in order to establish the economic value to businesses of the NetRegs website. As can be seen in Table 2.6 just under half (45%) of respondents acknowledged that using NetRegs had saved them money.

Table 2.6: Businesses that have saved money by using the NetRegs website.

YES	NO
45%	55%

N = 67
Base: All businesses.

All businesses who answered yes to saving money due to using NetRegs were then asked to provide information on the level of the savings made. The vast majority of businesses (93%) all thought they received savings of at least £251 per year with 42% believing that they have made a healthy saving of between £501 and £1,000, annually and 4% of businesses stated to be saving a staggering £50,000 +.
Taking in to account all of the information in Figure 2.2 it was possible to estimate the annual average saving per business, from using the NetRegs website. It was calculated that the average savings per businesses is between £1,179 and £1,552 annually.

Figure 2.2: Money saved (per year) due to use of the NetRegs website

N = 26

Base: All businesses answering 'Yes' to saving money due to the NetRegs website.

To further understand the distribution of the savings made, further analysis was carried out looking at the relationship between time spent on NetRegs and money saved. The results, shown in Table 2.7, the greatest savings are seen from users who visit the website once per month, who on average are saving between £1,879 and £2,385. Businesses who visit NetRegs once per week also receive substantial savings, which on average equate to between £900 and £1,700 per year per business.

Table 2.7: Relationship between Frequency of visits to NetRegs and savings made.

| FREQUENCY OF VISITS TO NETREGS		£'s SAVED
Every week	Low Estimate	£900
	High Estimate	£1,700
Every month	Low Estimate	£1,879
	High Estimate	£2,385
Every 2 months	Low Estimate	£0
	High Estimate	£125
Every 1/4 of a year	Low Estimate	£63
	High Estimate	£188
Twice a year	Low Estimate	£0
	High Estimate	£125
Annually	Low Estimate	£0
	High Estimate	£0
Less than once a year	Low Estimate	£0
	High Estimate	£188
First time using NetRegs	Low Estimate	£0
	High Estimate	£83

N = 66
Base: All businesses

Businesses were then asked whether using Netregs has made their company more resource efficient by conserving water, energy, materials and reducing waste disposal costs. 43% of businesses felt that they had become more resource efficient since using NetRegs, with average savings estimated between £1,457 and £2,231 per business per year.

2.4 Website Layout, Ease of Use and User Comments

It is important that the NetRegs website is easy to use and easy to understand; therefore it was necessary to gain feedback on the current website layout and the ease of use of the site. Businesses were asked to rate the layout (Figure 2.3) and the ease of use (Figure 2.4) of the website from Excellent to Poor. The vast majority (93%) of businesses felt that the layout of the website was either excellent (32%) or good (61%). Only 2% of respondents felt that the layout of the website was poor, stating that the website was not user friendly. Of the businesses that felt the website layout was average or poor 50% were from the Construction sector based in Scotland and the remaining 50% were from the Manufacturing sector based in Northern Ireland.

Figure 2.3: Businesses view on the layout of the NetRegs website
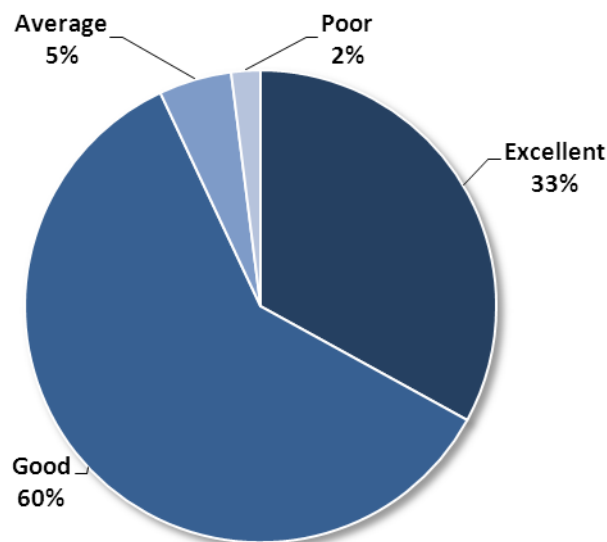
N = 60
Base: All businesses

Following on from the previous question business were asked to rate how easy it was to locate what they were looking for on the NetRegs website, 66% felt that when using the NetRegs website it was easy to locate what you were looking for, 26% felt that it was very easy and only 8% felt it was hard to navigate to the desired page (Figure 2.4). Of the businesses that felt it was hard, 61% were located within the Manufacturing sector, within Northern Ireland.

Figure 2.4: NetRegs ease of use
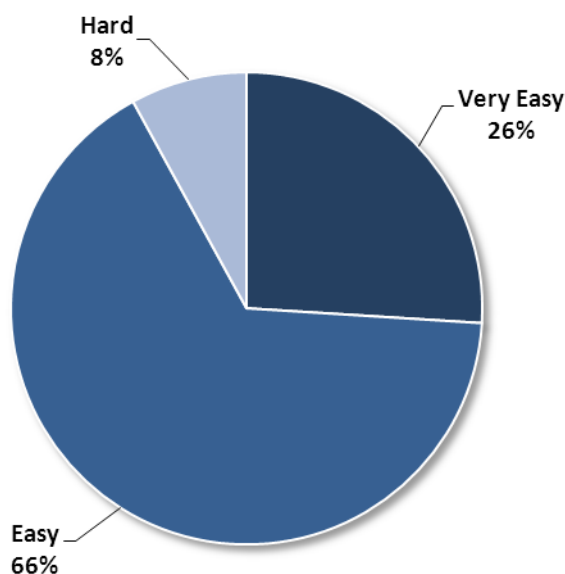
N = 60
Base: All businesses

At the end of the survey businesses were invited to leave feedback and suggestions relating to the NetRegs website. A total of 36% of businesses either provided feedback on the NetRegs website or offered suggestions on ways to improve the website. Of all of the respondents who provided suggestions for ways to improve the NetRegs website 41% felt that more could be done to improve the information provided on legislation, including producing fact sheets on legislation and easy to digest legislation summaries. 18% thought that online training would be good and suggested including webinars, carbon foot print tools and tools for Packaging Regulations and Carbon and Energy management.14% of respondents wanted to see more information on Environmental Management Systems and ISO 14001 and 9% felt that the NetRegs website would benefit from following a similar style to the Health and Safety Executive website. The vast majority of feedback received from users was all very positive with comments such as 'NetRegs is a fantastic resource', 'excellent website' and 'Very good source of information' appearing frequently. However a small percentage of feedback provided an insight into areas of the website that could be improved and these areas included more information on legislation and Environmental Management Systems and improved awareness of website especially within newer companies. A table with all of the comments and feedback can be found in the appendix, Table 4.1.

3.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

3.1 Current Business Practice

The survey asked users to identify any actions carried out by their business when complying with environmental regulations. Almost all of the companies searched for information and a large proportion also kept records, files and carried out general administration. Apart from the users who stated that they did not carry out any of the actions listed (1%), the action carried out the least by businesses was to obtain advice from a solicitor or consultant which is more than likely down to the cost implications associated with using such services.

Over one third of users stated that they spend around 1 – 5 hours per week complying with environmental regulations, one quarter thought they spent 26 hours or more and one fifth spent 6 – 10 hours per week complying. Out of all of the sectors, Construction businesses were most likely spend 26 hours or more complying with environmental regulations, possibly due to the increasing requirements seen over the past two decades, from the legislative and regulatory framework to mitigate and improve the environmental performance of their projects[1].

To conclude the first section of the survey businesses were asked to provide feedback on how often they used NetRegs and how many business hours were saved due to using the website. Most businesses stated that they used the website every month and saved between 1 to 5 hours per week.

3.2 Economic Value of NetRegs

Under half of the users interviewed felt that their business had saved money whilst using NetRegs, with 41% of these users saving between £501 and £1000. On average between all users interviewed the annual savings made by using NetRegs, per business total up to around £900 and £1700. The sources of these savings are possibly due to one or more of the following benefits: reduced risk of prosecution or fines, reduced costs and an increasing customer base.

Similar to the previous question, users were asked whether they had become more resource efficient since using NetRegs and to provide an estimated value of the savings made. 43% of users felt that they had become more resource efficient and the majority estimated their savings to be around £1,501 to £2,000. The average savings made by all users by becoming more resource efficient equates to between £1,457 and £2,231.

Further analysis was carried out to discover the relationship between time spent and money saved by using NetRegs. From the results it was concluded that the greatest savings were made by businesses who visited the website monthly, which on average saved between £1,879 and £2,385 per annum. This suggests that the current procedure used by NetRegs of producing and publishing monthly updates /

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[1] L Hodgson and J Essex, *'Challenge to the UK Construction Industry; to live within environmental limits'*, A Research and Development Project, Published by Institution of Civil Engineers, Url: http://www.ice.org.uk/getattachment/84520fd1-18d1-4748-99c4-3dba0a0fe711/Building-within-our-Environmental-Limits.aspx

reports is adequate if users are to receive the maximum benefits or savings associated with using the site.

3.3 Website Design and Ease of Use

Users of Netregs were asked to provide feedback on the layout of the website and how easy it was for users to navigate to their desired page(s). The vast majority of respondents felt that the layout of the website was either 'Good' or 'Excellent' and that the website was 'Easy' or 'Very Easy' to use. Of the users who felt that there was room for improvement with regards to the layout or the functionality of the website the following comments or suggestions were made: "Businesses need a short, to the point, website which provides concise updates"; "Additional Guidance on Legislation"; "Difficult to dig down to specific requirements. Find new updates on legislation ..." Although these comments are from the minority of users, it is important to address the issues raised. One of the most common suggestions is to provide more information on legislation; therefore it may be worthwhile for NetRegs to prioritise a review of all of the guidance on legislation and to look at providing other means of presenting information on legislation, for example, in a summary sheet or fact sheet format.

To conclude the report, it is evident that NetRegs is a well respected source of environmental information that is helping businesses to comply with environmental regulations and become more efficient. In order for NetRegs to continue to be a well respected and well used source of environmental information it must be dynamic, up-to-date and interactive, whilst also taking in to account and addressing the feedback and suggestions made by its users.

Appendix

Figure 4.1: Survey questionnaire

NetRegs Evaluation Survey

1. How many employees does your company have?

○ 0-9

○ 10-49

○ 50-249

○ +250

2. Which of the following best describes your business output?

○ Agriculture, Hunting, Foresty and Fishing

○ Mining, Quarrying, Electricity, Gas and Water Supply

○ Manufacturing

○ Construction

○ Wholesale and Retail Trade including Repairs

○ Hotels and Restaurants

○ Transport, Storage and Communication

○ Financial Services

○ Health and Social Work

If Other Please Specify

3. Where are your business premises located?

○ Northern Ireland

○ Scotland

Other

4. Which of the following occupation describes your role?

○ Manager or Senior Staff

○ Professional or Technical Staff

○ Adminstrative or Secretarial Staff

If not mentioned, please specify

NetRegs Evaluation Survey

5. Does your company do any of the following actions, when complying with your environmental regulation?

☐ Search for information

☐ Check the reliability of environmental information

☐ Ask for advice from a solicitor or consultant

☐ Contact either: Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Northren Ireland Environment Agency

☐ Provide information to third-party organisations for example, consultants

☐ Compile and submit applications

☐ Modify equipment and machinery

☐ Cooperate with audits or inspections

☐ Keep records, files and general administration

☐ My business does not do any of the above when complying with regulation

Any other action?

_____

6. Approximately, how many hours does your business spend complying with environmental regulations, on a weekly basis.

○ 1-5 hours per week

○ 6-10 hours

○ 11-15 hours

○ 16-20 hours

○ 21-25 hours

○ +26 hours

7. How often does your company use the NetRegs website

○ Every week

○ Every month

○ Every two months

○ Every quarter of a year

○ Twice a year

○ Annually

○ Less than once a year

○ This is my first time using NetRegs

NetRegs Evaluation Survey

8. How many hours does your company save using the NetRegs website per week? (Compared to sourcing similar information on different websites)

○ 1-5 hours per week

○ 6-10 hours

○ 11-15 hours

○ 16-20 hours

○ 21-25 hours

○ +26 hours

9. Have you saved money by using the NetRegs website?

○ Yes

○ No

10. Could you provide an estimate of any savings made by using NetRegs?

○ Less than £250 per year

○ £251 - £500

○ £501 - £1,000

○ £1,001 - £1,500

○ £1,501 - £2,000

○ £5,000 - £10,000

○ £20,000 - £50,000

○ +£50,000

11. Has using the NetRegs website made your company become more resource efficient? (By conserving water, energy, materials and reducing waste disposal costs etc.)

○ Yes

○ No

NetRegs Evaluation Survey

12. What is the estimated value of these saving?

- ◯ Less than £250 per year
- ◯ £251 - £500
- ◯ £501 - £1,000
- ◯ £1,001 - £1,500
- ◯ £1,501 - £2,000
- ◯ £5,000 - £10,000
- ◯ £20,000 - £50,000
- ◯ +£50,000

### 13. Please rate the layout of the website

Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
◯	◯	◯	◯

14. Please rate how easy it usually is to locate what you were looking for on NetRegs?

Very Easy	Easy	Hard	Very Hard
◯	◯	◯	◯

15. We are planning on adding new functionality and content to the website, such as online training tools and a business self assessment tool. Is there anything you would like to suggest?
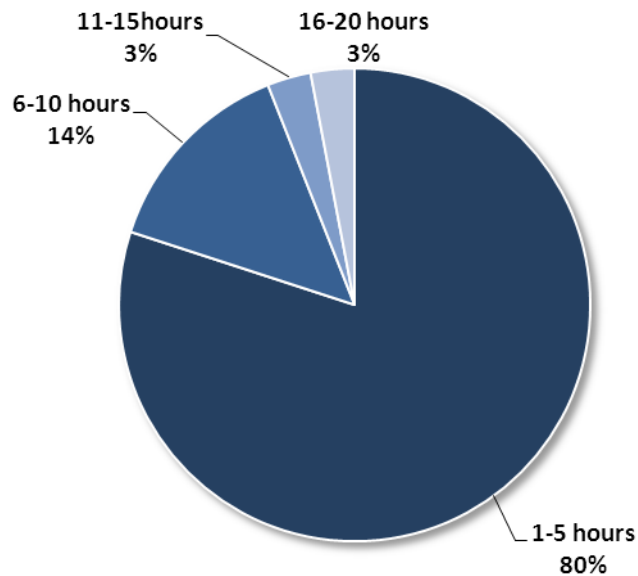
16. Please leave any comments about the website as a whole e.g. information contained, layout etc. Positive or negative criticism will be highly appreciated. Thank you

Figure 4.2: Frequency of usage of the NetRegs website
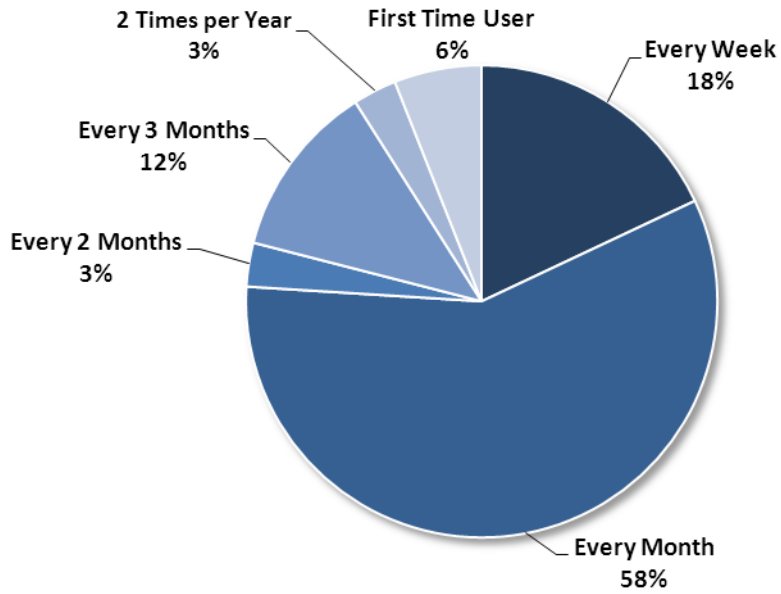
N = 70
Base: All businesses

Figure 4.3: Hours per week saved due to the NetRegs website.

N = 67
Base: All businesses

Table 4.1 Feedback and suggestions from respondents

Suggestions	Feedback
"Fact sheets for individual pieces of legislation which break up the most important topics into manageable information. 'Toolbox Talks' for key topics, i.e. informal short presentations providing refresher training for the workforce."	"It is important for content to be updated in a timely manner and to be kept fully up-to-date."
"On line training would be good"	"Very useful in keeping up to date with legislation and providing a summary of the legislative requirements"
	"Netregs is a fantastic resource which I find invaluable. I use Netregs on a weekly basis and it's a great resource and tool to use when undertaking legal compliance review and forecasting new legislation."
"ISO14001 compliance information and assistance"	"NetRegs are fantastic - they save companies lots of time, ensure compliance and keep companies updated on any changes."
"Relevant legislation to industry specific sectors. ACOPS, Guidance notes"	"Difficult to dig down to specific requirements. Find new updates to legislation i.e. search for legislation changed or added in the past 6 months / year."
"Guidance for 'managed services' offices rather than just offices. What I mean is that our landlord does most stuff as they own/are in charge of the building but various external auditors have different opinions on what our responsibilities as tenants are - we've been left a bit confused as to the boundaries of responsibilities."	"The ability to search on changed/updated legislation since "date X" would be really handy for when I'm doing my quarterly check. Really glad to see the new/updated legislation site back though - netregs seemed to disappear for a while and trying to find this information on our own was a nightmare"
"Links to other websites where experts can be contacted for advice on how legislation relates to your particular business"	
"Training tools would be excellent, I feel NetRegs would benefit from following the style of HSE site, the legislation is on NetRegs but not in plain English for the average user, we see the legislation but not easy examples of how to comply with it, especially for ISO 14001, which is how I found your site, when compiling the register of env legislation. Is useful but could be much much more useful with the right content."	
"If you provide online training that would be very good. As a company are starting to train our employees - WAMITAB waste qualifications. Another area to offer additional training would be on the Packaging Regs. So that companies know how to make their own calculations etc. I'm sure the same would be true for Carbon and Energy Mgmt. Apart from present legislation its is important to highlight future legislation in Env. Mgmt & Waste Mgmt. Ditto consultations."	"Excellent website. Please keep up the good work. Many thanks h******@w***.co.uk"
"Up to date environmental legislation which applies to the different business sectors."	
"Some plain English guidance on compliance with Regulations would be much appreciated."	"Site generally well laid out. Better than some other government websites. Lesson could be learned from the HSE website regarding provision of plain English guidance and advice."
"Additional Guidance on Legislation"	

Suggestions	Feedback
"Summary of new legislation in any year or month"	"Layout is clear and visually appealing More needs to be done IMO to communicate what NetRegs is about. Historically it was seen as a tool for SMEs but clearly it is useful to a much broader section of industry"
"Online training is great and more case studies and best practise, clear definitions on why a company should be compliant to reinforce the technical support, more information about fines for breach of legislation etc"	"Normally ok but could do with more content"
"Creating and maintaining a Site Waste Management Plan"	
"We have a very specific requirement of netregs and that is as a source of information for our customers in advising them of the legislation relating to feminine hygiene waste, and their responsibilities for providing sanitary bins and the law covering disposal of the waste. We get the email updates and scan them for any changing legislation, and we check whether the advice that is given on NetRegs tallies with what we are telling our customers."	"So far as our specific requirements are concerned the netregs website has a small amount of relevant information. One important thing about the website is that it makes a clear distinction that this information is for NI and Scotland. Brilliant Bins sends our disposable sanitary bins to customers across the UK, and we have created sector specific guides which have to be tailored to each individual country. Net regs is one reference source for this information."
	"While all legislation is available on web site more explanatory notes would be useful on updates/versions etc."
	"Very useful website, popular with some of our auditing bodies - BSI, Achilles FPAL"
"Online training tools would be very useful. Perhaps webinars."	"I can't find information on Environmental Management Systems easily at all."
"Agree training tools would be excellent particularly if recognised for CPD by bodies such as CIWEM."	
	"Good format, easy to use, especially useful when tracking down new legislation to maintain register for ISO 14001 and OHSAS 18001"
	"An excellent website in all respects"

N = 22
Base: All business who left feedback or comments at the end of the survey.