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Chan, L. et al 2002. *Budapest Open Access Initiative*. New York: Open Society Institute. Available at: <http://www.soros.org/openaccess/read.shtml> [Retrieved 22 January 2007].

Information literacy in Scotland: challenges and opportunities

Dorothy Williams, Emeritus Professor of Information Science, Robert Gordon University. Email: williamsda420@gmail.com

1. Introduction

On 13 February 2015 the Scottish Government and the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) held a joint one-day symposium titled 'Information literacy in Scotland: challenges and opportunities'. The aim was to bring together a wide range of organisations and individuals with an interest in information literacy (IL) in the community and workplace, to discuss the value of IL and the challenges and the opportunities to develop IL. This was seen as an important step in raising awareness and extending the discussion about IL beyond the more familiar settings of the information professions and formal education.

Almost 80 delegates attended the event, held in Scottish Government offices at Atlantic Quay in Glasgow, with approximately half from the information professions and half representing a range of interests from the worlds of national and local government, education, health and welfare.

2. Presentations

Delegates were welcomed by co-hosts from SLIC and the Scottish Government. Amina Shah, CEO of SLIC, set the scene for the day with the clear message that IL is central to equality of opportunity and fundamental to the Government's digital strategy and National Literacy strategies. Colin Cook, Head of Digital Strategy and Programmes at the Scottish Government, reinforced this message, stressing that ensuring people are digitally and information literate is crucial to the Government's aims. His key messages were that there is no point in spending so much on information infrastructure if people can't use information and if business can't get the skilled people it needs; and that digital skills could be one of the most powerful levers to overcome inequality - or it could result in a new inequality if we don't get it right.

These introductions set the scene and were followed throughout the day by speakers looking at the challenges and opportunities from a range of perspectives.

John Crawford, co-founder of The Right Information community of practice, gave an overview of some of the IL developments in Scotland including the Scottish Information Literacy Programme, the first national programme in the UK. He reflected the importance of IL in life-long learning and thus central to areas such as health, the workplace, citizenship and political decision-making. Raising awareness of IL within the business community had proved a real challenge and the work of InformAll (<http://www.researchinfolit.org/infolit/ridls/>) in this regard was welcomed. He also recognised areas of significant challenge particularly in relation to digital participation agendas.

Hilary Weir, the Digital Literacy and Enhancement Manager at the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), reported on new skills-based qualifications being rolled out. These include the SQA Digital Participation programme to deliver digital skills by creating pathways through

academic and workplace qualifications from basic to advanced skills, and the National Progression Award (NPA) Digital Passport qualification, with units on Information Literacy, Network Literacy and Social Media Literacy, which is being developed within the context of the new National Qualifications in secondary schools and will offer students a chance to gain a qualification which lists IL as a component.

Kirsten Urquhart and Hilary Kidd from Young Scot, an initiative which aims to inform and engage young people (age 11-26), outlined the work they do through provision of multi-platformed access to information and activities tailored to the interests of young people.

The health perspective was presented by Blythe Robertson, Policy Manager of Person-Centred & Self-Management at the Scottish Government and Christine Hoy, Primary Care Development Manager, Health & Social Care Alliance Scotland. While many of their examples focused more on the provision of information rather than IL, they spoke of health literacy developments, such as the NHS Scotland Health Literacy action plan to build confidence, knowledge, understanding and skills to self-manage health issues, and the importance of partnership working between Scottish Government, NHS and the Health & Social Care Alliance.

Gregory Colgan, Head of Corporate Debt and Welfare Reform at Dundee City Council, talked compellingly about the implications of the UK Government welfare reform programme and the real challenges that lie ahead for digital inclusion. The new universal credit support will require benefit applications, ability to manage budgets, and job searches all to be done online. This presents major problems in areas of the country which currently have relatively low levels of access to the internet and lack of skills. The picture presented from Dundee was of a city putting its energy into positive attempts to overcome these challenges, and libraries and librarians were seen as central to a wide range of imaginative partnership initiatives aimed at developing access to information, overcoming literacy problems and developing digital skills.

The focus on improved citizen participation and equality of opportunity continued with the final speaker Evelyn McDowall, the Business Solutions Leader for the Wheatley Housing Group, who outlined the Digital Glasgow strategy to overcome digital exclusion. Lack of online access is still a problem for the majority of the Wheatley Group's clients and for a large proportion of the elderly population of Glasgow. In response the city has set itself the aim of being a world leading digital city by 2017, and has a series of goals and strategies to develop improved access to the internet and basic digital literacy working in partnership across service sectors.

3. Key messages and discussion points

Throughout these presentations and in the accompanying discussion sessions, the main issues were digital participation agendas and the need for strategies to overcome digital exclusion. It is perhaps understandable therefore that the dominant skills focus for delegates from outside the information professions was on basic digital skills rather than the wider interpretation of IL.

The other clear message coming from all speakers was the need for partnership working and that librarians and libraries needed to be central to those partnerships. Real progress in digital literacy or IL development needed collaboration and communication across sectors, as well as identification of areas of common interest.

A number of issues and dilemmas emerged during plenary and group discussions:

- Government commitment to digital access to welfare services at a time when large sections of the population still lack internet access and/or skills;
- Pressures on local government funding and support in areas that could help the Government's key strategy areas;
- Availability of funding for projects and time-limited initiatives but recognition that there is a need for more embedded longer-term strategies;
- Reductions in school libraries/staffing at a time when so many other initiatives and sectors were recognising the role of librarians.

Despite these concerns the tone of the day was positive and the event enabled sharing and communication of ideas, establishment of new cross-sector contacts and an opportunity to press forward the joint message to Government of the value and importance of information literacy.