

**Note of the Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Digital Participation AGM meeting - 23 April 2013**

**MSPs in attendance**

**Willie Coffey  
Fiona McLeod  
Liam McArthur**

WC welcomed everyone to the group and reminded everyone that the Royal Society of Edinburgh are still keen to take evidence as part of their enquiry. More information is on their website here: [http://www.royalsoced.org.uk/1058\\_SpreadingtheBenefitsofDigitalParticipation.html](http://www.royalsoced.org.uk/1058_SpreadingtheBenefitsofDigitalParticipation.html) and they can be contacted at [digiscot@royalsoced.org.uk](mailto:digiscot@royalsoced.org.uk).

**AGM proceedings**

Office bearers were proposed and confirmed as follows:

- Willie Coffey MSP, Convener
- Liam McArthur MSP, Deputy Convener
- Vicki Nash, Treasurer
- Claire Mack, Secretary

The Annual Return statement was circulated for comment and any changes should be notified to CM within 30 days of the meeting.

The meeting welcomed Douglas White of Carnegie UK Trust who were launching their report **Across the Divide**. The key objectives were to look at Glasgow on its own merits, drive learnings for all areas with a digital participation deficit and to test theories about the growing digital divide. The research consisted of 200 face to face interviews to test key barriers and drivers across a range of demographic groups. Headlines from the research are that the 40% of people offline in Glasgow are; spread across half the geography of the city. Attitudes towards technology matter; those who are not overtly negative towards it are likely to be more easy to be persuaded online.

Key barriers to going online were identified as comfort with the offline world, cost and fear of the online world e.g privacy, spam. Some gender variations were evident; women cite costs whereas men mention lack of interest most frequently. Some drivers included a level of self-interest and information of individual interest, keeping in touch with friends or relatives and actually having to use the internet for something like job seeking. The individuals surveyed claimed not to be shopping online, banking online or using the internet for education and learning which suggests that these things wouldn't form the cornerstone of any strategy in this area. Two very obvious key messages emerged; any digital inclusion programme needs to be differentiated, highly personalised and of individual interest. As well as being segmented it would need a comprehensive and coherent approach to prevent people falling through the gaps.

The report suggests some actions:

- A joined up response

- Mapping to identify gaps
- Branding to achieve a common purpose
- Working with intermediaries
- Adequate resources, both skills and infrastructure, working out where the balance of each lies
- Sharing of learning

WC thanked DW for his presentation and opened the floor to questions. A member asked if there was a similar pattern to be found in other cities? DW said there was some statistical analysis via the Scottish Household Survey but there was a weak correlation between Glasgow and the proportion of population segments that are least likely to be online. Another member asked about literacy and if this may have had a bearing on whether some people choose not to use the internet. DW said that there was a reluctance to speak about literacy but the researchers had tried to take a soft look into this through card sorting exercises and the like. Nothing strong came through but it would be very difficult to measure. Glasgow could well become the leader in addressing literacy in this sense although it is not likely to be the only barrier but that cannot become an excuse not to deal with digital exclusion.

A member said that the demographic make-up of Glasgow is similar to Newcastle and other northern English locations. There appears to be a groundswell of people who want to learn with a 'new older generation'. Is there collaboration between libraries, colleges and communities to point people elsewhere instead of turning them away? With regard to the research methodology it was asked if perhaps the 'hall testing' method might skew gender towards women. DW thought not as there was a recruitment questionnaire to help control the sample. The gender differences may have come about as a result of their more likely role with children in caring capacity and homework support etc.

The report was already being used by The Wheatley Group to help design research for their pilot exercises. There was deep concern over the impact of welfare reform on vulnerable offline groups. DW agreed that this was huge challenge but the solution was not to train people to fill in the form, this would be a great missed opportunity. A member asked about community education and said that it was not just about qualifications, that there were lots of open and uncertified learning opportunities, perhaps it was time for a 'Glasgow offer'. DW agreed that there was lots of good stuff around which is where mapping would be helpful. The good things going on are not at the scale to make the significant impact required to reach the people who need support. DW confirmed in response to a question that the research was carried out within the Glasgow city boundary, the Scottish Household Survey shows other west of Scotland local authority areas that have similar issues therefore Glasgow is not unique and co-ordinated response could be developed. The issue of rural proofing should also be considered although cohesive branding would be advantageous it must also allow for locally led solutions. There are different reasons for digital exclusion in rural areas.

A member asked if the research looked at long term health issues, DW replied that it had not explicitly done so and the number of participants made further cuts to the data difficult, there had to be compromise to get good qualitative results. Citizens Advice Scotland were looking at a number of issues amongst their benefits enquirers and in terms of barriers only 5% out of 500

listed physical disability as their main barrier. Another 4% said mental health issues were the main reason for them not being online.

Next to present was Joe Wilson of the Scottish Qualifications Authority. He had sensed anxiety at another meeting of the group about there being a gap in education and learning in this area. IT is embedded throughout the new Curriculum for Excellence rather than being a stand alone course. The SQA look after school qualifications, college and work-based learning. Our distinct Scottish system allows the ability to be nimble and allows dialogue easily with other bodies. Three different subjects are often conflated; computer science which is industry type skills, digital literacy which are citizenship skills and ICT skills which are the individual skills in the use of specific packages etc. Looking at the experiences and outcomes of the curriculum you can see where they all fit. There are also a distinct set of skills around information handling as well.

The SQA has engaged with industry to understand their needs and to exploit the opportunity for them to become partners in learning. Some challenges that have become obvious are the low numbers of students opting to do computing in schools and the number of suitably qualified teachers and maintaining their skills base. It is hoped that the new CforE will change that and there is also the opportunity to think about who teaches digital literacy in the community, it doesn't belong to computer scientists and there is room to re-think that space.

WC thanked JW for his presentation and asked if we could deploy our young people better to help with community learning? JW responded that there are a number of US models where learners are encouraged to run school networks, determine filtering policies and run the help desk but there is a broader issue about the equality of the education system in Scotland. There is also a gap with access in the workplace, people can learn how to use it but then cannot use it at work due to personal use policies and walled gardens. JW was aware of BYOD, or bring your own device schemes that had been highlighted as good for business.

A member commented that one of the issues with having these skills spread across the curriculum is that every teacher needs to know it to teach it. There is potential for it to fall between the gaps if it becomes no one's key responsibility. He had built a matrix which illustrated this and offered to share some of the detail of it with the CPG. Another member suggested that in some areas of Europe there are four strands of learning; computing, computer science, information technology and digital literacy. There could be a need for global harmonisation to ensure transferrable skills and labour markets. Another consideration for learning is not to make learning centres so digital focused so that those not online are excluded. Some of the key hooks, such as Facebook, can't be used in learning centres and schools so other facilities need to be used at additional cost.

A member asked about the availability of learning programmes in the Highlands and Islands such as those run by the British Computer Society. Another issue raised was the lack of technological support and technicians and how this impacts on implementation. In schools with small rolls, computing can fall off the curriculum, there are some schools that don't teach history for example. Glasgow has long presented heightened exclusion issues which are much greater than digital ones. Ian Duncan Smith reported more than ten years ago on Glasgow and her issues which are multiple and provide a 'pathway to poverty'. Digital Participation should not be deemed a consumer choice. Another member picked up on the small school rolls point,

sometimes whilst courses are offered they are up against other courses forcing students to make very difficult choices especially when considering future education applications where some traditional subjects sometimes feel more 'useful' in this context.

In schools peer to peer learning was thought to be important, a member was interested in how the system takes this into account. JW responded that individual inputs are captured during group work. A member countered this by saying that peer to peer also brought inherent difficulties in perpetuating bad habits however more use and relevance in schools will encourage greater interest and use at home.

Michael Fourman reminded the group that the RSE inquiry is still ongoing and any info that would help in particular to support the case for broadening access and removing locked down applications within schools and workplaces to encourage use and interest would be welcomed. Get in touch at <mailto:digiscot@royalsoced.org.uk>

The minutes of the 23 January 2013 meeting were approved.