

Note of Cross Party Group on Digital Participation meeting – 2 April 2014

MSPs in attendance:

Willie Coffey MSP

Fiona McLeod MSP

WC welcomed everyone to the meeting, The minutes from the last meeting were approved. On actions, Adrienne is drafting some wording for a letter to the FCC on accessibility of e-readers which will be circulated to the CPG for feedback.

1. Michael Fourman, Royal Society of Edinburgh – Report on digital inclusion

The RSE's report is due out on 30th April. Members were invited to contact Susan Lennox at the RSE if they would to attend the launch.

MF explained that the RSE had been engaged in looking at spreading the benefits of digital participation. MF said that those who are most deprived are likely to be more digitally deprived. The RSE was not focussed on coverage i.e. going from 70 to 75%, but instead looking at broad aspirations for Scotland to be a digital nation.

MF said that everyone has an undeniable right to digital inclusion and that the Government must respect and protect our rights and freedoms online. MF said that some people didn't want to go online because Government know what they are doing – this has come to the fore with the NSA revelations.

MF said that access to the internet is needed to go online and that there are rural/urban disparities in infrastructure. The BDUK programme means that these disparities will be lessened but by 2030, 100% of Scotland will not have superfast speeds due to too much copper in some places.

The RSE has carried out an analysis of internet access and social deprivation. MF noted that where people are more isolated, they are more likely to want to be online. This uses Ofcom postcode level data on access and the Scottish Government's social deprivation index. This found that the more deprived you are, the more likely you are to be offline. Being online in one postcode may be due to local factors, or a herd effect i.e. if some people on your street are online, you are more likely to be online. 10% of postcodes in Scotland have less than 1 in 10 offline; in 20% of postcodes half are likely to be offline.

MF gave more detail about what the pockets of exclusion shown in the data look like. There are areas across Scotland where 30-40% of households are offline. There are some places where the picture is better than first thought.

The RSE recommends that communities are targeted for support and that digital skills and information literacy is developed.

Q&A

WC asked how much data was in the RSE's sample. MF said that this was Ofcom data for every household in the UK which covers 99% of households in Scotland – not directly comparable to the Scottish Household Survey. MF said that the key factors on take-up are employment and income.

WC noted that SIMD communities are quite different. MF said that the RSE was picking up on Ofcom data but doesn't take account of the whole picture.

Tara Morrison said that in remote areas, the chances of households being offline increases. If Government puts more services online, will households just have to get online? MF there are issues in inner cities and Glasgow, where people don't see a reason to go online.

Maggie Ellis said that it is difficult to get online in some areas. A colleague in Loch Eriboll with a dish is told that if she gets up at 5am her internet will work. MF the RSE's original position was that it wouldn't look at infrastructure. The problem is not solved despite some good initiatives and new solutions will be needed.

Evelyn McDonall (Glasgow Housing Association) said that when people have the opportunity to get online in a pilot they have conducted, they embrace it fully and are more social and online. The qualitative benefits of being online need to be captured. MF agreed.

Ian McCracken said there was excellent data about take-up and that it was a shame there is not sufficient data about information literacy skills. There are some major challenges with information literacy, IM carried out a survey of staff in a previous school and very few had had any formal training.

Bill Johnston said that he was pleased to see information literacy getting a mention in the report. He suggested taking information literacy as a topic of investigation with the same level of analysis as the RSE report. It would be good for Scotland to take a lead – it is one thing to get online, but once you are online you are dealing with a wealth of information. He suggested that this was something Parliament could investigate.

Action: Could the Chair raise with colleagues in Parliament?

Douglas White (Carnegie Trust) said that if there was an element of compulsion to go online, that will have an impact. However, if people are compelled to go online and not keen to do so, it could be a negative experience. There needs to be a focus on 'digital by desire' to positively frame the argument. He added that it would be interesting to look at to what extent being online contributes to how deprived you are.

MF said that it is hard to separate causation from correlation. The way the RSE has dealt with this in the report, is that deprivation might need to be dealt with – but conversely if you want to be employed being online helps, based on the qualitative evidence of what people have said. The British Survey of average household incomes shows that in each employed band, over 90% are online – most of those offline are self-employed or unemployed.

Douglas White asked whether the RSE was planning to tailor recommendations to different levels of Government. MF said that most recommendations were aimed at the Scottish Government as this is the level where they needed to be embedded e.g. the curriculum.

Vicki Nairn noted the gap between community delivery and Government delivery. 16% of Highlands and Islands communities will still have a gap after investment in broadband rollout has been made. If you put a computer into public centres, most people cannot afford to make the trip there.

MF said that the RSE thinks that to be effective, you give the community access to technology communally.

John Crawford (The Right Information) said that the role of libraries had been dismissed in the report. Scottish libraries provide 966 training courses. He added that you need to identify learner groups and training.

MF: libraries are great, but not easily accessible throughout Scotland. MF said that you cannot rely on libraries alone.

Maggie Ellis (PhoneAbility) said that reliance on copper wires is a problem. She has been interviewing in 6 countries and the UK is wedded to wires. She gave the example of a Spanish company provided connectivity to the Amazon basin with mobile phones.

MF cautioned relying too much on wireless. Ofcom commissioned a report by Analysys Mason on the costs of delivering to remote communities, but this is not the cheapest way to provide connectivity for heavy data usage.

Adrienne Chalmers raised the issue of accessibility. The BBC quoted research yesterday which found that 70% of public bodies' sites are inaccessible. There are no sanctions or ways to take action against those who can't be bothered to make them more accessible.

2. Chris Yiu, SCVO – Digital inclusion programme

CY gave a recap of the big issues on digital inclusion and the SCVO's work programme. There are four pillars to the Digital Scotland Strategy – all are linked and the SCVO is focussed on the digital participation pillar.

CY said that the SCVO's role is to help more people in Scotland get basic online skills and help the third sector make the best of the internet. This is distinct from getting households connected – it is about making sure it has an impact on people's life choices.

SCVO's focus is on basic online skills. One of the ways to reach those not using the internet is understanding people's personal connections and motivations. CY added that the third sector is well placed to do that working through existing relationships and trust in place.

CY explained that the BBC suggests that 30% of adults in Scotland don't have basic online skills, compared to 21% across the UK – 1.3million people to reach. The Tinder Foundation looked at the cost of achieving full digital inclusion in the UK by 2020 which, excluding kit and connectivity, is £50 – 300 per head. In Scotland this equates to £100mn. There is lots of fantastic activity happening across the country, but this is not a problem which can be solved by goodwill and small grants and infrastructure is not enough.

The SCVO is looking at doing a pilot programme to put digitally literate people in charities to see how they could be using digital technology and improving their digital capabilities.

Action: Chris offered to come and talk to the Group about this once funding has been confirmed.

CY said that the SCVO is also focussed on bidding with partners for the Big Lottery Fund award this year on basic online skills. The Tinder Foundation has a web form where organisations can register interest.

Action: Send details of bids to members of the Group when published.

The third area which the SCVO is focussing on is triggering more action on Scotland's Digital Participation Charter, through work with corporate partners.

The fourth area the SCVO is working on is evidence and causation. The SCVO is working on how to track the impact of intervention. There is a shortage of consistent data on the level of digital skills and what people are getting out of the internet. CY asked whether there was a case to pull together existing resources which are accessible, which make sure this work is properly connected to the qualifications framework. CY added that they are talking to the UK Government about plans for assistance for those affected by the 'digital by default' programme. The UK Government is looking at procuring support and the SCVO is interested in how the third sector can help deliver this.

CY closed by noting that everybody has a part to play and that the SCVO is interested in working with as many people as possible.

Q&A

WC noted that 1.3mn who lack digital skills are a lot and that many of those people are along. He asked whether this is the same issue for information literacy.

CY said that some people do not have a broadband connection, some may do but they haven't passed the bar of basic online skills.

Ian McCracken (The Right Information) noted the importance of skills for both learners and mentors. He said that there needs to be a digital strategy for Scotland which incorporates a digital skills strategy embedded in the curriculum.

CY asked what the framework would be for connecting this together. He noted the importance of having an understanding of the benchmark.

Joe Wilson (Scottish Qualification Authority) said that the SQA is training champions. There are particular skills needed about engaging people, which isn't about computing.

Vicki Nairn noted an interest in digital interns and whether local authorities can have a role to play. She asked CY for his thoughts on targets. CY agreed.

Liz Leonard suggested that there seems to be a constant push to get everyone digitally literate and asked whether there was a right not to be digitally engaged. She added that one of the difficulties of the third sector is that they can often work in silos and asked CY how they were connecting those linked and not linked to the SCVO.

CY said that it is not just about SCVO's members, but the sector as a whole. He noted that it was a challenge, as there are 40,000 third sector organisations in Scotland. SCVO's role is to provide a platform where people can network and share information.

Amina Shah noted that some of the most powerful activities in public libraries is where volunteers who are unemployed can help others e.g. showing them how to save money on price comparison sites. She said that it is about grassroots, 'digital by desire' making real differences to people's lives.

Theresa Swayne (Highlands and Islands Enterprise) noted that in early 2012, her organisation embarked on an IT business and community engagement programme, which has helped over 200 businesses and worked with Citizens Online. She said that a Highlands regional post has just been approved. Take-up and skills are just as important and Highlands and Islands Enterprise has secured investment for digital participation and is a strategic partner in the Big Lottery Fund bid and is open to working with others.

CY noted that it is relatively easy to spot those who don't use the internet, but spotting those who don't have basic online skills is more difficult.

Fiona McLeod MSP said that the figure of 30% lacking basic online skills is hugely important and highlighted that there is a debate tomorrow (5 April) about skills for a digital Scotland.

Adrienne Chalmers explained that she has set up a peer support group who are teaching each other how to use iPhones.

Douglas White said that £100mn needed in funding is a big, but not impossible, number. He asked where to go next on achieving it.

CY said that he was interested in getting a sense of how close we are to that number with current activity. If we agree on the scale of the challenge, we have to think about how we achieve it.

Theresa Swayne said that H and I E know how much they need in the Highlands and Islands and is keen to discuss with the SCVO.

3. *Keith Dryburgh, Citizens Advice Scotland – Offline and Left Behind*

KD said that this issue came to the fore with the launch of the UK Government's 'digital by default' strategy. The CAB complete around 20,000 forms for welfare claimants. 700,000 households in Scotland are moving onto universal credit. KD said that the move of public services online was already affecting Job Seekers' Allowance, as there are potential sanctions if claimants do not apply for jobs online. KD contrasted these figures with 68% of households which have taken up broadband.

Last year, the CAB surveyed 1,100 clients seeking advice on benefits issues. They found that only half had access to the internet at home. Of the 25% of those surveyed who accessed the internet elsewhere, half used libraries. He said that a lack of digital skills is a bigger problem than access, as there are people online who don't use their connection.

KD said that issues were not just with the initial online application, but the need to maintain applications online. Only a quarter of those surveyed felt that they could fill out online forms without assistance. Applications take an average of an hour to fill in, which is difficult as online library sessions tend to be for a half an hour period.

KD said that skills and confidence were the key barrier to those surveyed going online – only 2% said they had no interest in going online.

KD provided some case studies of sanctions for those who struggled to get online or apply for jobs online. The CAB is looking at installing internet kiosks, but the challenge is to help people apply for jobs.

KD said that the CAB was focussed on ensuring that those worst affected by the move of services online have the support to transition.

WC said that the CAB's findings chime with his constituents' experiences. Organisations like the CAB will find they become and advocate which adds a huge burden to their workload.

Sean McNamara (CILIP) said that this also applied in libraries, where they find that people lack basic digital skills.

Evelyn McDonall said that the Glasgow Housing Association is undertaking a mapping exercise, which they have already done in Glasgow. Through the Glasgow Advice and Information Network they have mapped gaps and shared information as partners.

Sheena Watson (Digital Fife) said that the issue of sanctions is very pertinent. It is hard to find out sanctions figures and how many are related to not getting online.

KD said that sanctions are the issue that worries him most at the CAB.

Joe Wilson asked whether retailers could provide free computer access.

Tara Morrison said that in rural areas there are computers in hotels, village halls and that there are other creative ways to provide spaces for people to get online (such as churches).

KD said that the CAB's research found that more people had phones with the internet than computers, but didn't use the internet on their phone.

John Crawford expressed concern about ideas being joined up and having an overall strategic direction. A study on the impact on libraries of people looking for online benefits advice found that libraries could not cope with demand.

Theresa Swayne noted that the Scottish Government do not say 'digital by default' but 'digital by choice'.

Ian Watson (IRISS) said that public authorities stop people using the internet properly and that the network effect is important – people share experiences online.

4. Members' points

Douglas White highlighted a report from the Carnegie Trust which looks at 6 case studies of the best digital participation projects across the UK. The report put together seven digital participation tests which organisations can benchmark their interventions against.

Amina Shah said that libraries are heavily involved in this and have seen huge increases in the number of people seeking assistance.

Ends.