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Spreading the Benefits of Digital Participation
A Response to the Interim Report of the Royal Society of Edinburgh Inquiry

The Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) welcomes the RSE's Inquiry in to Digital Participation and recognises the need for unified national action to overcome barriers to digital engagement if Scotland is to realise its digital ambitions. SLIC supports the key findings of the Inquiry and the interim report's focus on the key factors: access, motivation and skills.

However, we believe that Scotland's public library network can make substantial contributions in each of these areas and would ask the Inquiry Panel to consider the following points and examples of activity in its final report.

Access

Public libraries have always played an active role in facilitating access to information and, over the years, their services have adapted to incorporate new technologies. With over 500 community based hubs all connected to the Internet, Scottish libraries are recognised as having a key role to play in assisting the Scottish Government to meet their targets to increase digital participation. Scotland's libraries offer over 8.5 million hours of free internet access each year[1], and Wi-Fi is now a standard feature across many library services. 'Getting online' has been a key part of the library offer since public access PCs were introduced to libraries through the *People's Network*, a process which began in 1999 and was supported by the Big Lottery Fund. Since then, library staff have also been supporting people to get online, whether by offering ad hoc assistance to computer users in libraries, or by delivering more proactive learning sessions to encourage digital participation.

According to data collected by SLIC, Scottish libraries offer over 200 different types of courses to support digital skills development in communities, covering the basics of getting online as well as office skills, using mobile devices, online shopping and job search skills. A database showing the full details of public library provision in this area – totalling almost 1,000 learning opportunities - is attached as part of our electronic submission to the Inquiry.

As the Interim Report recognises, "...a digital society should ensure that publicly-owned devices and connections are made available for public use." This is, in fact, a core function of the modern public library service, and a role that it is well placed to develop across the existing branch network which spans communities across the country. SLIC agrees with the recommendation that existing public access be increased and would welcome further discussions with Scottish Government and other stakeholders as to how this could be achieved. Our landscape paper on digital participation outlines the challenges facing public

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[1] 8,784,786 hours according to the CIPFA Public Library Statistics 2012/13

libraries as they strive to support this agenda – specifically, the dated or variable quality hardware/software/connectivity - and recognises that overcoming these barriers would require additional financial support, particularly in light of local authority budget cuts.

SLIC has been working with the Scottish Government to ensure that libraries' role is represented in the national digital strategy. This has led to a successful SLIC bid for funding in support of two specific digital participation projects.

The first of these will see the creation of an online resource for directing users towards digital access points and learning sessions, such as the IT classes offered by libraries and included in our database. This work is nearing completion and will be integrated with the Digital Scotland[2] website in early 2014. As part of the second project, a network of Digital Library Champions has been established across the Scottish public library services, with each of the 32 authorities having nominated a representative. We welcome the Interim Report's support for widening the network of champions at national level to improve peer-to-peer support in communities, and would point out that libraries could play a vital role in the implementation of such an initiative – whether by offering a safe, welcoming location for peer sessions to take place, or through more proactive staff involvement.

Motivation

The Champions will contribute to the development of a common 'digital offer' across Scotland's libraries, thus creating a core, consistent level of service provision across library branches. It is also proposed that the Champions will assist in delivering digital initiatives and will form part of a wider "digital champion" family supported by the Scottish Government's Digital Directorate.

The Public Library Information Fund (PLIF) has supported a variety of library based digital participation focused projects. This year a *Technology Petting Zoo* – collections of the latest gadgets and mobile devices - has been circulating around library services in Scotland, offering users an informal introduction to new technologies and showcasing the potential of the Internet. The focus of this has been to motivate people to go online by demonstrating the ways in which it could improve their lives. Petting Zoo demonstrations have focussed on areas such as:

- Access to health information - using an iHealth Blood pressure dock and a range of apps;
- Entertainment - such as ebooks and interactive multimedia content;
- Early years education – guiding parents towards fun, age appropriate educational resources.

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[2] http://www.digitalscotland.org/

Good Practice Example: digiTable, South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture

South Lanarkshire Libraries have introduced an interactive digiTable (a Samsung SUR40 digital touch table) at East Kilbride Library to support digital inclusion by encouraging people to use the Internet in new and imaginative ways. The key focus of this project is to address the issue of motivation or inclination to go online but the simple user interface was also intended to support those with low confidence levels and skills.

Over the past six months the digiTable has been used to support interactive story-telling sessions with younger children, group learning activities for adults with learning difficulties, a Young Explorers virtual tourism club and a digital arts workshop for older adults. Forthcoming activities include collaboration with DWP colleagues and the third sector to introduce support for job seekers, as well as a *Laughs and Landscapes* heritage project, which aims to preserve local culture involving a volunteer group of older members of the community.

The digiTable sessions have been well attended, and have generated interest within the community. Other libraries across Scotland have also introduced similar schemes and others have expressed interest in introducing the digital tables in the future.

Skills

As part of SLIC's second Scottish Government funded project, a high level review of digital participation related services within public libraries in Scotland was conducted in 2013. A national data collection exercise was undertaken by SLIC, together with a programme of library visits which aimed to contribute to a national perspective on the provision of digital learning opportunities in public libraries.

The purpose of this exercise was to describe the current landscape of basic computer related training provision in Scotland's libraries, and to consider associated resourcing and skills' development issues. A landscape paper was created as an output of this work (attached).

As a result of this review, SLIC is now piloting a national training programme that aims to enhance the digital skills of frontline library staff. The training scheme covers a range of hardware to ensure that staff are equipped to support users of mobile devices. The programme was funded by the Scottish Government's Public Library Improvement Fund (PLIF), and has been successfully implemented in Inverclyde and North Ayrshire libraries. The programme will now be rolled out nationally beginning with a further six authorities in March 2014.

Good Practice Example: The Opportunities Project, Dundee Libraries

The Opportunities Project in Dundee employs a coordinator to recruit, train and oversee a team of volunteers to support people who are looking to develop or improve their digital literacy skills. Volunteers work across all 14 libraries in the city, using the existing 234 people's network PCs and additional laptops and mobile devices via the libraries' wi-fi facilities. This project specifically targets job seekers and those claiming benefits who, as a result of the UK Government's welfare reforms are now required to go online.

An Opportunities Hub has also been created within the Central Library which houses a range of services and facilities for job seekers including IT equipment, supported access and space for advice surgeries from other agencies within the city. As well as support for job seekers, this project also supports local businesses and charities make the most of digital development through social media surgeries and drop-ins. Through partnership working with the DWP, Housing Department, Welfare Rights, Dundee Voluntary Action, NHS Tayside, Business Gateway and other agencies and groups in the city, libraries are recognised as being at the heart of digital inclusion and a main point of contact for advice and support.

Additional Clarification

Library Legislation

The final paragraph on page 49 states: "...the provision of libraries is not a mandatory service." However, the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 states: "A local authority...shall have a duty to secure the provision of adequate library facilities for all persons resident in their area."[3]

The Impact of Budget Cuts to Public Libraries in Scotland

The final paragraph on page 49 states: "Reduced opening hours and library closures have become common across Scotland..." (Public Libraries News, 2013). The Public Libraries News is a crowd-sourced information service, which includes all news items concerning potential budget cuts and closures in the public library sector, whether or not such measures are eventually enacted.

Closures

In the year 2012/13, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance (CIPFA) recorded a drop of 4 branch libraries across Scotland bringing the total (including mobiles) to 606 (610 in 2011/12). Of the four 'closures', three of these refer to the Shetland Islands Council where, in fact, no branches actually closed. Rather, the Library Service changed its reporting methodology to exclude small library collections held in Scalloway, Whalsay and Skerries; that is, the same level of provision exists at these locations but Shetlands Islands Council decided that these should no longer be considered 'branches' for the purposes of the CIPFA return.[4]

The one branch that did close in 2012/13 was Westwood Library in East Kilbride, South Lanarkshire, which was linked to the redevelopment of the East Kilbride Central Library.

Since then, Moray Council closed four branches on 30th November 2013 - Rothes, Portknockie, Findochty and Hopeman – having originally planned to close seven. This will be reflected in the 2013/14 CIPFA statistics.

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[3] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1973/65/section/163#commentary-c968178
[4] Confirmed by Karen Fraser, Executive Manager: Library Services, Shetland Islands Council via email to Gillian Daly, SLIC on 13/12/2013

Reduced Opening Hours
The CIPFA statistics record the number of library branches (excluding mobiles) opened across four hours' bandings:[5]

Average hours of opening per week	2011/12	2012/13	Change	% Change
60+	8	8	0	0%
45-59	177	175	2	1.13%
30-44	157	163	6	3.82%
10-29	172	170	2	1.16%

SLIC has gathered some anecdotal evidence that would suggest further cuts to opening hours beyond the period covered by the CIPFA stats (i.e. beyond the fiscal year ending March 2013). However, at present, it is not accurate to say that reduced opening hours have become common across Scotland.

SLIC believes that a strong evidence base regarding the position of libraries in Scotland is an essential component of advocacy for the public library service. It is important that decision makers across the local authorities have accurate information about what is happening elsewhere to inform their own decision making processes. SLIC is concerned that presenting a picture of widespread cuts and closures, as is the case in England and other parts of the UK, offers councils a false precedent which may feed the decline of the service by influencing budget decisions. We therefore urge the RSC to consider the above statistics in representing the current position of the Scottish public library sector.

Information Literacy vs Digital Literacy
The glossary defines the term 'digital literacy' as: "the ability to effectively, and safely, locate, manage, analyse, evaluate and create information using digital technologies". The term "digital skills" is also used throughout the report, sometimes to represent the same idea and at other times within a context that suggests aptitude or proficiency with respect to technological hardware/devices. The term 'computer literate' also appears in the document in much the same context. Other skills are mentioned alongside digital literacy (on page 56) - computational thinking, information technology, informatics and computer science –as desirable elements of the curriculum. Elsewhere (on page 29) digital literacy is then linked to "critical thinking skills".

Thus, it seems that the Inquiry appreciates that two different skill sets are involved in digital participation – the basic 'computer literacy' and the 'critical thinking skills' associated with processing the information that computers enable access to. However, the blurring of distinctions and definitions throughout is problematic for practitioners and stakeholders.

In line with submissions from the *Community of Practice: Information Skills for a 21st Century Scotland*, and others from the Library and Information Services (LIS) sector in Scotland, SLIC calls for the Inquiry to include the term information literacy to apply to the

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[5] CIPFA also records those libraries opened for more than 10 hours and less than 10 hours, however, this figures include mobile libraries and, as such, cannot be directly compared with those included in the table.

range of critical thinking skills that are attendant in full digital participation. As Bill Johnston stated in his response to the Inquiry: "For citizens to fully benefit from digital participation in 21st century culture it is essential that they not only have access to a base level of relevant technology and online systems, but that they also develop knowledge and skills in creating, accessing and managing the information processes and content represented in their digital technologies and devices. In effect the 'literacy' of online digital activity is perceived here as the literacy of information, hence the use of the term Information Literacy."

We note that other LIS responses submitted as part of the Inquiry make reference to internationally accepted definitions of information literacy and would repeat their calls to have these adopted in the final report.

Good Practice Example: A whole school Information Literacy approach using ExPLORE (Holy Rood High School, Edinburgh)

In collaboration with teaching staff, the school librarian at Holy Rood High School in Edinburgh has developed a cross-curricular Information Literacy framework to support learning and teaching. The ExPLORE programme encourages pupils to adopt the same 5-step approach to all information gathering tasks to: Plan, Locate, Organise, Represent and Evaluate. ExPLORE was developed in recognition of the fact that many pupils struggled to find good quality information sources to support course work, particularly when using the Internet. Common issues across the school included plagiarism and the incorporation of erroneous source materials, as pupils lacked basic understanding of using copyright protected materials or of evaluating information sources for reliability. There was a perception for many pupils that the highest ranking search engine results represented the best source, with little consideration of the impact of using different search terms, or determining the author of Internet content.

Although connected to the Internet, these gaps in understanding prevented pupils from taking full advantage of digital technologies to support their education. The Information Literacy programme in this case is viewed as a foundation of digital participation since the same skills' set will be required of pupils throughout life, whether to support learning or support decision making as citizens – covering finance, health and democratic participation.

Similar programmes are offered in school libraries across the country in recognition of the importance of Information Literacy in establishing a nation of digital participants.

Future Proofing

There is an assumption running through the report that all of this represents a generic learning outcome which can be replicated across contexts such as differing devices. This is not borne out in our experience. When the technology updates and new versions of devices, software packages, browsers and operating systems are released new skills gaps are opened and related training needs emerge. Ergo, this is an ongoing need that faces society and not a one-time effort that can be completed by a specific endpoint. Investing in libraries with their existing networks of locations, trained staff and professional ethos of equality of access and opportunity would ensure that whatever changes take place in technology, there is a mechanism for supporting access to the networks, the kit, the public space and the user engagement to address both the digital and the information divide.