

Information Literacy for Democratic Engagement (IL-DEM)

Final report to ILG – January 2017

1. Overview

In 2016, Edinburgh Napier University's Centre for Social Informatics was awarded funding by the Information Literacy Group (ILG) of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) to run a short project on information literacy amongst Scotland's community councillors. This document is the final report of the Information Literacy for Democratic Engagement (IL-DEM) project. It reviews the achievement of the project aims and objectives. It should be read in conjunction with the accompanying *Stakeholder report*.

Context

Community councils are nominally elected bodies that are roughly equivalent to parish councils in England, but with fewer responsibilities. Its members are **community councillors**. Community councils are supported by **community council liaison officers**. These are local government staff who provide links between local and hyperlocal levels of democracy in Scotland. There is at least one community council liaison officer in each of Scotland's 32 local authorities, but – for the majority – community council liaison work is only one part of their duties. The **Scottish Government** is responsible for the legal framework under which community councils operate. The **Improvement Service** is a public body charged with supporting local government in Scotland¹.

2. Project aims

The project had the following aims:

1. To evaluate how community councillors (1) access and understand information on their duties and rights; (2) keep up to date with local developments of relevance to the communities that they serve; and (3) disseminate information to their communities, and (4) identify where future efforts need to be directed to improve the skills and practices of this group.
2. To test and validate a proposed model of information literacy for lifelong learning.
3. To investigate the role of public library staff in the training of community councillors, as well as broader issues related to communities, social capital, and citizenship.

Aims 1 and 3 have been achieved through the successful delivery of the objectives identified in the project proposal, summarised below. (Insufficient data were gathered to allow for a rigorous treatment of aim 2.)

2.1 To determine a project communication strategy

The project's impact plan identified key stakeholders: the project team, community councillors, community council liaison officers, the Scottish Government, the Improvement Service, CILIP/ILG, and public librarians. They were targeted via six themed posts² on the team's [research blog](#). The blog automatically tweets links to new posts to [the team's Twitter feed](#). The team members also publicised the project via their own research blogs and Twitter feeds³. It is estimated that the project reached well over 1000 people through this use of social media over the course of the project.

At least two further blog posts are planned. One will cover the theme of understanding digital policy. The other will report the completion of the project and provide a summary of results.

The accompanying stakeholder report provides an overview of the project findings and conclusions for the key stakeholders identified above.

2.2 To complete a literature review and a framework for evaluation

The literature review completed for the project evaluates relevant material published up to December 2016. It will form the basis of a paper to be submitted to the *Journal of Information Literacy*. An assessment of the evaluation framework

¹ See <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk> for more information.

² (i) project under way, (ii) about research question 1, (iii) about research question 2, (iv) about research question 3, (v) project update (vi) information training needs

³ Research blogs: <https://hazelhall.org>, <https://spartakan.wordpress.com>, <https://bruceryan.info>
Twitter feeds: <https://twitter.com/hazelh>, <https://twitter.com/spartakan>, https://twitter.com/bruce_research

that was used to assess the project's findings (as presented in the accompanying *Stakeholder report*) is the theme of a conference paper abstract to be submitted to the *European Conference on Information Literacy 2017*.

2.3 To gather data from community councillors, community council liaison officers and public library staff

The bulk of the data analysed for the project was gathered by semi-structured interviews with 19 community councillors. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in preparation for data analysis.

Twenty-five community councillors who expressed interest in the project but were unavailable for interview were invited to complete an online survey. 10 usable completed surveys were returned and analysed.

Additional data were obtained from five community council liaison officers and six public librarians. Desk research that focused on identifying local authority policies on library support for community councils also contributed to the study.

2.4 To draft a project report for stakeholders that addresses the research aims and identifies training needs

Please see the accompanying *Stakeholder report*.

2.5 To draft a paper for the *Journal of Information Literacy* on the basis of the completed project

A paper for the *Journal of Information Literacy* has been drafted. Additional funding has been obtained for its completion later in 2017. See section 2.7 below for more detail.

2.6 To complete a 1000-word summary for the ILG web site and the *Journal of Information Literacy* project report section

Please see the attached *ILG web site summary*.

2.7 To raise chances of the completed research project having further impact

The project has several outputs that will increase the project's impact:

1. **Deposition of project data.** Anonymised data from the project will be placed in Edinburgh Napier University's data repository in February 2017. This will allow for future use of this data, both by the project team members and others.
2. **Conference paper** for *Information: interactions and impact* conference⁴. An abstract for a paper that covers findings about community councillors' information practices has been submitted. It is anticipated that the full paper will be presented in June 2017, and then submitted for publication in a special issue of the *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* in 2018.
3. **Conference paper** for the *European Conference on Information Literacy*⁵. An abstract for this paper will be submitted in February 2017. This will address the methodological aspects of the research. If accepted, the full paper will be presented in September 2017.
4. **Journal paper** for the *Journal of Information Literacy*. This paper has been drafted from the project's literature review. Further funding has been obtained to enable its completion in April 2017.
5. **Thought-piece**⁶ for the national community council web site⁷. This will be drafted and submitted in February 2017. It will be used as the basis for an article to be submitted to *The Conversation*⁸
6. **Further funding.** Further internal Edinburgh Napier University funding has been obtained to:
 - a. gather and analyse online survey data on the information literacy of community councillors (i.e. to extend the supplementary data collection exercise cited in 2.3 above, and hence complete aim 2 above).
 - b. complete the *Journal of Information Literacy* paper (as noted in 2.5 above).

Further support from Edinburgh Napier University's public engagement fund will allow for dissemination of the main project findings to practitioners. The team will take advantage of its public engagement expertise to develop methods devised for the highly-regarded '[digicc](#)' workshops. If resources permit, an information literacy training artefact/pack for reuse by community councils, community council liaison officers and other community groups will be created.

Finally, an ESRC funding application is in development. If successful, this will support further extensive research on information literacy and hyperlocal democracy.

⁴ <http://www.rgu.ac.uk/research/conferences/i-2017>

⁵ <http://ecil2017.ilconf.org>

⁶ <http://www.communitycouncils.scot/dialogue.html>

⁷ <http://www.communitycouncils.scot>

⁸ <http://theconversation.com/uk>