

Information professionals and volunteers as 'digital proxies': impact on effectiveness of clients and employees of informal support in accessing services

Interim report

This interim report is aimed at the participants in the project workshops and others who are interested in this project.

The aim of these workshops was to research digital proxy practices of staff within local government, libraries, and civil society organisations. This work will be used to support wider research in this area, and may be used for publications and future research proposals.

Digital proxies, for this research, are those who access online systems on behalf of others – with their permission – so that these 'clients' can obtain advantages from such systems. For example, a staff member may log into a benefits-claim system and enter the client's data to make the claim as if it were the client him- or herself doing this.

The primary focus of this work is online government services, partnering with system owners, citizen support/advocacy groups and other stakeholders to understand how they are supporting (vulnerable) citizens to better cope with increased online systems that are integral to their everyday lives.

Data analysis and validation are continuing, with some initial key themes identified around how decisions are made on how help is provided, service user experience, links between provision, policy and resourcing, and conflicts between policy, law and support. A final report will be issued later in 2021.

The workshops

Half-day workshops took place on 2, 10 and 18 February 2021. Lockdown-related restrictions meant that the workshops were held remotely, using Teams. However, an advantage of this was that participants could attend from across Scotland, including participants from South Ayrshire, Edinburgh, Orkney, Eilean Siar and many places in between.

The 40 participants were mostly librarians, but included local authority officers, some Scottish Government service development staff and one person from a civil society organisation. Most have a decade or more experience in this area, which adds a depth of practical experience to the data that was gathered.



