

Information Literacy Workshops: Trials and tribulations of Public Engagement within a pandemic.

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Project Aim

This Internally funded Public Engagement project was aimed at engaging the public of Edinburgh to provide learning opportunities on Information Literacy and online search best practice.

Two in-person workshops were organised for March 2020, to be hosted at an Edinburgh library. Prior to COVID, our proposed plan was that the workshops would draw from the Scottish Information Literacy Framework (SILF) (Crawford & Irving (2013); Irving (2011)) to underpin their content, structure, and design. A participant-led approach was to be used to facilitate sharing of participants' lived experiences of information needs, search-behaviours and internet use, in part by demonstrating their existing information practices. This would have been supplemented with demonstrations and discussion on good practices to develop skills, based around the SILF pillars. However, COVID forced the cancellation of the workshops.

Methodology

After cancellation, rather than retire the project, the deliverable was redesigned as a series of tutorial videos that demonstrate the SILF's principles. This required a shift in methodological approach. Showcasing participants' expertise was still deemed of utmost import so online audio or video interviews were recorded with 12 participants to provide the tutorials' core content.

Questions, derived from the SILF, covered participants' understanding of the term 'information', their information-needs, how they convey and fulfil information-needs, barriers they have encountered, and how they validate and share information. Participants were not asked to demonstrate information-searching.

Interviews were piloted with 3 participants, leading to only minor changes. The 12 participants were a convenience sample recruited from the researchers' personal contacts. Participants included individuals from wide age and working background ranges, such as students, former civil servants, and members of civil society organisations, all of whom regularly search for and use information in their personal and professional lives.

Participants' answers to each interview question were edited together into video-tutorials to be used in future in-person workshops, each with a short introduction to its topic and closing words to introduce workshop activities.

Outcomes

The interviews demonstrated the suitability of the SILF, in the form of themed questions, to provide a platform enabling members of the public to reflect on their information literacy and online search behaviours. This reflection allowed the participants to critically analyse their own behaviours, for example identifying reliance on a certain search engine, reliance on 'experts', and (in some cases) fragility of their knowledge around accessing internet services to obtain information. The outcome of the video tutorials is a contribution to public engagement and lifelong learning, although these are yet to be used in practice and suitably evaluated with participants.

References

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