

I work as Library Research Officer at Glasgow Caledonian University where I undertake, among other things, research projects in the information field and I have become convinced that information literacy is an essential skill for the Scottish people for the 21st century which they must acquire if lifelong learning strategies are ever to be turned into a practical reality. It is impossible to be a lifelong learner if you do not have the independent learning skills which information literacy confers. I am currently directing a research project which is looking at developing an information literacy framework which spans the secondary and tertiary sectors. **Information literacy skills - the link between secondary and tertiary education**  
[www.learningservices.gcal.ac.uk/ils/index.html](http://www.learningservices.gcal.ac.uk/ils/index.html)

Information literacy being defined as:

knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner.

This definition implies several skills. The skills (or competencies) that are required to be information literate require an understanding of:

- a need for information
- the resources available
- how to find information
- the need to evaluate results
- how to work with or exploit results
- ethics and responsibility of use
- how to communicate or share your findings
- how to manage your findings.

One of the big problems is one of definition as even those in educational development and policy making seem to confuse **information literacy skills** with **IT skills** but the two are not the same. **IT skills** (information technology) are about using computers – email, file management and so forth. Information literacy is about finding information in all physical forms (the internet, books etc.), evaluating its worth and making it work for you whether it is for work, educational or recreational purposes. Those of us working in higher education find that first year students are increasingly appearing with basic IT skills but generally poor or limited information literacy skills and competencies.

Information literacy skills and competencies are needed by:

- **Secondary school pupils** to help them learn to find information for themselves to support coursework and also to develop baseline skills which can be applied in tertiary education or in work where independent learning skills are increasingly needed.

- **Students in higher education** who are now expected to be independent learners and need information literacy skills, not just to complete their coursework but to give them learning skills to apply in the modern work situation
- **Those in work** who need information literacy skills to find relevant, credible information to support decision making and improve their career prospects
- **Lifelong learners** who need information literacy skills to support the independent learning process

While it is true that the Scottish Executive is anxious to enhance access to digitally held information, and indeed all information resources, it does not recognise that the Scottish people have to have the information literacy skills listed above to be able to take advantages of the opportunities of e-learning and e-government so that they can access, critically evaluate and use the information within the available resources. The (international) Prague Declaration on the subject [http://www.infolit.org/International\\_Conference/](http://www.infolit.org/International_Conference/) describes information literacy as a civil right and a goal which all democratic societies should pursue.

However there is no specific focus of responsibility or decision making within the Scottish Executive. According to the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) – The importance of information literacy is the subject of on-going discussions across a number of portfolios within the Scottish Executive. This means it is extremely complex as often one department doesn't recognise where another department is already engaged in work. For example OfCom Scotland report to Tourism, Culture and Sport (as libraries do). Their remit is media literacy, which overlaps to some extent with information literacy. Tourism, Culture and Sport is working on a Digital Media Strategy which recognises the importance of information and digital skills (separating them). The Curriculum Review is looking at information literacy within the 3-18 curriculum but as their objective is to declutter the present curriculum and not to add to it there is no guarantee that information literacy will be included in the new curriculum.

The above complexity makes awareness raising and policy developing extremely difficult. In working on the research project both my project officer, Christine Irving and I have found, in approaching educational agencies, at both the secondary and the tertiary sector two common reactions which are a product of the policy vacuum outlined above:

- An ignorance of what information literacy is
- A belief that some other agency is dealing with it

For example, when we approached the Scottish Higher Educational Funding Council we were told that the Scottish Library and

Information Council (SLIC) was dealing with the issue. In practice SLIC has been involved in and initiated national projects <http://www.slainte.org.uk/infohandling/index.htm> but there is more work to be done not just by SLIC but by all interested parties. However the complex situation described above makes any progress on a national basis extremely complex and difficult for SLIC or any other interested party to deal with.

Given that there is a clear need for a focus of understanding, access and decision making within the Scottish Executive, we feel that, as responsible citizens, a petition to the Scottish Executive, is a good way forward.

We want to:

- Create a clear understanding of what information literacy is within the Scottish Executive and the agencies responsible to it
- Identify a clear focus of responsibility for information literacy within the Scottish Executive
- Ensure that responsibility is delegated in a clearly defined manner to an appropriate agency
- Ensure that the identified agency formulates and implements suitable policies, in conjunction with relevant centres of expertise in the areas of secondary and tertiary education, lifelong learning and the workplace.

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