digital strategy 2023

Northern Ireland Assembly

Research & Information Service

RalSe

Foreword

The purpose of this strategy is to set out a plan to direct the work of RaISe over a medium-term period in its use of digital technology. Our work has increasingly involved the use of digital technology in producing and publishing information, and in seeking to understand our audience. The creation of a strategy will help us to focus our use of digital, to develop new capabilities appropriately, and to help others in the Assembly to understand our approach. It will enable us to monitor progress and to balance resources appropriately. It should provide an over-arching context for projects and any bids for resources.

There have been rapid advances in the use of digital technology to create and disseminate information products in recent years. Other parliaments across the UK and Ireland have worked hard to develop such features as podcasts, blogs and 'dashboards', and have sought to expand the range and complexity of data visualisations provided to customers.

Indeed within our own service there have been a number of important innovations in recent years. We have used Geographical Information Systems (GIS) for more than ten years now and more recently have begun to develop our use of interactive web GIS. Our capability with infographics has improved rapidly since 2016. The electronic resources managed by the Library are continuously reviewed and improved.

Our use of social media, the development of the Research Matters blog, the creation of a Brexit hub, and the KESS podcast series are four examples of innovations which have become an embedded feature of our services. And even as the process of creating a digital strategy has unfolded this year, RaISe staff have begun to experiment with technologies such as digital storytelling, coding languages like R and Python, further iterations of the Library catalogue, and web analytics.
We are working in a context where fairly ambitious 'digital transformation' agenda have become the norm in the public sector. For example, both the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive published digital transformation strategies in 2017.

These broad and rapid changes are likely to have had an effect on the expectations of our core customer-base as well as our wider audience. Among the demands made by our customers, it is likely that they will seek to obtain information more quickly and easily, to do so whilst on the move, to share that information rapidly, and to interact with that information to tailor it more closely to their individual needs.

The RaISe Digital Strategy has been prepared by a Steering Group with contributions from across the service. It sets out a definition of what we mean by 'digital', and establishes a vision to be achieved by 2023. It became clear throughout the strategy formation process that we had to address concerns expressed by staff about issues such as a potential lack of resources, about the need for upskilling, and about the risk of departing from our 'core mission'. For this reason, this document contains a set of principles on which any future action will be taken. This action will be structured around six objectives, each of which will be pursued through a set of tasks. Monitoring of the progress of the strategy will be undertaken by the Digital Strategy Steering Group, over-seen by the RaISe Board of Management.

By 2023 we will not necessarily have completed our journey towards embracing digital activity but we hope that through this strategy we will have significantly enhanced our understanding, our skills and our ambitions.

John Power, Head of RaISe

Defining digital

In the context of this strategy we define digital as:

...any aspect of our use of digital technology to capture, store, process and communicate information. The focus of this strategy will be digital engagement with Assembly Members and our wider audience, but may also involve the development of internal systems.

Guiding principles

This strategy links with two other key Assembly strategies: the draft Corporate Strategy and the Public Engagement Strategy. The objectives within these strategies which relate to the promotion of systems innovation, focusing on learning and development opportunities, and using the latest technological approaches will be of particular relevance.

The vision, objectives and tasks set out in the RaISe Digital Strategy will be pursued on the basis of the following seven principles:

- Our use of digital technology will seek to enhance, and not conflict with, our core mission of providing information to the Assembly in an impartial, objective, timely and non-partisan manner.
- We will continue to respect our legal obligations, including copyright (and Crown copyright), licensing agreements, GDPR and our duties under equality legislation.
- We will place the needs of our core users at the heart of any innovation.
- Any digital innovation must be sustainable, therefore this strategy will consider resources and staff capacity as one of its core considerations.
- The strategy will be evidence based and will include monitoring mechanisms.
- We will work with our colleagues in Information Systems to ensure none of our digital activities conflict with the principles of safety or security, particularly when working online.
- We will seek to be inclusive of all our staff so that everyone has opportunities both to enhance their knowledge and skills, and to suggest potential digital innovations.

Vision and objectives

digital strategy

Tasks A, B and C

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A Enhancing our digital infrastructure, systems and resources.

A
1. Review and re-submit an improvement plan for the research database.
2. Explore options for developing RaISe digital systems to: (a) improve communication[3] ; and, (b) enable mobile[4] and interactive working.
3. Explore options for the creation of new research product templates.
4. Assess the potential for using a greater range of data sources (including ‘big data’) as a research resource, and options for data automation.

B Developing a better understanding of our core customer-base as well as our wider audience: who are they and what are their digital information needs?

B
1. Review our current audience and compare with our stated mission.
2. Review the digital skills of our core customer-base.
3. Review our current electronic resources – do they meet customer needs?
4. Review and define data analytics[5] on outward facing content.

C Exploring new methods of presenting and communicating our work and further enhancing what we currently do.

C
1. Explore options for furthering the use of GIS and interactive mapping, potentially within constituency profiles.
2. Review existing infographic/data visualisation capabilities and explore options for expansion.
3. Explore a range of new digital techniques for communicating our research work.
4. Commence review of Research Matters.

Tasks D, E and F

digital strategy

D Developing our outward face so that our resources can be accessed and used more easily.

1. Develop a series of user guides to all of our digital outputs to ensure: harmony of style and accessibility (including equality duties); and, to improve the transferability of skills and reduce dependence on a small number of skilled staff.
2. Explore ways of making Library material more accessible, including: (a) making our Library catalogue available online externally; (b) securing access to subscription journals for all Assembly users; (c) improving the navigation of electronic resources[6] ; and (d) the digitisation of some of our rare collections[7] .

E Acquiring and nurturing new digital skills for our staff and our customers.

1. Review digital skills and training needs within RaIse.
2. Form a digital skills development plan to include all RaISe staff.
3. Amend our training and awareness sessions to improve the digital capabilities of our customers.
4. Explore options to draw skills available in other organisations through scholarships, interns, placements and bursary schemes.

F Improving collaboration and engagement within the Assembly and with outside organisations on digital.

1. Assess the relationship between this strategy and wider Assembly strategies.
2. Explore options for using digital technology to encourage cross-team working and collaboration.
3. Further develop our relationship with IPVIS.
4. Explore options for digital knowledge exchange with academia utilising existing networks such as KESS and Research Councils.

Endnotes

A number of recurring terms are used in this strategy; these terms are defined here as follows:

Assess: An assessment is defined here as a process by which a judgement can be made as to the feasibility or effectiveness of a particular service or facility. It will generally be a less formal process than a review or an exploration, and may be relatively short in duration.

Review: A review is defined here as the critical evaluation of the current delivery of a service. It should have defined terms of reference and personnel, and provide a report with clear actions and owners.

Explore: The term 'explore' is used here to mean inquiry into the further development of a service or facility. It is anticipated that this process will involve the investigation of a number of different options and could, following further discussion, lead to the establishment of a project.

Develop: Within the context of this strategy, 'develop' means the creation or significant enhancement of a facility or service. It is anticipated that the process of development will involve a project design, potentially including a pilot phase. Any development must adhere to the list of principles which accompanies this digital strategy.

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1 The draft Corporate Strategy contains three objectives which are of particular relevance to the RaISe Digital Strategy; these are: 'Promoting innovation in our systems to improve services to our customers', 'Maximising the potential of our people through a longer term focus on learning and development opportunities', and 'Developing new approaches to engagement which enable the public to interact with the work of the Assembly'.

2 The Public Engagement Strategy has two objectives of direct relevance: 'Delivering programmes to inform and engage youth, community, business, media and academic groups, by working with partners and using the latest communication and technological approaches', and 'Communicating the work of the Assembly in an accessible and inclusive way'.

3 Both internal and external communications using digital technologies such as Skype, instant messaging and forums.

4 By 'mobile working', we mean the ability to work beyond the confines of our designated workstation: for example, consulting papers at a committee meeting, demonstrating research to external groups (either elsewhere within Parliament Buildings or outside), away-from-desk internal and external communication, or working in the Library.

5 By 'data analytics' we mean the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of web data associated with our outward facing content.

6 This could include an exploration of such facilities as EBSCO and the use of categories and tags to improve the searchability of our own resources.

7 This could include collections such as Sentate Hansard, Command Papers and PP papers.