



DIGITAL ETHICS: A FRAMEWORK FOR TRUST ***SOME COMMENTS FROM EKKLESIA***

Like other countries, Scotland is facing difficult decisions about using digital options to maintain, provide and improve services.

The aim of its recent consultation topic, to which the following comments were made from Ekklesia, has been to inform what principles and frameworks might look like to guide how the country can develop as an Ethical Digital Nation. See: <https://consult.gov.scot/digital-directorate/digital-ethics/>

Issues around culture, trust and technology are being explored in terms of the impact these have on people and society. The aim is to encourage “a fair and responsible digital society. Our focus for this conversation is trust in the use of information. We invite individuals, businesses and organisations to engage in this conversation to help us take the next steps to shape Scotland as an Ethical Digital Nation.”

Ekklesia made brief, initial comments in the following areas, raised by other individuals, businesses and NGOs. We understand that further conversations and consultations will take place.

1. An overarching inclusive communication strategy

This is a very important issue. It is essential that disabled people are consulted, involved and engaged thoroughly in the processes of inclusive communication and the ethics of digital development, for example.

2. Increasing digital literacy

Digital Literacy education, training and awareness is vital, because there is a real risk of deepening the 'digital divide' in Scotland. The issue is how to build Digital Literacy into other programmes of outreach and education in both formal and informal sectors, through NGOs, etc.

3. Institutions and information sharing

The Scottish Community Safety Network has a useful information-sharing protocol here, which we commend: <http://www.safercommunitiesscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/Information-Sharing-Protocol-Template-PDF.pdf>

4. Transparency

Socitm (Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation) has produced a digital ethics practice guide that we regard as very helpful in this matter.

See ‘Digital ethics: the ethical use of emerging technologies and data’:
<https://socitm.net/download/digital-ethics-the-ethical-use-of-emerging-technologies-and-data/>

5. Fairness

'Fairness' can be a slippery concept in this and other areas. It has to embrace concrete practices, safeguards and monitoring mechanisms around: access, equality, diversity, inclusion, awareness/education, uptake and engagement.

6. Upskilling ethical digital capabilities

Demonstrable understanding of (and communication of) ethical practice, guidelines and monitoring from organisations involved in the creation of digital tools is essential. But the criteria for this need to be established and agreed from the outset.

As DeafScotland (<https://deafscotland.org>) have said: users need to know what "ethical digital capabilities" are in a way that is accessible, inclusive and easy to understand. Those creating digital tools need to understand how to ensure users can participate, and how to understand the messages involved.

7. Freedom of choice in data sharing

Data is crucial to the provision of services. Sometimes this can work in anonymised ways, but not always. People should always know what data they are sharing, why, how, where it is stored and how it is accountable.

The right not to share data should exist as far as possible, without discrimination. Essential services should never be withheld. There will be data privacy trade-offs in some areas, but these should never be concealed and should always be open to challenge.

Building trust through clear information and transparent processes, including data recall, is important in making this work practically.

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ABOUT EKKLESIA

Ekklesia was established as a think-tank in 2002, drawing upon a network of allies and thinkers influenced and engaged with a Christian commitment to social justice, economic sharing, nonviolent peacemaking, and environmental sustainability. We have always sought to work across different traditions of religion, belief and non-belief in pursuing these goals. Today Ekklesia, which is based in Edinburgh, Scotland, continues to operate as an independent change network promoting transformative ideas for a better future. www.ekklesia.co.uk