

Case Study

GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE NEW DYNAMICS OF AGEING

"Journey Associates' expertise, skills and quality of research was particularly valuable in facilitating sensitive user-centred research in the area of design and health. Their highly professional handling of the wide range of individuals involved in the research provided excellent value for cost, ensuring reliable data and outputs which substantially assisted in securing further funding to continue the research." Prof Alastair Macdonald, Senior Researcher School of Design, The Glasgow School of Art.

The School of Design at internationally recognised GSA wanted to look into the benefits of a new digital tool that converted scientific data relating to stress levels on the joints of older adults into a visual format. We were commissioned to (i) undertake user focused research to explore how this tool could improve the understanding of complex mobility issues, and enhance communication between healthcare and design professions and older people, and (ii) to advise on the format and delivery of a national conference on ageing research. The project was funded by the cross-council New Dynamics of Ageing programme.



The Project

The research design took account the diverse nature of the user groups, including older people in their 60s, 70s and 80s; healthcare professionals representing physiotherapy, occupational therapy and general practice; and design professionals from bioengineering, architecture, interior design and transport design. A series of in-depth interviews allowed us to understand the issues affecting daily living tasks and mobility for older adults; and to determine how this information was used and gathered within healthcare and design professions. This rich contextual information allowed us to explore the need for improved communication and understanding in this area.

Our Approach

A series of focus groups enabled us to gauge the users' views and experience of the tool; including its visual clarity and legibility, its potential as a communication aid to allow professionals to share their expertise across disciplines, and as a way of empowering older people to participate in discussions with professionals about their health issues. On completion of the user consultations, a workshop for a select group of specialists explored the further development of the technology and its applications.

Outputs & Impact

The research findings provided the client with confirmation that the tool was easy to interpret, and had the potential to allow older people to participate in discussions and decisions about their healthcare and the design of their environment. It also highlighted to client and key stakeholders that the tool deepened understanding of issues, and improved communication across professional disciplines, allowing a more joined-up approach to healthcare and design planning. The findings from the analysis were presented at a national conference on ageing and have appeared in publications. The outcomes of the workshop resulted in successful research funding from the Medical Research Council to develop the tool and user engagement process further and test its use in a series of rehabilitation applications again involving a range of stakeholder, to include healthcare professionals, carers and patients.