Interview Transcript[[1]](#footnote-1)

Subject 7: Hazard Communication

I: [explaining project]

[1:48]

I: So I guess we’ll start with, kind of, what your job position is and how that relates to communication of weather information or hazard information.

S: My actual day job is not really related to it at all. I think I said I wasn’t sure if I would be that helpful because I [unintelligible] of just encouraging governments to make better use of satellites. So maybe, hopefully in the long term, then they’ll be able to use satellites to understand flooding a bit more, but, you know, there’s a bit of Cumbria this weekend that we could have used a lot more satellite information to spread that. But that’s a long way off. My role with the [organisation], we have a number of products, well one main product, maybe two. So there’s the [hazard product]. Oh I didn’t send you a copy of it, did I?

[2:45]

I: Oh no. That would be helpful if you could.

S: Yes. I will. Sorry, it’s been a very busy couple of days. I’ve not really been at my desk, which summarizes all of the different alerts that currently go out and brings them all into one place, so over the weekend, it was going a bit crazy and there was like red for flood, red for rain, amber for wind, you know, so it kind of just brings them all into one place. That’s the aim of what [organisation] does. They also have a set of science notes, which just summarize kind of the hazard itself, just from a scientific point-of-view that this is what a landslide is, or this is what a flood is, you know freshwater flooding. So those two products. And I think I mentioned that they’re going through a bit of a revision to try to make them more, I don’t know, user-friendly, perhaps, which is where it could be useful to hear some of your research outputs. And so I think at the moment they’re quite word-based with a few little graphics. Just one little graphic of the whole of the UK and then a blob, essentially, shows which parts of the UK are susceptible to those particular alerts, if that makes sense.

I: That does make sense. Do you mind also sending me the science notes or an example of one of those?

S: The science notes, they are online. If you Google [organisation] and it should be one of the tabs is science notes and then there are six already live. I will say the [organisation] website is about to start undergoing a big overhaul. Don’t judge us based just on the website, essentially.

[4:38]

I: That’s fair enough. So the collection of alerts. What’s that called again?

S: [hazard product]

I: The [hazard product]. So when we were looking at it the other day it looked like it was mostly text-based. Is that true?

S: Yes it is. At the top, there’s a big sign, blue box that says these are the alerts that have been issued for the next five-day period. And then below that is five maps of the UK, so one for the next five days and then the areas that are at risk are just, I think there’s a blob over the top of them. Some people refer to them as, “the blobs maps.” I don’t know if that’s good communication technique or [unintelligible]. And then below there’s a bit more information, kind of like, more practical, maybe how the responders should be dealing with the event, that kind of information. The aim is to really target it so that it is advice for responders from the experts.

[5:53]

I: How is that advice presented? What kind of information is in that advice to the responders?

S: It’s not very much at the moment. It’s like a paragraph. So what we need to understand is what do they want to know? What will be useful to share? And I think that’s the bit where we need to do a bit more end-user engagement on.

[discussion of possible collaboration]

I: In terms of, can you describe who all receives the daily assessment?

S: It goes out to your responders, the police, you know the blue lights kind of people, all those kinds of bodies, essentially. Those who have a role in responding on the ground when there is an event, or I think people, maybe like resilient infrastructure people might get it as well. So, you know, your critical national infrastructure guys, the councils, all people like that. It’s a very long list. So they can sign up. They can also get it through [software], so anyone who has access to that can get it.

I: Okay, so I believe I remember you said you can get it either directly online or by email, is that correct?

S: Yes. And if you sign up to the [software], it’s kind of like a map that shows, more precisely, the areas where a risk is, or an alert has gone out. And there’s an option on there to say “send me the summary documents” and then you get it emailed to you every day at 2:00 at the moment and then whenever a revision goes out in between that, say this weekend there were a number of documents going out because of the Cumbria floods. It’s been a bit crazy.

[8:39]

I: Where do you get the “blob maps” from?

S: So the Met Office are responsible for pulling it all together. So they do it. There’s one person dedicated to doing that every day.

I: Okay. So you’re summarizing Met Office, Environment Agency, and all of that.

S: Yes, exactly. It’s for the whole of the UK. Or is it all of Britain: Scotland, England, Wales, those people involved as well.

I: One of the things we’re going to do, like I mentioned, is we’re going to try to help, or we’re going to try to figure out how well people understand uncertainty graphics specifically. So you were talking about these blob maps and whether or not they’re useful. They’re certainly the most used, so that’s kind of one of the reasons why we’re asking if it’s the most useful. So that’s specifically one of our target products that we want to test.

S: That’s really interesting. We met with Scotland a few weeks ago and I think they thought it was a bit too vague for them, almost. They wanted something a bit more specific to Scotland. Because you know, because scale is such an issue and so I think there might be something on that.

I: Oh that’s interesting.

[10:20]

S: Does that make sense? So, I mean, you know, Scotland’s so small compared to the rest of England and this is where impact might start coming in as well because the same scale event in the Highlands of Scotland will have a much smaller impact than if it hit Manchester, London, or something. But I think they sometimes feel just on the margins a little bit and so whether a whole map of the UK is actually useful for them was a prominent question when we were talking to them.

[10:52]

I: Okay. So were they concerned about kind of resolution as well? Because certainly Scotland is quite hilly so for a flood event, for example, it would probably be a lot more localized impacts in a really hilly area versus a flatter area.

S: Yeah, I think that was one of the concerns. I think the other one was just actually was putting everything altogether in one place useful? They already have these channels that they get information from directly so if people already send them these updates for an example flooding, why do we need to duplicate, you know, reissue the same information. So that was another point because, you know, [organisation] ones probably are that bit more specific than all of one step covers all of the UK.

I: Gotcha. Okay. This is really interesting.

[11:44]

S: I mean, I’m just, there might be more I can give you once we’ve digested all the notes from that session, but we haven’t quite got to that stage yet.

I: Well, I’d be happy to hear, if you’re allowed to share it, I’d be happy to hear whatever you guys have.

S: Yes, it’s not actually been written up yet so you’ll have to give me a week or so. It’s a busy time.

I: Absolutely. No joke. So our kind of plan for the next year or so is we’re going to get together this, basically it’s an online decision game and so we’re going to analyze people’s decisions based on, like we’ll give them a graphic, basically and ask them, will you bring an umbrella today or not. Or will you go out and buy ice cream or not, or you know just have these decision games. We’re going to give them different formats of information and see how those change their decisions, basically. So this is going to be an online game and we have a psychologist and we have a couple of graphic designers on our team. So we’re going to play with things. I’m actually really excited about this.

S: That sounds fantastic.

[12:58]

[talk about getting help recruiting respondents]

S: Good to meet you.

I: Good to meet you too and let’s keep in touch about this.

S: Yes, fantastic.

I: Speak to you soon.

S: Yeah, speak soon.

I: Bye.

S: Okay. Bye.

1. The interviewer is denoted by “I” and the subject as “S” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)