

Digital capabilities of the social care workforce

Bulletin

This bulletin has been designed to give you more information about the research conducted in this important area. Use the links throughout the document to take you to parts of the main report for more information.

The research proposed 8 recommendations for the sector to consider:



Explore the feasibility of creating a single online information resource about digital technologies in social care, focused on the strategic planning and management of digital technologies in the social care context. The resources suggested in other recommendations in this report could be contained within this overarching service.

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Consider providing guidance for employers in the sector on digital data and system security issues.

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Consider providing a framework for discussion on 'bring your own device' (BYOD) approaches, to enable social care employers to take informed strategic decisions about their policy on personal digital devices.

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Review relevant digital skills and competency frameworks with a view to their potential use across the adult social care workforce in England.

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Consider the need to develop a learning and support programme for strategic digital skills in social care.

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Consider developing a national social care 'digital champions' support programme; review approaches currently being used in the housing sector with a view to replicating it for the social care sector.

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Consider making core information and communication technologies (ICT's) skills a mandatory part of all learning and development and qualifications frameworks.

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Make explicit mention of digital skills and skills assessments in the revision of the recruitment and retention strategy for adult social care currently being undertaken by Skills for Care.

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Background and aims of the research

Skills for Care, the sector skills council for adult social care in England, commissioned this research in order to gain a better understanding of the current status of digital technologies and digital capabilities in the social care sector. The research informed the development of the workforce strategy for ‘Digital Working, Learning and Information Sharing’, which aims to support commissioners and employers to develop the digital capacity of their workforces and ensure that digital approaches to care and support are open to everyone.

Managers and most staff see the benefits of digital technology in:

-  Improving efficiency
-  Improving the quality of care services
-  Offering benefits to people they support

Research approach

The research consisted of a **rapid evidence review**, a survey of managers and staff along with site visits to 8 organisations. The survey found out about uses of and attitudes towards digital technologies as well as perceptions of digital confidence and skills.

In total, 236 managers and 303 staff responded to the survey. The site visits helped gain in-depth insights into their uses of the technologies and their approach to digital skills support. In total 20 managers and 17 staff were interviewed across a range of organisations.

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Attitudes to using digital technology

- Staff are keen to use digital technology
- 60% of managers encourage staff to think about digital technology in all they do

What current learning opportunities are there for digital technology?

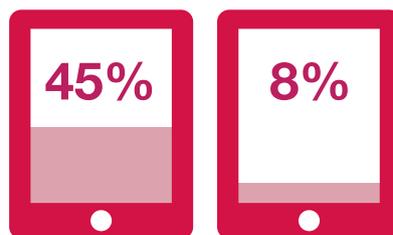
Staff have had the following regularly or occasionally:



50% of staff use digital technology with people they support

Current uses of digital technologies in adult social care

- The **review** revealed little existing evidence on the use of digital technologies in social care. The most robust research was a series of three bi-annual surveys showing a steady increase in the use of digital technologies for workforce learning.
- In our research, the use of digital technologies was commonly used for organisational activities - over 95% of survey respondents report its use in at least one aspect of their activities.
- The surveys suggested digital technologies are most commonly found in generic organisational activities, particularly people management, workforce learning and development, external marketing and communication, and internal communications. All the organisations we visited used digital technologies in these areas.
- Amongst survey respondents, digital technologies were slightly less common in care-specific administration activities such as recording care plans or managing the delivery of care, though even here, three-quarters of organisations report its use.
- We found widely varying degrees of digital management of care activities in the organisations we visited; some had digitised almost every aspect of the management and recording of their care activities, while others still used mainly paper-based records.
- Digital technologies are having an impact on the direct interactions between care staff and the people they support, for example to support leisure activities for people using their services, and to support communication with family and friends. **We found numerous examples of this during our site visits, and spoke with managers and staff who felt that digital technologies played a significant role in making services more person-centred.**



45% have a tablet device at home compared with 8% having a work tablet. 9% use their personal tablet for work.

Adopting digital technology

- Lack of consistent internet access for mobile workers providing services in people's homes, however, still inhibits the use of digital technologies directly with people who receive care and support services at home.
- The two most significant determinants for whether organisations were embracing digital technologies appeared to be management priorities and the overall attitude to change in the organisation.
- The rapid adoption of digital technologies in society generally was also driving adoption within the care organisations we visited. There was a general sense of a potential danger of being left behind, summed up by a staff member: "The whole world is going digital. You can't run away from it. You have to acquire the knowledge and fit in."

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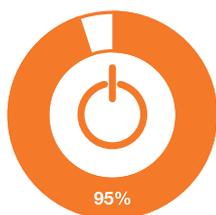


Staff access to digital devices

- The digital device most commonly used for work purposes by staff we surveyed was the desktop computer provided by the employer – two-thirds of staff reported using one.
- Just under a third of staff reported using laptops provided by their employer for work, and 15% reported using their own personal laptop for work purposes.
- The use of tablets for work is still relatively low, with less than a fifth of staff using one; about half of these staff are using their own device, and half are using one provided by their employer.
- Personal use of smartphones (i.e. phones with access to the internet) is high, with almost three-quarters of staff saying they have their own smartphone (very close to the figure for the UK population). One fifth of staff report using their personal smartphone for work purposes.
- Personal use of mobile digital devices – smartphones, laptops and tablets – is considerably higher than workplace use, suggesting that in terms of digital mobile at least, individual staff are more digitally engaged than their employers are.

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95% of participants use digital technology for at least one work related activity



75% of staff use digital technology to record/manage delivery of care



Attitudes to digital technologies

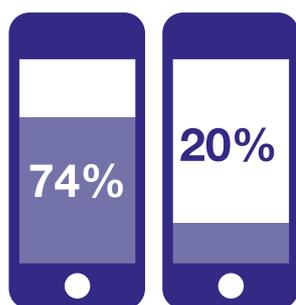
- Most managers in our survey were convinced of the potential benefits of digital technology and its capacity to improve both the efficiency and the quality of care services. All the managers we interviewed on site had very positive attitudes towards the introduction and continued expansion of the use of digital technologies. They too cited efficiency and quality improvements as the principal strategic drivers for adoption of new technologies.
- Other drivers for the introduction of digital systems included increasing requirements from commissioners for detailed and immediate reporting on the status of services, the increasing integration of health and social care information systems and the need to gain and maintain competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive provider market.
- Most staff in our survey also had a strongly positive attitude towards digital technologies, seeing their potential to improve the quality of services and the quality of life of the people they support, as well as the potential to support their own career development.
- The staff we interviewed also felt that digital technologies were beneficial to the organisation as a whole and to their own role, helping them to do their jobs better. Caveats included a sense of pressure to do administrative tasks more quickly, and – in organisations using shared folders and email extensively – the pressure to take administrative work home.

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Digital capabilities in the adult social care workforce

- Social care managers in our survey reported a significant shortage of digital skills across all levels of the workforce; over a third said their workforce does not have sufficient basic online skills.
- A number of managers and staff in the organisations we visited, felt digital skills correlated with age, and that younger staff were well equipped to support older staff.
- While the managers and staff at the sites we visited were content with their knowledge and procedures regarding online safety and security, nearly half of the managers in our survey said their workforce lacked a basic understanding of these issues.
- The most frequently cited digital capability shortage concerned insufficient basic understanding of digital assisted living technologies; managers and staff in both the surveys and a number of the sites visited felt they needed to understand more about these technologies.
- The surveys revealed a significant ‘perception mismatch’ between how managers assessed staff skills and how staff assessed their own skills; managers reported significant skills shortages while staff were very confident in their own skill levels.

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74% of staff have a personal smartphone.

20% of staff use their personal phone for work purposes.

Future uses of digital technologies

Participants expected imminent developments including:

- greater use of digital technologies for managing and monitoring service activity including real-time reporting to commissioners.
- greater use of mainstream digital technologies directly with people who receive care and support services.
- greater use of assisted living technologies.

Looking a little further ahead, interviewees predicted:

- mobile digital technologies becoming ubiquitous for care staff.
- more and more people who receive care and support services using mainstream digital technologies independently to manage their own care.

Digital skills assessment and support

- The majority of social care organisations do not as yet consider digital skills to be essential for all recruits; however some organisations are making basic online skills a requirement, and assessing them at interview, and this trend is likely to continue.
- Peer support and peer-to-peer learning are essential for the development and maintenance of digital skills in the social care workplace; these forms of support are highly valued by both managers and staff, including staff who may lack confidence in using digital technologies.
- Opportunities for more formal training in digital technologies would also be welcomed, although costs are a barrier to uptake; there are gaps in generic digital skills for example using mainstream office software and social media, as well as in specialist areas such as assisted living technologies.
- Managers and some staff would also like access to regular, independent updates about digital developments, presented for a social care audience.

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Conclusions

Digital technologies are deeply embedded in adult social care organisations; they are commonly used in business processes, and they are increasingly commonly used for the management and actual delivery of care. Organisations making best use of digital technologies tended to:

- have an appetite for innovation.
- display an open learning cultures.
- recognise and encourage peer support in the use of digital technologies.
- keep abreast with advances in the use of technologies in social care.

Drivers for the uptake of digital technologies include efficiency improvements, quality improvements, compliance with commissioners, and competitive advantage.

Lack of resources currently inhibits many organisations rolling out digital access to all staff. A number of organisations support staff to use their own personal devices, particularly smartphones, during the course of their work.

Managers in social care consider their workforces to be significantly lacking in the whole range of digital skills, from basic online skills through to specialist skills in digital assisted living technologies. Staff, by contrast, are very confident in their own digital skills.

By far the most frequent form of digital skills learning evidenced in this research was on-the-job learning, ranging from informal peer support through shadowing and supervisory support to structured in-house training.

The organisations we visited had key members of the workforce who were the 'go-to' people for digital skills support. These 'digital champions', help to make the application of technology possible for other staff, and in many cases also for people receiving their care and support services.

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- **Staff have confidence in their own basic online skills with over 90% feeling confident or very confident.**
- **But 52% of managers feel staff do not have sufficient basic online skills**

If you would like to read the full report [click here](#)

If you'd like to see our infographic showing an overview of the results [click here](#)

For information about digital literacy skills in the social care sector [click here](#)

For more information about other research conducted by Skills for Care [click here](#)

