

Digital capabilities in the social care workforce

Rapid evidence review

July 2014

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Published by Skills for Care

Digital Capabilities in the social care workforce: Rapid evidence review

Published by Skills for Care, West Gate, 6 Grace Street, Leeds LS1 2RP www.skillsforcare.org.uk

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Reference no. NT330 / 130121C

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Skills for Care is the employer-led strategic body for workforce development in social care for adults in England. It is part of the sector skills council, Skills for Care and Development.

This work was researched and compiled by Sara Dunn with Alexander Braddell of Sara Dunn Associates.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Martin Harvey (eSkills), Kate Johnson (TCSW), Miles Maier (Lasa), Alison Petch (IRISS), Ian Watson (IRISS) and David Wilcox (Social Reporter/ Nesta) for their help in finding additional relevant literature and references for this review.

1. Introduction

This report details the results of a rapid review to underpin investigative research on the topic of digital capabilities in the adult social care workforce in England. The research was commissioned by Skills for Care, the sector skills council for adult social care in England, and conducted by Sara Dunn Associates.

The purpose of the research project overall is to better understand how digital technologies are used in and by the adult social care workforce in England. The particular focus of the project is on the skills required to use digital technologies effectively in the social care context. The research is intended to inform the development of a 'Strategy for Digital Working, Learning and Information Sharing', with which Skills for Care has been tasked by the Department of Health.

This rapid review was undertaken to establish the existing evidence base for work in this area, addressing the following questions:

- To what extent are digital technologies embedded in the daily working lives of the social care workforce?
- What are the main uses of digital technologies in the delivery of social care?
- What are the main barriers to the further use of digital technologies?
- What facilitates or inhibits digital capability in the social care workforce?

2. Methodology

Searches were undertaken on the following databases and search engines:

- ERIC.
- Google Scholar.
- ISI Web of Knowledge.
- IRISS (SSKS and LX).
- LG Search.
- Social Care Online.
- Skills for Care Research Knowledge Base.
- TSRC.

In addition a manual search of the following sources was undertaken in order to identify further relevant grey literature:

- Age UK.
- BBC Research.
- ESkills UK.
- Go ON UK.
- NESTA.
- Nominet Trust.
- Ofcom.
- Tinder Foundation.

A variety of primary search terms, related terms and search strings were used appropriate to the different databases, including:

- Digital, 'information technolog*', IT, ICT, computer*, internet.
- Literacy, skills, capability, inclusion.
- 'Social care'.

For the larger databases, the search was narrowed to UK only.

2.1 Working definitions

Our working definition of the collective term 'digital technologies' includes a range of technologies that use binary data including:

- The internet.
- Desktop computers.
- Laptop computers.
- Tablet computers.
- Smartphones.
- Mobile phones.

Much of the research reviewed did not explicitly define its technology terms, with IT, ICTs or digital technologies used interchangeably. In practice, most of the research found focuses on the use of the internet-enabled interactive devices itemized above.

Our working definition of the term ‘digital literacy’ includes:

- Basic online skills: communicate by email; find information using a search engine; share information via an online form; and do all of the these safely i.e. identify spam, evaluate safety of websites, set privacy settings¹
- Information literacy: the ability to source, search for, evaluate, combine, share and apply digital information²
- Media literacy: a critical understanding of the impact of digital technologies on society.³

This definition will be subject to revision during the course of the research project, and is likely to incorporate aspects of digital literacy specific to the social care setting.

2.2 General points on search results

Digital technologies and associated skills change extremely fast. Therefore for the larger databases, initial search results were filtered to include publications from 2010 onwards. For the manual searches, brief review of documents older than 2010 was conducted, and where there was a high degree of relevance some older documents were included.

In total 69 studies, articles, reports and guides were assessed for relevance and quality following guidelines produced by the Cabinet Office.⁴ Thirty-three items were then selected for detailed review and inclusion in this report. These sources are listed in full in the bibliography, and the nature of the evidence or information within them is summarised below. No relevant systematic reviews or meta-analyses were found.

Nature of evidence	Number of documents
Opinion piece by individual author/s	2
Practice experience account; Good practice guide	7

¹ The definition of basic online skills developed by GoON, the government funded agency charged with improving the UK’s digital skills; see <http://www.go-on.co.uk/challenge/uk-snapshot>

² Based on the definition of information literacy developed by IRISS; see <http://www.iriss.org.uk/project/information-literacy-cycle>

³ Based on the BBC definition of media literacy; the BBC has a statutory duty to support media literacy; see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning/overview/about/digitalliteracy.shtml>

⁴ Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Task Force (2008) *Think Research: Using Research Evidence to Inform Service Development for Vulnerable Groups* Cabinet Office; Spencer *et al.* (2003) *Quality in Qualitative Evaluation: A Framework for Assessing Research Evidence* Cabinet Office

Opinion study (i.e. survey of respondent views/perceptions)	10
Case study research	3
Evidence/literature review	3
Policy document	8

2.3 Limitations of review

This was a time-limited rapid review and may not have uncovered all research relevant to the topic. It is possible that research about other aspects of workforce development in social care may contain some reference to digital technologies and/or digital skills, in particular research that focuses on specific contexts of use for technology such as assisted living or telecare.

The literature contains many single studies about aspects of service delivery, workforce development or organisational practice in social care that involve digital technologies. Some form of meta-analysis, looking at the types of services with substantial digital elements that feature in the academic literature within a given timeframe may be a useful exercise to gain further insights into the range of uses of digital technology (see section 3.3.1 for a rapid version of this).

3. Findings

3.1 Policy context

Key points

- The current Government Digital Strategy aims to make all public services ‘digital by default’ by 2015.
- This policy is recognised as having implications for the 11 million people in the UK who currently do not have access to the internet.
- Some commentators see the social care workforce, and family and carers, as important ‘enablers’ for the digitally excluded.
- While there is no policy explicitly dealing with generic digital capabilities in the social care sector, Skills for Care’s workforce strategy recognises the challenges posed by the spread of digital technologies, particularly in terms of social media and assisted living technologies, and the need for the workforce and skills implications to be further understood.
- The Department of Health’s own Digital Strategy focuses primarily on improvements to information delivery – both to professionals and to the general public – through digital media.
- While digital skills are recognised as a core functional skill in the learning and skills sector, the current social care workforce training and qualifications frameworks do not address digital capabilities in any significant way.

3.1.1 Digital policy in the UK

A recent report prepared by Booz & Co (2012) for GoON, the government funded body charged with encouraging the uptake of digital technologies in the UK, summarises the current challenge in digital technology facing the UK:

With ICT access approaching ubiquity, policymakers’ next challenge is to ensure that individuals, businesses, and governments are making the best possible use of networks and applications. Countries that have achieved advanced levels of digitization—the mass adoption of connected digital technologies and applications

by consumers, enterprises, and governments— have realized significant benefits in their economies, their societies, and the functioning of their public sectors....

Over the past two decades, policymakers established rules to enhance access to communication services—setting policies that introduce competition and promote infrastructure sharing, for example. Now they need to gain a similar understanding of the ways in which they can encourage adoption and boost the usage of digital applications by consumers, businesses, and public institutions.

The ‘Digital by Default’ agenda as set out in the Government Digital Strategy (Cabinet Office 2012) sets a target for all public services to be delivered online ‘by default’. It also mandates the provision of ‘consistent services for people who have rarely or never been online’:

It is important we do not leave anyone behind in this move to a digital by default approach. Departments will recognise and understand the needs of people who can’t use digital services. We will provide appropriate support for these people to use digital services and other ways to access services for people who need them.

Some considerable government resource⁵ is therefore being dedicated to the continuing problem of digital exclusion, which sees 11m people in the UK lacking basic digital skills and therefore potentially excluded from accessing public services.⁶

Outside government there has been a great deal of comment on and response to the Digital by Default agenda from a range of think tanks, campaign groups and related organisations. Some of this has included discussion of the implications for the social care sector, though the focus is largely on the implications for people using social care services rather than on the social care workforce. Often, the ramifications for the workforce are implicit rather than explicit. For example, a 2013 Nominet Trust report ‘Digital Technologies for a Better Later Life’, offers ten recommendations to improve digital inclusion for older people, one of which is:

Enable [sic] carers and care services – both for direct use of technology and to act as proxies. More could be achieved by integrating digital technology into services, and supporting carers in their use of technology. This will be increasingly important as older people who are not connected may require proxy helpers to use online services.

⁵ For example the recent award of £1m from the Department of Health to the Tinder Foundation to support health management through online access for hard to reach groups, and significant grants for digital inclusion work from the Cabinet Office and the Big Lottery in the pipeline.

⁶ An excellent overview of the national digital skills picture is given in the Tinder Foundation ‘Digital Nation’ infographic at <http://www.tinderfoundation.org/our-thinking/research-publications/digital-nation>

In a similar vein, a Nominet Trust ‘provocation’ paper and various blogs by Ayres (2013) have drawn attention to the potential benefits of digital technologies – essentially defined in this instance as web-based information services – in the care sector. Once again the focus is on how to facilitate the use of online services by people needing care and support; there is little or no direct attention paid to the issue of digital skills in the social care workforce.

3.1.2 Digital policy in health and social care

The Department of Health Digital Strategy (DH 2012) focuses in the main on the internal requirements for the Department to become more digitally effective, and on the effect of digital technologies on the provision of information, including a commitment to ‘steward the health and care system towards a health information revolution’ by:

- implementing the Digital First channel strategy for health and care to deliver a consistent approach to digital across the system, including bringing together the best information and services from across the NHS, public health and social care into a single integrated customer service platform for citizens
- developing an active community of digital professionals within the health and care system and providing a digital workspace to share best practice, case studies and digital knowledge
- developing the information policies and improving the data quality to ensure that Digital First and the health information revolution become a reality across the health and care system for the benefit of all.

The Caldicott Review of information governance (DH 2013) makes (limited) mention of the digital nature of most information and record-keeping, and recommends that training for professionals at undergraduate level ‘should cover confidentiality requirements, record keeping, information technology and systems, and the application of informatics principles to practice’.

The Skills for Care workforce development strategy *Capable, Confident, Skilled* (2011) focuses on the use of digital technologies to build communities (through social media) and to market services. It also points to the increasing use of ‘adaptive, rehabilitative, information and communication technologies such as telehealth and telecare’ to help people needing care and support to live independently, and points out that the implications of these technologies for the workforce need to be better understood.

A study of the workforce development implications of assisted living technologies, commissioned by Skills for Care (Circle 2012), looked at three local authorities with varying approaches to the introduction, delivery and support of assisted living technologies (ALT). Recommendations for workforce initiatives included supporting ALT leads to champion and drive forward services, a generic framework outlining skills and knowledge needs amongst professionals, and an associated national framework of

learning and development. Also looking at skills for assistive technologies, Skills for Care and Development's '2013-18 Workforce Learning Strategy to Support the Embedding of Electronic Assistive Technologies in Social Care Services' (2013) contends there is a need for a good level of digital literacy amongst social care staff in order for them to be able to engage effectively with assistive technologies.

3.1.3 Workforce training and qualifications

The importance of digital capability is well established in the adult skills domain. In the late 1990s, IT skills were included in definitions of Key Skills. However, references to digital capabilities in social care national occupational standards are very sparse and focus on the purely functional skills of using particular devices.⁷ The Common Induction Standards include two references to 'electronic systems',⁸ and the closest that the Manager Induction Standards come to digital capabilities is a single reference to 'technology'. Regarding the adult social care qualifications systems, it is our understanding that (apart from the Functional Skills element of the Higher Apprenticeship framework) there is no specific focus on digital literacy or ICT skills in any of the core QCF qualification units. In the learning and skills sector, the inclusion of ICT, alongside English and maths, within the Functional Skills curriculum positions ICT as a basic skill (Entry 1 to Level 2) and it is a mandatory element of most apprenticeships. However Skills for Care explicitly advises employers that for intermediate and advanced level apprenticeships ICT is only an optional element of the programme.⁹ Only the level 5 Higher Apprenticeship stipulates ICT (as a transferrable skill).

A requirement for what are termed ICT skills is explicitly identified for social workers, and it does include some of the critical evaluation skills which we might associate with digital capability as opposed to simply functional IT skills. QAA Social Work Subject Benchmark 5.9 lists six criteria in ICT and numerical skills which social work graduates must demonstrate. These competencies include effective use of ICT for professional communication and enhancing skills in problem solving and research in practice. In addition to these expectations, there is a requirement that students demonstrate the ability to have a critical understanding of the social impact of ICT, including an awareness of the impact of the 'digital divide' (Quality Assurance Agency 2008).

⁷ For example, unit SCDLMCSA1 and SCDHSC0242 National Occupational Standards (NOS) database <http://nos.ukces.org.uk/Pages/index.aspx>

⁸ Skills for Care (2010) *Common induction standards* CIS 1.4.3 and CIS 7.4.3 Leeds: Skills for Care

⁹ Skills for Care (2013) *Apprenticeship employer guide* Leeds: Skills for Care

3.1.4 Looking ahead

Skills for Health, quoted in the UKCES 2012 'Sector Skills Insights into Health and Social Care' expects the impacts of ICT on the healthcare workforce will mean that:

- the requirement to use basic ICT systems will affect all jobs, and
- the sensitivity of data-handling will require skills of confidentiality and data security.

We might reasonably extrapolate these expectations to the social care workforce.

3.2 To what extent are digital technologies embedded in the daily working lives of the social care workforce?

Key points

- **Most data we have is from a single 2012 study based on interviews and two surveys (one of which was small-scale)**
- **Available data suggests digital technology is well embedded for professional and managerial staff, but not for the remainder of the workforce.**
- **While two-thirds of social care employees have a mobile phone for personal use, this is still well below the national average of 92%.**
- **85% of employees in residential and domiciliary care have access to at least one form of digital technology when at work, but only 44% of employees use them every day, and only 38% say they use them in direct work with people using services.**
- **Only a quarter of social care staff say they access the internet for work.**
- **There is some evidence that digital technologies are more embedded in domiciliary care than residential care.**

The search revealed very little robust research related to this question. The 2012 study 'E-readiness in the social care sector for SCIE' by Ipsos Mori offers the most reliable, comprehensive and directly relevant data on this question. Most of the information that follows in this section derives from this study.

The focus of the Ipsos Mori research was on one specific use for digital technologies, namely to support workplace learning. However, there were also some questions on the general prevalence and use of ICTs in the social care workplace.

This research was conducted in 2012 as part of the evaluation of the Get Connected ICT capital grant scheme administered by SCIE between 2010 and 2013. The researchers used the CQC database to identify employers in residential care and in domiciliary care, and sought the views of managers responsible for training and development, and of employees. Quota sampling was used and post-survey weights applied to ensure the overall data were reflective of social care organisations on the CQC database.

In total 550 managers were interviewed, using computer assisted telephone interviews, and 192 employees returned a paper-based self-completion survey. The researchers urge caution however regarding the results for the employee surveys due to low response rates (6%). The research builds on two previous surveys (2007 and 2009) conducted by Ipsos Mori, although the researchers also urge caution regarding comparisons over time due to methodological changes.

The survey of 550 employers showed ICTs were well embedded for managers but less so for what this survey termed 'operational staff' (defined as frontline staff and those 'supporting or maintaining the organisation'):

- Nearly all employers (93%) say all their managers have access to a computer all the time.
- In comparison, just half (51%) of operational staff have access to a computer all the time.
- Employers who are based in rural locations are less likely to have operational staff with access to computers (60%, compared to 75% of urban employers).

This finding reflects the situation nationally across all sectors. One of the most influential studies of internet use in Britain, the annual 'Cultures of the Internet' survey by OxIS (Dutton et al 2013) states:

The likelihood of using the internet at work is closely linked to occupation... The main message is that people in higher-status manager and professional occupations are more likely than blue collar workers to use the internet at work. Administrative and clerical workers are in between these two categories.

Interestingly, the OxIS study breaks down internet use at work by the British Standard Occupational Classifications (SOC2010). The category 'Occupations associated with

Health and Social Care' is reported to be one of the occupations with 'near universal access'.¹⁰

Two-fifths (37%) of employers report that their employees have access to mobile phones provided by their organisation and this includes 7% who say all employees have a work mobile. (Unfortunately the survey did not make a distinction between mobile phones and smartphones.)

In the Ipsos Mori employee survey, employees were also asked about their access to, and use of, a range of internet devices:

- Desktop computer.
- Personal mobile device (i.e. smartphone).
- Employer-provided mobile device.
- Wifi enabled laptop.
- Tablet computer.

The results showed:

- Eighty five percent of employees have access to at least one of the above digital technologies at work (compared to 98% of at home).
- Around two-thirds of employees have work access to a desktop computer; it is interesting to note that this is very similar to findings in 2009 and 2007 – in other words desktop computer access appears to have plateau-ed.
- Only about a third of employees actually use the desktop computer to which they have access.
- Two thirds of social care staff have access to a smartphone at home – considerably lower than the national average of 92%.
- Only three in ten staff have access to a smartphone at work.
- A very small minority (5% or less) have access to and use a tablet computer at work.
- Of the staff said they do not use it a computer at all, the most frequently mentioned reason for not using a computer at work were that its use was is not part of their role.

¹⁰ At first sight this may be somewhat unexpected, but can be explained by the occupational category including only professional social care occupations i.e. social workers, allied health professionals and so on.

3.2.1 Differences between service types and sectors

The Ipsos Mori survey identified statistically significant differences between different service types in their uses of and attitudes to digital technologies (though the small sample dictates caution). Domiciliary care employees made more use than residential care employees of remote technology devices such as laptops and mobile phones, and were also more likely to be able to access the internet. Domiciliary staff were also more confident about using tablet devices and, there was a higher degree of perceived employer support for the use of electronic devices within the domiciliary workforce compared to the residential workforce.

Other research, while not specific to social care, suggests that voluntary sector employers may be less engaged with digital technologies than employers in other sectors. For example, according to the European Commission Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (2011), organisations in the Third Sector (voluntary, not for profit and social enterprises) across the EU have concerns about their low 'e-readiness' and the limited ICT skills and knowledge of their staff. In the UK, a report on voluntary sector skills and leadership suggests that digital literacy is low in the sector; 61% of 100 charities surveyed (which included but was not limited to charities in the social care sector) said that levels of digital literacy within their organisation are not very good, poor or very poor, and almost half felt that this hampered their service delivery activities. We could not find any similar data equivalent data for the private sector in social care or for the local authority social services workforce.

3.2.2 Perceived benefits of digital technologies

While there are many commentators calling for better use of digital technologies in social care (see for example Ayres 2013, Iriss 2013), and an increasing number of good practice guides aimed at helping social care managers and staff make the most of digital technology (see for example SCIE 2012, 2013, Savitch 2011) its benefits for social care providers tend to be assumed rather than explicitly evidenced by research. The NIACE/IES (2012) evaluation of the SCIE Get Connected project provides some evidence of impact, stating that 'after only a few months, most sites were able to identify the positive impact that [the digital technology funded by] Get Connected has already had on both service users and staff, which in turn has enabled sites to offer an improved level of care.' The evaluation identified improvements to work related learning, improved communication with service users, and organisational benefits such as improved record keeping.

Similarly a good practice guide produced by Age UK (2012) based on a project on digital inclusion in 20 care homes points out that addressing the issue of access to digital technologies showed 'the potential for its positive impact on staff, volunteers and care homes as businesses'. Evidence from a small scale case study project for Skills for

Care by the authors (Dunn & Braddell 2013) suggested that employers perceived the following benefits of digital learning technology:

- greater flexibility in the delivery of learning content ('anytime, anywhere')
- improved tracking and record-keeping of learner achievements
- lower costs compared to classroom based approaches.

3.3 What are the main uses of digital technologies in the delivery of social care?

Key points

- **We could not find any studies directly addressing this question.**
- **Some inferences can be made by assessing the range of technology uses mentioned in the social care research literature, which covers assistive technologies, information seeking, learning and development and organisational processes.**
- **There is an assumption that assistive technologies will spread rapidly across the social care sector, and this will hasten a requirement for all staff to have some degree of digital capability, though the exact nature of this is unclear.**
- **One study suggests internet-enabled devices are used by approximately one-third of staff working in domiciliary and residential care services, principally for the purpose of finding information.**
- **Digital technologies are used to deliver learning content and to manage learning processes by approximately 90% of social care organisations.**
- **Digital technologies come into play in almost all organisational processes, but there is no specific sector-wide data about its use in social care organisations, nor is there any robust data about differences between the various service types and organisation types in the sector.**

We could identify very little evidence directly shedding light on the range of sector-wide uses of digital technologies in the delivery of services. The academic literature contains many individual studies of aspects of service delivery involving digital technologies. They are too extensive to evaluate within this rapid review but we can gain some sense

of the range of uses across the sector as a whole through a brief assessment of the 50 most recent results returned by a search on Social Care Online using the term 'information technolog*'.¹¹ These showed four main types of use for digital technologies:

- 17 articles on various types of assistive technologies, mainly for older people or for people with learning disabilities.
- 9 articles on the provision of information to people using services using online sources.
- 6 articles on the use of IT in social care formal research and or learning.
- 6 articles on the use of IT for records management.

We discuss these four areas of use briefly below. (The remaining SCO search results contained 5 articles on the impacts of social media in social care, 4 articles on the uses of touchscreens with people using services, and 3 articles on issues concerning digital exclusion/ethics.)

3.3.1 Use in digital assistive technology

We could not identify any primary research on the extent of the use of digital assistive technologies in the social care workforce, but it is a topic currently receiving much attention. There is recent qualitative research on assistive technologies, in particular case study research by CIRCLE for Skills for Care (CIRCLE 2012), a survey of employers by Skills for Care and Development (SfC&D 2012) and case study reports by VODG/NCF (2013). These studies suggest:

- an increasing penetration and uptake of assistive technologies, including many with digital elements, and expectation that speed of penetration and uptake will increase
- that technical skills including digital skills are but one element of the knowledge and skills the social care workforce needs to engage with assistive technologies; an understanding of the social aspects of technology, including their benefits and their context of use, is seen as equally or more important.

3.3.2 Use for information seeking

According to Ipsos Mori for SCIE (2012) just over a third of residential and domiciliary care employees surveyed 'use ICT in the workplace or with clients' (sic). The majority of those who use ICT in their care work with people needing care and support use it to seek information in order to plan care. The second most common ICT task is writing letters or documents, followed by keeping in touch by email.

¹¹ Search conducted 1 Dec 2013. A search for 'digital technolog*' returned no results – likely to be a flaw in the beta version of the new SCO site or a shortcoming in the underlying taxonomy.

An unpublished 2011 study commissioned by NICE/SCIE (conducted by Dunn for TFPL/Idox) identified in detail the types of information that social care and healthcare practitioners sought online. A survey of 384 health and social care professionals, and 84 depth interviews, identified direct care issues as the most common trigger for information seeking amongst practitioners. Other triggers were:

- assessment issues
- legal issues
- service management and development issues
- people management issues, and
- formal learning.

3.3.3 Use in workforce learning and development

The OxIS 'Cultures of the internet' survey (Dutton et al 2012) asks the question 'What do people who use the internet at work do?', and learning and skills is the most prevalent activity across all occupational categories, although more so for managers, professionals and clerical workers than for blue collar workers. Perhaps unsurprisingly therefore the majority of research on use of digital technology in the care sector has learning and workforce development as its focus.

The Ipsos Mori survey for SCIE showed 81% of employers saying they use some form of digital technology in training for management and 68% use them for training for operational staff, an increase compared to their 2009 survey. A third of employers now deliver at least half of their training using e-learning compared to one in five in 2009. E-learning forms a greater part of the training mix in care homes with nursing than care homes without nursing or domiciliary organisations.

A survey of learning and development managers at 236 adult social care organisations in England (disseminated via Skills for Care e-newsletter and not statistically representative of the sector as a whole) conducted by Dunn and Braddell for Skills for Care (2013 unpublished) showed 15% of respondents considered their organisation to be 'novice' in their use of learning technologies, and 60% to be 'developing'. This suggests that social care lags behind other sectors in its use of digital technologies for learning; an annual survey of workplace learning technologies by Towards Maturity (2012) showed just under 5% of employers across all sectors consider themselves to be novice in their use of learning technologies, and 50% to be developing.

The Dunn and Braddell 2013 survey for Skills for Care also found approximately a quarter of 236 respondents saying that their organisation used a learning management system, a similar figure to that found in a survey by SCIE (2013 unpublished) of 161 social care organisations drawn from the SCIE database.

3.3.4 Use in organisational and administrative processes

We could find no research data on the range of uses of digital technologies for organisational and administrative purposes, with the exception of the data above on the administration of learning.

We know anecdotally about the increasing use of online systems for recruitment (for example the values-based recruitment pilot currently being administered by the NSASC), and we have some individual case studies of social care organisations using digital technologies in innovative ways for internal communication (see for example the Ideal Care Homes case study, part of the Skills for Care Learning Technologies for employers guide¹²). Looking beyond social care, we found evidence (Cogapp 2013) of organisations in the voluntary sector, including but not limited to social care organisations, using digital technologies for the following purposes:

- Fundraising.
- Campaigns.
- Marketing and PR.
- HR and recruitment
- Policy.
- Corporate services.

The use of digital technologies in local authorities is clearly widespread and deeply embedded. We could not identify any data on the specific use of digital technologies by social services departments within local authorities, but we do have some evidence, for example, that local authorities were more advanced in their organisational use of digital technologies for learning (Dunn and Braddell 2013, SCIE unpublished 2013) than other parts of the social care sector.¹³

3.4 What are the main barriers to the further use of digital technologies?

Key points

- **There is evidence to suggest that social care employers see the set-up costs of digital technology as a barrier to further uptake, particularly those in SMEs.**

¹² <http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Qualifications-and-Apprenticeships/Learning-technologies/Learning-technologies.aspx>

¹³ SOCITM conduct an extensive subscription based research and information service on digital technology which may include data on the nature and extent of digital technology in local authority social services; it is not accessible via public web search

- **Lack of staff skills is also considered to be a barrier by managers and by some staff.**
- **Lack of time is cited by some employers and staff as a brake on the use of digital technologies for information seeking.**

We do not have any robust data about barriers to the use of digital technologies for social care organisations, but we do know that:

- the 237 social care employers surveyed by Dunn and Braddell for Skills for Care (2013) cited costs of set-up and maintenance as their main barrier to further investing in learning technologies, very closely followed by a perceived lack of digital skills amongst their staff (i.e. potential learners)
- the NIACE/IES evaluation (2012) of the Get Connected programme also pointed to the lack of staff skills as the most significant barrier to increasing the use of digital technologies in the sector
- of the 550 employers surveyed by Ipsos Mori for SCIE (2012), more than half those from smaller organisations were likely to say that they lacked the resources to invest in digital learning technologies
- of the 550 employers surveyed by Ipsos Mori (2012) two-thirds said that better digital skills on their own part would help them to get the best out of e-learning for their staff
- evidence from the 2011 SCIE/NICE research on information seeking behaviour shows lack of time to be one of the major barriers to information seeking in the health and social care workforce. Similarly, 13% of employees surveyed for the Ipsos Mori 2012 study said they did not have time to use a computer work even when they had access to it.

The Ipsos Mori (2012) employee survey also asked a number of questions about digital skills. Employees were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree that they have 'the skills to use a computer, the internet and mobile phone applications (both basic and advanced)'. The great majority of employees agree they can use a mobile phone to make calls (86%), that they can use the internet (79%) and use a computer (76%), while two-thirds (66%) feel they have the skills to use a mobile phone to surf the web. Interestingly, these figures show no significant difference from the 2009 data. Employees were also asked about whether they felt they had the skills to take part in e-learning. Two-thirds (66%) of employees feel they have the skills required to take part in e-learning. The remaining third felt they lacked some or all of the skills required to engage in e-learning.

3.5 What facilitates or inhibits digital literacy in the social care workforce?

Key points

- **There is very little robust evaluation of interventions to support digital literacy; programmes using a ‘champions’ approach to skills support show an increased awareness of and confidence about using digital technologies amongst their target beneficiaries.**
- **The strongest facilitator is likely to be recognition of the benefits of digital technology in achieving an existing aim or addressing an existing need.**
- **There are demographic factors at play; digital literacy decreases with age and increases with qualification levels of individuals.**
- **There is some evidence of a lack of management support for using digital technologies in the social care sector, which in turn will inhibit the development and maintenance of digital literacy.**

3.5.1 Facilitating factors for digital capability

One of the few literature reviews discovered during this desk research was by Age UK on the subject of digital inclusion (Age UK 2013). The selection methodology is not discussed, other than ‘what the authors considered generally reliable and timely’. The authors review a number of interventions to reduce digital exclusion of older people. While this is a different process than the promotion of digital literacy in the social care workforce, some parallels may usefully be drawn. Two interventions are of particular relevance, one in the housing sector and one in residential care.

- The ‘Get Digital’ project by Digital Unite (2010-2012) was a comprehensive structured learning programme involving social housing staff, landlords and the wider community; the staff in the housing organisations were supported to become digital champions. The evaluation, by NIACE, found that 57% of staff said they had increased their confidence in the use of ICT, and 83% of residents said they had a more positive attitude towards computers and the internet.
- The Reach for IT project by Age UK (2010-2011) aimed to tackle the digital exclusion of older people in residential care homes through partnership working with five community based organisations. Once again the approach was a champions model, training staff in the community organisations to become digital champions who then facilitate care staff and residents in getting online. Further

details of the evaluation, by SuS-IT at Loughborough University, were not in the public domain.

In a 2011 report 'Digital Champion Capacity Building Framework' the Age Action Alliance, a group of government and voluntary sector organisations with an interest in digital inclusion for older people, put the focus for digital inclusion interventions firmly on a cascading champions model:

We are failing to progress enough people from messaging about the benefits of digital literacy into action. We need to rethink the engagement to action route, and we suggest that the focus should be to capacity build others, including the targeting of specific groups, to deliver digital inclusion and digital skills, rather than mass messaging the intended beneficiaries directly.

Amongst the 'specific groups' identified are the workforces in social housing and social care, as well as the family and carers of people needing care and support.

3.5.2 Barriers to digital capability

There are acknowledged demographic patterns affecting internet access which we can take as a proxy for digital literacy. According to the OXiS 'Cultures of the internet' survey:

Gender differences have virtually disappeared in internet diffusion and use, but income and lifestage [i.e. age] remain important factors sorting those who do and do not have access. The gap in internet use between different groups of people has not been closing over time.

The social care workforce mirrors this national picture. According to the Ipsos Mori survey for SCIE (2012) self-reported ability to use a computer, the internet and mobile phone applications amongst social care staff surveyed diminishes with age. Social care staff aged 55 or over were more likely to say they do not have the skills required to take part in e-learning opportunities (19% vs. 7% on average). As mentioned earlier, according to the Tinder Foundation, 60% of those with no digital skills have no formal qualifications. Given that the social care workforce has relatively high numbers of staff with no formal qualifications, we can infer that this will result in relatively lower digital literacy in the workforce. This inference is supported by the UKCES Sector Skills Insight report (2012) which shows a higher than average number of social care employers reporting 'basic computer literacy' skills being hard to obtain in the workforce.

Related evidence about other barriers includes:

- A quarter of respondents to the Ipsos Mori survey noted that using a computer was not part of their job role.
- The 2011 SCIE/NICE research also identified a perceived lack of management support for staff to do research, including online information seeking; there was a perception that managers thought that when frontline staff were using computers they were 'not doing their job'.

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