Digital capabilities for social workers

An introduction for social work educators and trainers

Digital capabilities for social workers

This resource aims to highlight key areas from the Digital Capabilities Statement for Social Work Practice.

The resource can help you to:
- review services and procedures and policy
- reflect on and improve practice
- review education and CPD provision.

This joint project between BASW and SCIE is part of building a digitally ready workforce and is commissioned and funded by Health Education England.
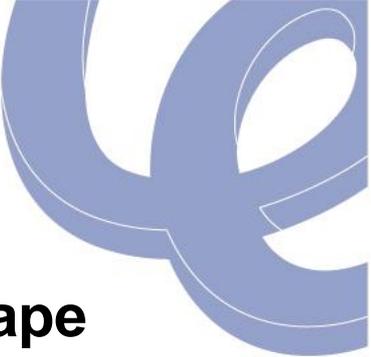
The Digital Capabilities Statement is for:

- Social workers working with adults, children and families in all settings

- Senior leaders

- Policy makers

- Commissioners

- Education and CPD providers

- People with lived experience of social work

They are also valuable to people who use social work services

Key documents to be read alongside this resource

- Digital Capabilities Statement

- Ethical Considerations

- Stakeholders Report

- Models of Local Digital Champions

- Health Education England – Health and Care Digital Capability Framework

Digital Capabilities Statement – An evolving landscape

As the digital landscape is rapidly evolving, it is important that we focus on four key areas that social workers need to keep up to date with digital developments as they progress through their career into different professional roles.

- **Knowledge**

- **Skills**

- **Values**

- **Ethics**

Terminology

The term 'capabilities' is used here to show that the framework is:

- **developmental**

- **aspirational**

- **reflective**

Digital literacy and capability is not something that has an endpoint as it is constantly evolving and social workers and organisations should keep abreast of changes .

What is Digital literacy?

The Digital Capabilities Statement is framed around the concept of digital literacy.

This includes:

- technical skills to use information and communication technology (ICT)

- cognitive ability for understanding

- critical reflection on digital matters in professional, social and leisure contexts

Social workers and organisations need to reflect on the implications of digital technology in their professional and social lives.

What do we mean by digital technologies in social work ?

- **Electronic systems** (software) to facilitate day-to-day work of and by social workers (e.g. email, electronic case management systems, email, calendar and collaborative technologies such as SharePoint and instant messaging)

- **Online resources** for professionals and people using social work services (e.g. apps and websites)

- **Assistive technologies** for people using services (e.g. communication aids and robotics; cognitive assistant robots, physically assistive robots)

What do we mean by digital technologies in social work ? 2/3

- **Social media** and social networking interfaces (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, Skype, WhatsApp) used by social workers and other professionals, and used by people of all ages accessing social work services

- **Informatics** – Using data strategically to determine aggregate need and monitor and improve services (e.g. performance management software used by social work managers)

- **Person identifiable data** – accessing and identifying data about people who contact services, or to improve their direct care or share information with professionals about them

What do we mean by digital technologies in social work ?

- **Information management** (e.g. search, retrieval, data security and access issues)

- **Hardware** (e.g. smart phones, mobile devices and web enabled laptops)

- **Online learning** (e.g. professional e-learning, online courses, webinars, online communities of practice)

- **Artificial Intelligence and machine learning -** for processing large amounts of data about the population to predict their needs

Digital technologies help social workers to:

- record, store and analyse information (e.g. case records)

- develop as professionals and support others in their development

- communicate, participate and collaborate with colleagues and people using services and their networks of support

- enhance safety and personal care

- stay safe when online and help others to do so

- learn new technical skills

- use our skills to be creative and innovative.

- learn from research and literature

The Digital Capabilities Statement

PURPOSE	PRACTICE	IMPACT
Meeting professional standards	Understanding the online uses and technology needs of people using services	Professional leadership and advocacy
Promoting user and carer involvement	Delivering services through digital technology	Developing and maintaining digital professionalism
Enhancing access to services	Ethical decision-making: knowledge and skills	
Enabling relationship-based practice	Online safeguarding: knowledge and skills	
Connecting people to online groups for support	Understanding applicable legislation and regulations	

Please refer to the full Digital Capabilities Statements for a full breakdown of each area

PRACTICE – What social workers do

What knowledge and skills are required for social workers to be digitally capable?

The Digital Capabilities Statement under Practice:

- **Understanding the online uses and technology needs of people using services**
- **Delivering services through digital technology**
- **Ethical decision-making: knowledge and skills**
- **Online safeguarding: knowledge and skills**
- **Understanding applicable legislation and regulations**

The relevant professional capabilities (PCF) are:

5 – Knowledge

6 – Critical Reflection and Analysis

7 – Skills and Interventions

PURPOSE – Why social workers do what they do

Why should social workers develop their digital capabilities and what can digital capabilities enable social workers to do?

This section focuses on social workers' values and ethics and how they approach their work. The Digital Capabilities Statement under Purpose:

- **Promoting user and carer involvement**
- **Enhancing access to services**
- **Enabling relationship-based practice**
- **Connecting people to online groups for support**

The relevant professional capabilities (PCF) are:

2 – Values and Ethics

3 – Diversity and Equality

4 – Rights, Justice and Economic Wellbeing

IMPACT – How social workers make a difference

How can social workers bring about change through practice, leadership and professionalism?

The Digital Capabilities Statement under Impact:

- **Professional leadership and advocacy**

- **Developing and maintaining digital professionalism**

The relevant professional capabilities (PCF) are:

1 – Professionalism

8 – Contexts and Organisations

9 – Professional Leadership

- **2.2 Respect and maintain people's dignity and privacy**

  → - Is it ok to snoop in people social media without consent **-** is this a grey area?

- **3.1 Work within legal and ethical frameworks, using my professional authority and judgement appropriately**

  → - What are the legal and ethical frameworks in your organisation in relation digital capability and skills?

- **3.4 Recognise the risk indicators of different forms of abuse and neglect and their impact on people, their families and their support networks**

  → - Are you confident about online risks to people you work with? S*ee links to help in this area*

3.10 Establish and maintain skills in information and communication technology and adapt my practice to new ways of working, as appropriate →

- How do you maintain these skills - how do you support the workforce to do this

4.4 Demonstrate good subject knowledge on key aspects of social work practice and develop knowledge of current issues in society and social policies impacting on social work. →

- How do you develop knowledge of digital capabilities and what it means to people you work with

I will not:

5.2 'Behave in a way that would bring into question my suitability to work as a social worker while at work, or outside of work

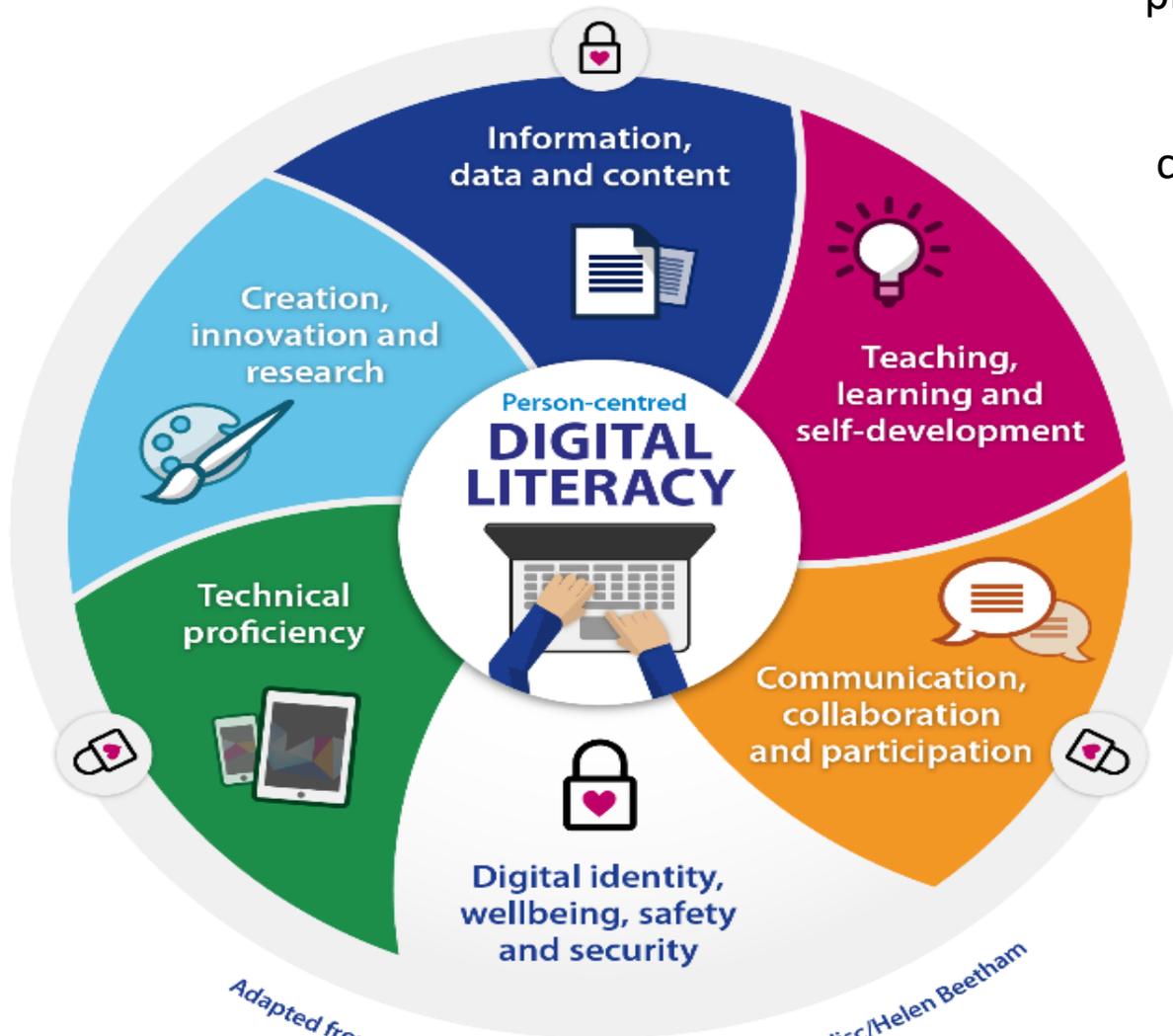Do you use social media appropriately? Do you have conversation on what is appropriate?

5.6 Use technology, social media or other forms of electronic communication unlawfully, unethically, or in a way that brings the profession into disrepute

Do you adhere to the organisation social media, digital technology and data sharing policy?

Health and Care Digital Capability Framework

This tool will further help you to assess and review your organisational and practice position and help plan and improve digital capabilities in social work

Person-centred
DIGITAL LITERACY

- Information, data and content
- Teaching, learning and self-development
- Communication, collaboration and participation
- Digital identity, wellbeing, safety and security
- Technical proficiency
- Creation, innovation and research

Adapted from Jisc Digital Capacity Framework (2015) Jisc/Helen Beetham

Social Work England Education Standards

The new regulatory standards for social work programme providers outline the following

1.1. have the capability to use information and communication technology (ICT) methods and techniques to achieve course outcomes.

How do you facilitate and assess for this ?

2.6 Ensure that practice educators are on the register and that they have the relevant and current knowledge, skills and experience to support safe and effective learning.

How do you ensure practice educators have the right digital capability skills and know-how to teach, facilitate and assess the student?

What do your practice educators courses cover in relation to understanding and teaching digital capabilities?

How does your programme assess for this? How do you ensure employers are involved in this process?

Social work education providers

Programme providers should embed digital capabilities across and within all areas of the curriculum and to provide specific means of assessing these capabilities alongside other curriculum development and forms of assessment for example:

- meet the standards 'Use of technology and numerical skills' in the Subject Benchmark Statement (Social Work)

- curriculum planning and development

- identifying practice learning opportunities for students

- assessing students' readiness for practice before placement

- supporting and assessing students on placement

- evaluating whether students have the digital capabilities for their newly qualified social work roles

Admissions and online identity

How do you assess digital capability at admissions stage?

How do you teach students about:

- their online privacy

- implications and consequences of their online identity

- staying safe online

- online conduct?

Digital capabilities across the curriculum including post-qualifying programmes

It is important that digital capabilities are included across modules and areas such as:

- ethics

- assessment

- communication

- law

- anti-discriminatory practice and anti-oppressive practice

How do you teach students about the opportunities, risks and protective factors of digital technologies in social work?
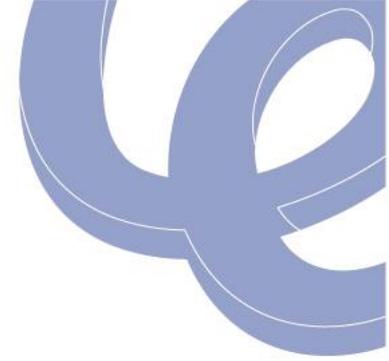
Practice educators and practice supervisors

This relates to practice educators assessing students on qualifying programmes and social workers undertaking any post-qualifying programme including but not exclusively a practice educators programme

Educators should ensure that practice educators and practice supervisors:

- work closely with social work programme providers to imbed the Digital Capabilities Statement

- work together to enable means of assessing these capabilities alongside other forms of assessment

- develop and maintain their own learning in digital capabilities across practice

Using digital to assist learning

- What digital tools and resources do you use to assist learning?

- Are there particular platforms you use regularly?

- How do you identify which specialist skills are needed for particular roles? (also relevant for post-qualifying programmes)

- How do you work with other disciplines to review and promote digital learning?

- What are your strategies, polices and governance relating to digital capabilities of social work students?

- Does the social work department have its own social media policy or is the generic university policy sufficient for social work?

- How to you ensure teaching staff have the knowledge and skills required to understand and teach digital capabilities?

- How / who is assessing digital your environment?

- Data analytics - what are you learning about your programme? What needs to improve?

- How do people with lived experience help you to develop and deliver the curriculum in this area?

- How do you learn about innovative practice where students are in placement

Video

Denise Turner is a senior lecturer in social work. Listen to what she has to say about digital capabilities for social workers.

[Denise Turner video](#)

Links

Support for online awareness and safety

Helping people to understand parental controls and privacy settings

[NSPCC Net Aware](#)

Support according to age

[Internet Matters](#)

Understanding risk with gaming

[Parentzone](#)

Staying safe online

[UK Safer Internet Centre](#)

Links

Sexting and the law

[Information leaflet](#)

Interactive tool

[Thinkuknow](#)

How to engage constructively online

[Digital 5 a day diet](#)

Simplified terms and conditions for social media use

[Terms and conditions](#)

Links

Reporting

Get more information and learn how to report online abuse

[Child Exploitation and Online Protection command](#)

Reporting criminal content

[Internet Watch Foundation](#)

Reporting hate crimes

[Stop Hate UK](#)

Links

Supportive technologies

Apps and online tools

[NHS Apps Library](#)

Useful apps and websites for older people

[AgeUK](#)

Contact us (Click through)

SCIE Digital Capabilities resource

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BASW @BASW_UK

#DigitalSocialWork

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