



social care  
institute for excellence

## Digital capabilities for social workers

An introduction for leaders, managers, commissioners and policy developers

**BASW**

The professional association for  
social work and social workers

# 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:

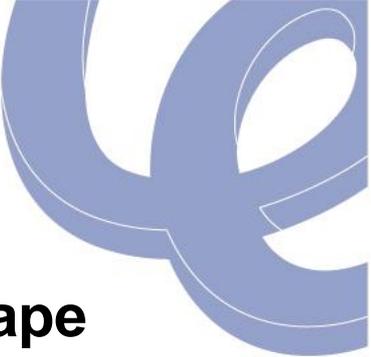
- Social workers working with adults, children and families in all settings
- Senior leaders
- Policy makers
- Commissioners
- Education and CPD providers
- People with lived experience of social work

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 ?

1/3

- **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 ?

3/3

- **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? *See links to help in this area*

# Social Work England Professional Standards 2/3



**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?

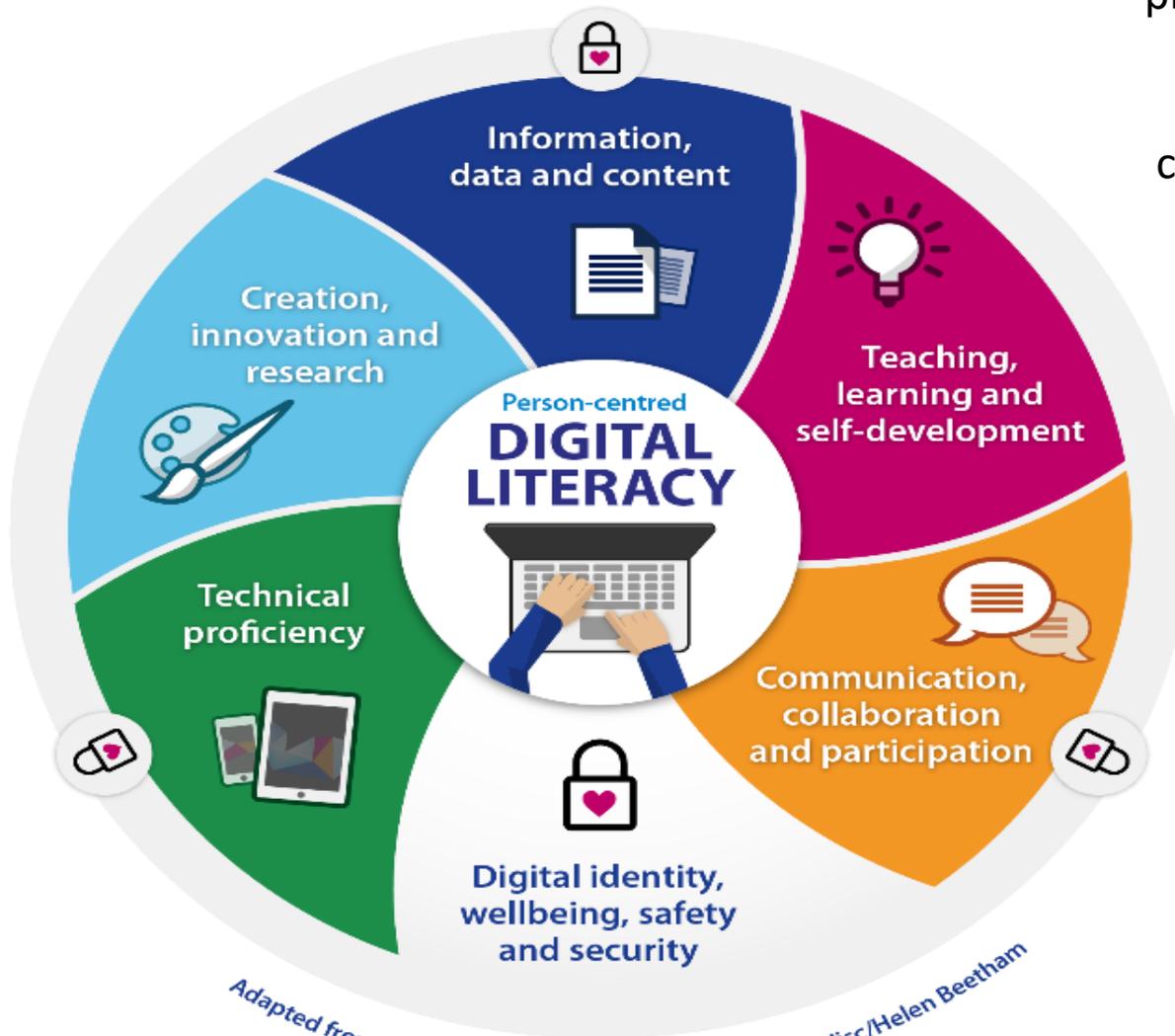
***5.6 Use technology, social media or other forms of electronic communication unlawfully, unethically, or in a way that brings the profession into disrepute***



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



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

## **You can use the Digital Capabilities Statement to:**

- inspire and digitally support effective practice, organisational and systems leadership.
- ensure digital systems are fit for social work practice
- take responsibility in the assessing, monitoring and, where appropriate, the commissioning of digital systems which in turn will support citizens
- inform supervision and evaluation of social workers' digital capabilities
- support recruitment and retention of staff
- ensure timely data entry and data quality to underpin good decision making and safe practice.
- develop creative digital roles and such as informaticians



These are some areas to consider when assessing organisational readiness for digital capabilities. Although the focus is social work, many areas are relevant for other teams and departments.

All three of these areas need attention in order to broaden and build digital capabilities with, and for, the workforce and citizens.



## Some areas for organisations to explore further 1/2

- What are your strategies, policies and governance relating to digital capabilities of your organisation and social workers?
- What is your change management strategy? How do digital capabilities feature in it?
- How / who is assessing digital your environment?
- How are you working with other disciplines and service areas for interoperability?
- Are social workers actively involved in producing digital environments?
- Data analytics – what are you learning? What needs to improve?

## Some areas for organisations to explore further 2/2

- Organisational development – what are your workforce needs? How do you know?
- Citizen's voice and needs- How do you learn this? What is your co-production strategy?
- Context – what is the local practice picture? Where will you start and why?
- How do you harness digital technology to integrate and link up services?
- What digital resources do you have to assist social workers and people to use services to enable relationship-based practice and informed decision-making?



## Video

Nicola McGeown is a principal social worker. Listen to what she has to say about digital capabilities for social workers.

[Nicola McGeown](#)

# 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](#)

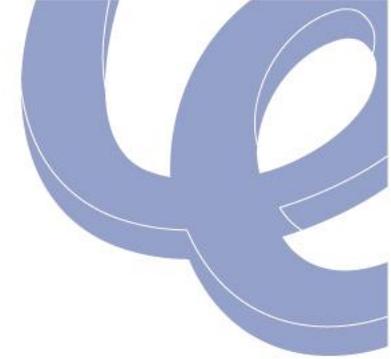
Useful apps and websites for older people

[AgeUK](#)





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## Contact us (Click through)

### [SCIE Digital Capabilities resource](#)



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**BASW** @BASW\_UK

#DigitalSocialWork

### [Contact SCIE and \[info@scie.org.uk\]\(mailto:info@scie.org.uk\)](#)

### [Contact BASW](#)

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