



social care
institute for excellence

Digital capabilities for social workers

An introduction for social workers, supervisors and teams

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:

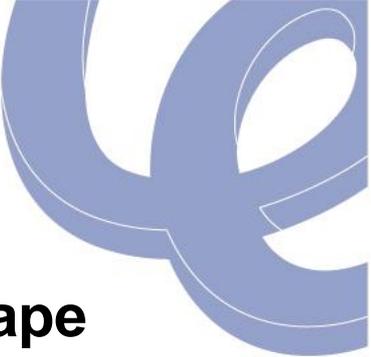
- Social workers working with adults, children and families in all settings
- Senior leaders
- Policy makers
- Commissioners
- Education and CPD providers
- People with lived experience of social work

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?

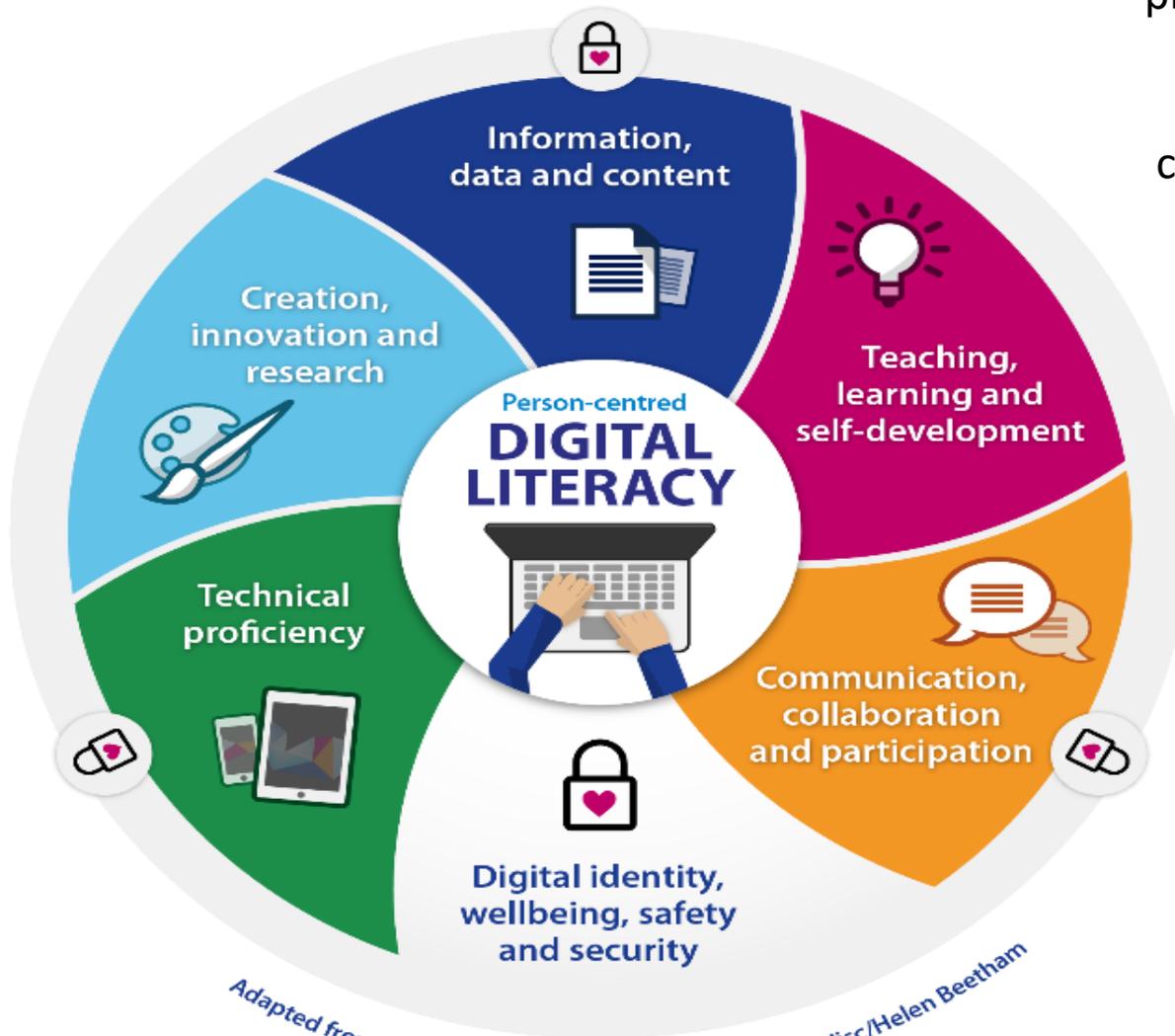
5.6 Use technology, social media or other forms of electronic communication unlawfully, unethically, or in a way that brings the profession into disrepute



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

How social workers can use the Digital Capability Statement



Everyday practice:

- refer to local guidance on what to use digital tools for and how
- critical reflection on practice including ethics
- new areas that require social work attention because of the impact of digital technology (e.g. online gambling and the impact on vulnerable individuals)

Self assessment:

- conduct a 'skills audit' about their proficiency based on the levels proposed in the Health and Care Digital Capability Framework

How social workers can use the Digital Capabilities Statement



Professional development:

- identify training needs - either self-directed or trainer-supported
- find learning resources online.
- group supervision and reflection
- propose and develop new professional roles



How social workers can use the Digital Capabilities Statement

Supervision:

- inform formal supervision and group supervision and peer-to-peer learning

People with lived experience, their friends and carers

- empower people using services to understand (and demand) the minimum level of proficiency required of social workers



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.

Practice educators and practice supervisors should:

- ensure they develop and maintain their own learning in digital capabilities across practice
- work closely with social work programme providers to embed the Digital Capabilities Statement
- enable means of assessing these capabilities alongside other forms of assessment



Managers and supervisors can use the statement to:

- inform supervision and evaluation of social workers' digital capabilities
- ensure digital systems are fit for social work practice and to take responsibility in the assessing, monitoring and, where appropriate, the commissioning of digital systems which in turn will support
- support recruitment and retention of staff
- inspire and digitally support effective practice, organisational and systems leadership for excellence



Questions for direct practice social workers

- How do you know what digital technologies the people you are working with use/ would like to use?
- How do you use digital technologies to assist people to express wishes, feelings and preferences?
- How do you ensure you keep updated with developments in digital technologies, policies and procedures?

Question for social workers, supervisors and teams



- How do you promote and advocate for the involvement of people with lived experience of social work to influence the development of systems?
- Where do you explore and understand the ethics of using digital communication tools?
- Do you have a team of digital leads focusing on policy, procedure and practice ?
- Is digital capability part of your improvement objectives?
- Is digital driving business change?



Question for social workers, supervisors and teams

- Do you have a vision and timeline for digital improvement?
- Are digital capabilities part of practitioners/ leaders job roles?
- Do you assess for digital capabilities in recruitment and selection?
- Do you assess digital as a competence/capability?
- Do you use a digital tool to assess workforce performance? – How could it be improved?

Social workers self-directed reflection zone



On a scale of 0–10. 10 being fully competent:

- How confident / competent do you feel about assessing peoples' online activity?

On a scale of 0–10. 10 being fully competent:

- How confident / competent do you feel about assessing peoples' online safety?
- What would indicate risks and potential exploitation?
- Where would you go for help and advice for yourself?
- What question do you / can you ask about online activity to support your assessment?
- How can online apps and sites support your communication with people?

Questions for supervisors



- Is digital improvement seen as a challenge? Why/ how?
- When you commission training or services, how do you ensure current and future digital needs of citizens are addressed?
- What are the implications of digital transformation of your service?
- Have you identified new technologies relevant to your service?
- How have you considered/addressed ethical dilemmas in digital technologies?
- How is your data collated stored and shared?
- Is all organisational data stored centrally or is it in a variety of formats?
- How do you use digital skills as a tool?



Video

Jordan Wosik is a care-experienced young person. Listen to what he has to say about digital capabilities for social workers.

[Jordan Wosik 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](#)





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[SCIE Digital Capabilities resource](#)



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