Digital capabilities in social care – survey report

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Skills for Care

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Background to the research

Survey research was conducted as part of a wider Skills for Care research programme on digital capabilities on the adult social care workforce in England. The research is intended to provide an evidence base about workforce digital capabilities and to inform the development of a strategy and support programme for 'Digital Working, Learning and Information Sharing' from Skills for Care.

Aims and approach

The surveys purpose was to gain insight from as broad a range of social care organisations as possible into the uses of digital technologies in the workplace and the skills issues raised. Two surveys were developed, one for mangers and one for staff. The surveys were mainly quantitative, asking for a rating/ranking of uses and attitudes towards digital technologies and digital skills issues.

Surveys were disseminated primarily online via relevant social care email networks and social media. There was also a paper-based version of the staff survey, and managers were enlisted to facilitate staff participation. Response rates overall were good, with a total of 539 returned from 236 managers and 303 staff.

Research findings

Uses of technologies

- In the activities of social care organisations is pervasive, over 95% respondents reported its use in a least one of their duties

- Use is most pervasive in generic organisational activities, particularly internal and external communication, learning and development, and people management.
- Less pervasive in care specific administration activities such as recording care plans or manging the delivery of care, but even here the great majority of managers (~80%) and staff (~70%) report its use
- It impacts the direct interactions between care staff and the people they support. Over half of staff respondents said they use digital technologies to find information about care and support, to support communication with family and friends, or o plan leisure activities with the people they are supporting.

Staff access to devices

- Most common device used by social care staff for work purposes is their desktop computer
- Tablet computer use is still low, used by around 1 in 5 staff, half of which are using their own devices
- ¾ staff have their own smartphones, 1/5 say they use their personal smartphone for work purposes
- Overall personal use of mobile devices is considered higher than workplace use, suggesting individual staff are more digitally engaged than their employers

Attitudes to digital technologies

- The majority of mangers and staff are convinced of the potential benefits of digital technology and its capacity to improve the efficiency and quality of care services, to benefit the people they support
- Over half of managers see access to tech for al staff as the greatest blocker to digital uptake, and 4/5s of staff want access to digital tech for all staff
- Most managers are confident in their ability to get expert technical advice about digital systems and in their ability to maintain safety and security, around 1/3 had doubts in these areas
- Most managers felt lack of staff capability blocked the use of digital tech, and pace of technological change was a challenge in maintaining staff skills, with particularly older staff needing skills support

- Small number of staff felt there was a risk that the use of digital tech could be at the expense of spending time with people they support; data security was also a concern for some, but not the majority

Digital capabilities in the workforce

- Social care managers' report a significant shortage of basic online skills and knowledge across all levels of the workforce
- 2/3's of managers feel the workforce lacks sufficient information literacy skills and that digital champion skills are inefficient
- ¾'s of managers feel knowledge about digital assisted living technologies is lacking across all parts of their workforce; technological advances, may be significantly outpacing the sectors capacity to use them.
- Staff respondents feel more confident about their own digital capabilities than managers, >90% of staff are confident or very confident about their basic online skills, <50% of managers feel these skills are sufficiently present in their workforce.
- Perception mismatch between managers and staff is especially noticeable for digital literacy and digital champion skills; more than 4/5's of staff say they feel confident about these skills, <1/4 managers' report having these skills in their frontline staff.

Digital skills support

- Both managers and staff report coaching /help from colleagues or managers and formal IT training as the most common forms of digital skills support currently offered
- The staff surveyed express a preference for either formal IT training or for time for self-guided learning in order ot improve their digital skills