

A VISION FOR TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL IN SOCIAL CARE



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Developing a vision for technology and digital in Social Care

Scottish Care recognise that technology and digital has an increasingly important role to play in all our lives. In social care, the use of technology and digital has the potential to support many areas of practice and lead to positive impacts on the everyday life of people supported, their families, the workforce, and relationships with wider partners in care. In previous work, Scottish Care has highlighted this potential in projects such as the Future of Care at Home (led by The Glasgow School of Art, 2018) and in the 'Tech Rights' report (Macaskill, 2018) dedicated to exploring the relationship between technology and human rights in the context of social care. A key recommendation of this report highlighted the need to develop a human rights charter which was subsequently created by Scottish Care in collaboration with a range of designers, providers and people who work in and use social care services. The resulting 'Human Rights Charter for Technology and Digital in Social Care' (Scottish Care, 2019) supports the development and use of technology and digital within a human rights and ethical perspective.

Over the past few months we have seen a significant change in the role of technology and digital and the way that this has been embraced across the social care sector. The emerging insights of our Collective Care Future programme (French and Young, 2020), highlight the ways in which technology and digital have impacted social care practice, flexibility and response, wellbeing of staff and people supported, attitudes and confidence, and perhaps most significantly, the way we connect and communicate with each other. The versatility, creativity and openness to innovation that exists across the social care sector presents the opportunity to build on and progress the technology and digital journey. However, this requires a strategic, systematic and collective approach to realise future potential and develop appropriate priorities.

In this paper, we present a vision for technology and digital in social care, informed by Scottish Care research and evidence reports, wider design research in the context of health and social care¹ and the embodied knowledge of our membership. The intention of this vision is to provide a tool that inspires dialogue across the sector and in collaboration with our wider partners to collectively engage in critique and debate in evolving the ambitions and resulting pathways towards realising the potential of technology and digital in social care. This encompasses a cultural, psychological, social, contextual and technological exploration that needs to involve the whole social care community and those connected to it including people supported, families, workforce, providers and wider partners in care. Although the vision will continue to evolve through engagement and dialogue, we hope that this outline provides a point of consolidation that supports the understanding of the potential of technology and digital, the implications for practice and the requirements for wider support to ensure progress is underpinned by a collaborative, rights-based approach.

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Practice

Enabling the workforce to deliver relational care by foregrounding human relations, reducing bureaucracy and through providing seamless access to relevant support, information and resources.

Recognising the expertise of and empowering the workforce in the use of technology and digital through appropriate training and tools.

Building capacity among the workforce through supporting confidence, providing reassurance and augmenting human presence to enrich the care experience.

Experience

Empowering people supported to express their lived experience, wishes and aspirations for their health, care and overall wellbeing.

Enabling independence, quality of life, flourishing and human potential of people supported (and their family).

Enabling people supported (and families) to be actively involved in decisions around their care and support, reviewing and modifying these in line with their wishes and choices.

Enabling human rights and rights-based, ethical practices that support and promote choice, autonomy, control, equality, transparency, accessibility and respect for privacy.

Partnership

Enabling consistency and continuity of care across all interactions particularly during points of transitions (e.g. engaging with wider services) through facilitating effective communication and sharing of information.

Enabling flexibility and responsive access to wider forms of appropriate support based on the needs and aspirations of the person.

Enabling multidisciplinary and partnership working by recognising the expertise of the social care sector, building trust and by making information and systems visible to minimise duplication of effort.

Underpinned by infrastructure for accessibility and connectivity, and technical integration

The evolution of the vision for technology and digital in social care will require us to embrace a rights-based approach beginning with the 'Experience' – that is the way in which a person supported chooses and/or seeks to engage with technology and digital as part of enabling their individual health and wellbeing and the way they are supported to achieve their wishes and aspirations related to care. In 'Practice' we explore the way in which the workforce can be empowered by technology and digital, equipping them with the appropriate tools to build capacity and confidence, and offer new ways of integrated working and support in the delivery of relational care. The way in which 'Partnership' is enabled by technology and digital highlights key areas of collaborative working to support fluidity of relational care facilitated by trusting relationships and the sharing of knowledge and expertise. Key to each of these aspects is the fundamental underpinning of the appropriate infrastructure that supports accessibility and connectivity, and technical integration.

It is essential that the developments of technology and digital in health and social care move away from a continued focus on the needs of the service and system. Defining, designing and developing the role and use of technology and digital in social care needs to be framed by the aspirations of the person, the care context and situation, and the intention, outcomes and appropriateness of the role of technology and digital before considering the functionality and form of the resulting technology/digital enabler or support. Specifically in the context of social care, we also call for more design and development that begins with social care at the outset, emerging from a process of understanding, identification and exploration to meet the needs, challenges and aspirations of the people and the sector, rather than be ported, modified or adapted from an initial health context focus and perspective. In addition, implementing and embedding technology and digital in the context of social care involves exploring the infrastructure, dynamics and rhythms of care practice to establish where technology and digital can augment and empower, and in what situations it is appropriate or not.

To progress the vision and realisation of the potential of technology and digital in social care we need mutual collaboration – working together in partnership with shared aspirations, mindsets and recognition of individual expertise. We propose that striving beyond improvement towards transformation and creating opportunities for experiential exploration of technology and digital in context will enable us to progress towards sustainable impact that leads to collaborative working relationships, strategic application and positive changes for people supported by, working in and connecting with social care.

We all have a role to play in evolving and achieving a technology and digital future for social care that we aspire to and through a collective approach and national conversation, we can ensure that the way in which we design and deploy technology and digital in social care is ethical and rights-based, foregrounding people, relationships and aspirations in context.

We look forward to future dialogue and development of the vision for technology and digital in social care and encourage you to join us as we continue this exploration.

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Notes

¹A body of design research using a Participatory Design approach in the context of health and social care in Scotland has engaged a diverse range of stakeholders in co-design across a range of digital and non-digital projects. This has been led by Design Researchers at The Glasgow School of Art with project outcomes available in the Future Health and Wellbeing repository: <https://futurehealthandwellbeing.org>.

References

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