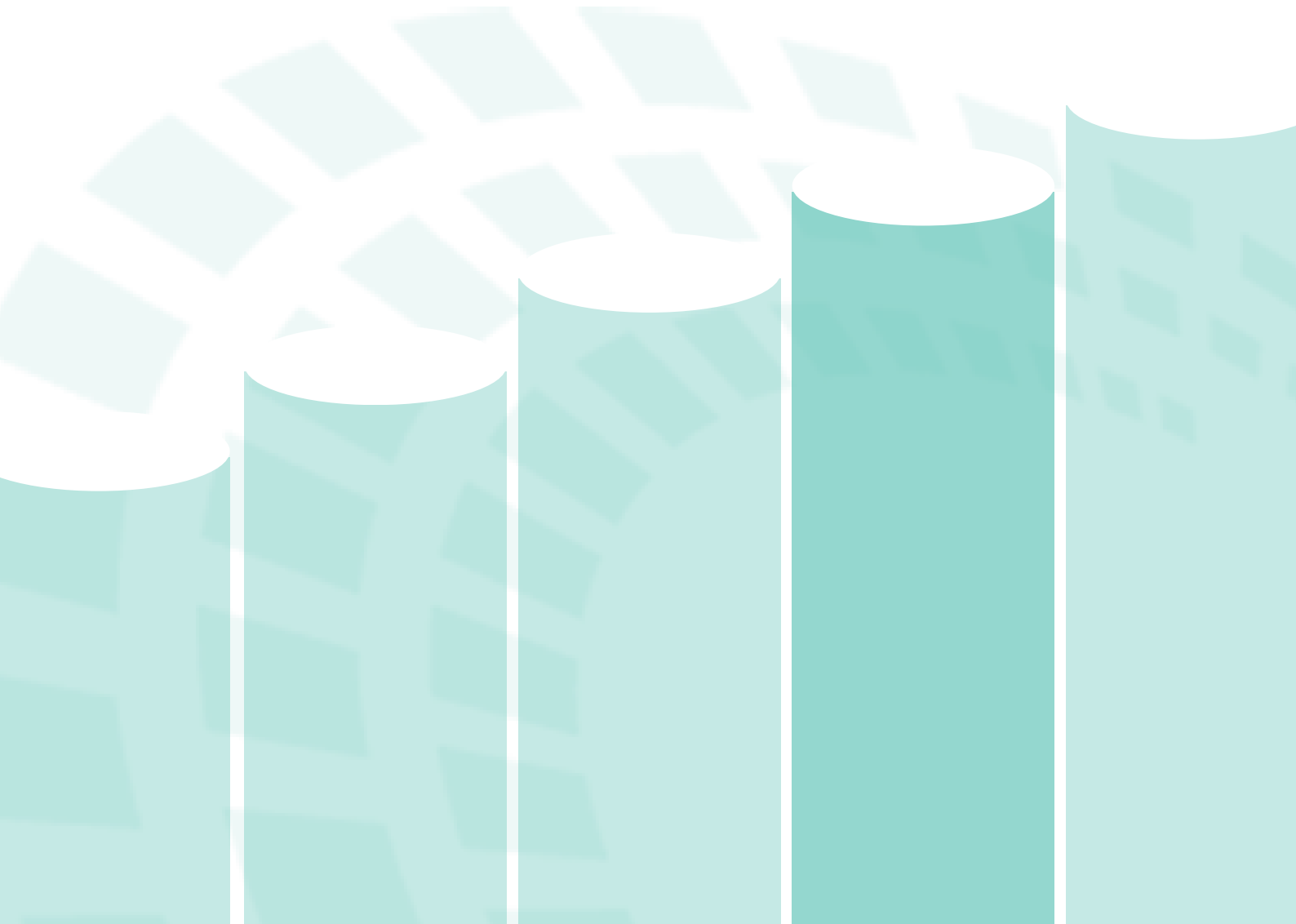


From pillars to practice

Skills & Confidence



Digital Health
& Care Scotland



Pillars for Digital Inclusion in Digital Health and Care

In July 2023, The Digital Inclusion Programme published a paper - 'From pillars to practice: developing a framework for embedding digital inclusion in health and social care' (Slater and French, 2023). The paper shared a refined approach to digital inclusion involving five pillars: Motivation, Device, Connectivity, Skills and Confidence, and Inclusive Design. These pillars offer an evolving framework towards practical implementation of digital inclusion across health and care contexts, including implications for digital inclusion in practice in the design, development and delivery of digital services.

In the 'Pillars Papers' series, we explore each pillar individually to offer insights on definitions, approaches and implications for digital inclusion to stimulate dialogue across health and social care on needs and requirements for the person, the workforce and organisations involved in person-centred care.

Definitions: Digital inclusion and digital health and care

Definitions of both digital inclusion and digital health and care vary across different settings and perspectives. In the 'Pillars Paper' series, we use the following terms:

Digital Inclusion: is our collective responsibility to ensure that everyone can benefit from being online. In the context of digital health and care this involves responsibility of organisations to ensure that where people choose to engage in digital services, they are offered and have the support they need to access these as part of person-centred care.

Digital Health and Care: involves organisations across all sectors in Scotland (Health, Social Care, Social Work, Housing, Third, Independent, Voluntary, Unpaid Carers) who are contributing to and providing person-centred care through services, interventions and support. It involves everything from prevention and self-management to technology enabled care, and from care in acute settings to care at home and community support.

Digital Inclusion Pillars: Skills and Confidence

In this paper, we focus on the pillar of 'Skills and Confidence' as a key requirement for digital inclusion.

Skills and Confidence



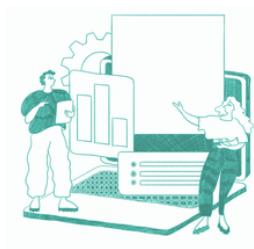
As someone that's digitally excluded I need...

the skills and confidence to do things for myself and know where to get support if I need it;



As part of the workforce I need...

the skills and confidence in my ability to digitally engage and to support others to be digitally included;



As an organisation or service we need...

to provide opportunities for the workforce to build skills and confidence in using technology and supporting digital access for others including creating safe spaces to explore barriers and fears.

Skills and Confidence requirements for the person, workforce and organisation (Slater and French, 2023).

Digital skills in health and social care

Skills in using digital and technology in health and social care have not traditionally been included as part of job role and training requirements. Over the past decade, building digital skills and confidence has become a key focus as people come to expect digital options as part of their health and care experience, similar to other aspects of their everyday life e.g., internet banking, online shopping etc. Several reports and exercises have begun to specify the necessary digital skills requirements for people working in health and social care alongside developing learning and training opportunities to support these (e.g., the [Digitally Enabled Workforce programme](#)). However, the focus on assessing and enabling digital skills, needs and upskilling for people who access services has had less attention prior to the pandemic.

As technology and digital become more mainstreamed across service delivery, there is a need to support the skills and confidence of both the workforce and the people who access services. This includes ensuring the workforce are equipped and prepared to provide or signpost people to digital support when people could benefit from, and choose to engage in, digital or technology services, interventions or information resources as part of their health and care.

Understanding skills and confidence needs for people accessing health and social care

Understanding the digital skills and confidence needs of people who access services is crucial to ensuring that digital services are accessible. Developing a form of 'digital skills needs assessment' is one way to assess the level of need and identify how people can be supported to help them access digital services. Regularly asking people whether they are able to go online when people interact with health and care services can also help understand levels of digital exclusion.

As part of understanding the digital skills and confidence of people who access services, ensuring the workforce is skilled in supporting accessibility needs is also part of making digital services more accessible – see the ['Devices and Connectivity'](#) Pillars paper page 11 for more information on accessibility.

Literacy and language

For many people, literacy and language will present additional barriers to engaging in the digital world. Literacy and language skills are required before a person will be able to begin developing their digital skills and confidence.

Literacy

Basic literacy is an essential part of navigating the online experience. Poor literacy skills can make it incredibly difficult for people to develop their digital skills and confidence. Literacy underpins many online tasks, such as entering a website address, doing an online search, creating and using a password or entering an email address (which is the key to access most services). Some accessibility features can be helpful for people with low literacy skills e.g., speech-to-text and screen readers.

Health literacy

Health literacy refers to people's ability to obtain, read, understand and use information about health to make decisions. The way that people access healthcare information can be impacted by their use of technology – including searching online for the causes of symptoms. Using technology to positively impact health and care management requires improving health literacy and helping people to understand appropriate, trustworthy and reliable information.

Digital media literacy

Digital media literacy is how people find, evaluate, share and create information online. Having poor digital literacy skills can make the internet a difficult or impossible environment to navigate and increase someone's likelihood of negative experiences such as scams. Improving digital literacy through developing skills and confidence with the support of trusted people is essential in ensuring healthy and safe online behaviours. People may have poor digital literacy as a result of inexperience; physical or cognitive challenges; fear of, or complex technology; or through a lack of education.

English as a second language

English as a second language presents barriers to people who require support to access health and care systems. Digital inclusion can often go hand-in-hand with supporting the development of other skills, and people accessing services should be supported to overcome language barriers as well. This also links with the need to ensure inclusive design to support people in accessing health and care using digital.

Workforce digital skills

A digitally confident workforce is a prerequisite for digital inclusion being embedded in health and social care organisations. The workforce need to be able to use, and possibly demonstrate, the digital tools and services they are providing, recommending or signposting to. The level of knowledge will vary across different roles, but a basic understanding is essential.

It can be a common misconception that because of the pandemic and subsequent move to remote and hybrid working, that we now have a digitally confident workforce. This assumption does not reflect the reality. In Scotland, only 43% of adults can do all 20 tasks in the UK Essential Digital Skills for Work Framework. This assumption also does not recognise that digital skills requirements are constantly evolving to keep pace with changes in technology, and therefore require constant support.

Learning from the Digital Inclusion programme has identified the following challenges for workforce digital skills:

- Confidence in digital skills for life does not necessarily translate to confidence in digital skills for work;
- Organisations do not routinely benchmark workforce digital skills;
- There are limited learning resources to support digital skills development;
- Time for digital skills development is not being protected in the workplace.

NHS Education for Scotland (NES) have developed a Digital and Data Capability Framework which can be accessed via Turas. This framework has been created to support the development of digital capabilities for everyone working in health and social care in Scotland. The framework identifies the skills, knowledge and behaviours that are essential for the workforce, clarifying the responsibilities at individual, team and organisational level.

Models for skills provision

It may not be a widely held view that organisations providing health and care services occupy a role in supporting people who access services with their digital upskilling. However, the continuing evolution of our reliance on digital technologies to support health, care and wellbeing outcomes means that organisations providing digital services assume a degree of responsibility for digital inclusion. The findings of the [Audit Scotland review](#) on digital exclusion state as part of the principles of digital inclusion that ‘All public bodies have a responsibility to enable digital inclusion in their programmes for reform. Public service reform will only be effective if everyone is included and can access the services they need. This helps secure better outcomes for people and realise human rights in the digital age’.

There are different options that organisations can explore in developing ways to support digital inclusion, and this will be driven by the nature of the service and the available resources. The most appropriate model should correlate with the reliance on technology as part of delivering services, the complexity of access to digital support, the skills needs of the individual, other available resources and the duration and intensity of the engagement/service interaction.

The following section describes models of digital inclusion support. The models are not mutually exclusive, and some organisations will benefit from considering how they might incorporate different aspects of the models in different parts of their services.

1 Embedded digital inclusion

The embedded model recognises that digital is now a permanent feature of how the organisation functions (high reliance on digital delivery of services) and in the lives of the people the organisation seeks to engage. The entire workforce is supported by the organisation to build their own digital skills and confidence, and in-turn provides some level of digital support to people who access services. The level of support can vary, but this model recognises that there are opportunities at different parts of a user journey throughout health and social care services. This may involve anything from a quick demonstration of how to use a specific app, through to spending time with someone to help them set up an email address and register for services. In some organisations the 'Digital Champion' approach is used to achieve the embedded model, and the change management process can be phased across different teams or service areas. This model provides greater sustainability than others.

2 Digital team or coach(es) providing digital inclusion support

A dedicated digital role can afford more in-depth support for individuals. The role (or team) is a protected resource, and the role is usually recruited specifically, or formally incorporated into an existing role. In some models this role is fulfilled by a peer mentor. Digital teams or coaches provide more intensive digital skills support than can be provided by frontline staff in some organisations.

Trust and pre-existing relationships are a key feature of building digital skills and confidence. In this model, the trust an individual has with their regular support worker or other care practitioner can be bridged with the Digital Coach, usually through joint introductory sessions. As the Digital Coach is located within the same organisation, they should have a good understanding of the wider context of the individual's circumstances which can help inform their digital learning. This can also make the sharing of information and risk assessment easier as there are no information governance barriers.

This model can be a temporary solution as part of a wider change management process. Some organisations use Digital Coaches at the beginning of their digital journey, moving towards an embedded model over time as workforce digital skills and confidence grow.

3 Partnership digital inclusion

In organisations where it is not possible or practical to support digital skills, a partnership model can be considered. This model is most common where a public sector service partners with a local, community-based organisation who provides digital inclusion expertise. The partnership should be adequately resourced with some form of governance e.g., a service level agreement. This is particularly important if referrals are being made to support individuals use a specific digital tool or platform.

For this model to work effectively, the referring organisation should ensure that there is an internal process to enable the workforce to identify where an individual requires digital inclusion support. This should be underpinned by clear referral pathways, which will require consideration of information governance arrangements.

Partnerships can be beneficial in allowing organisations to play to their strengths, ensuring the individual gets the right support from the right place.

4 Community Hubs as 'places' for digital inclusion

A hub model can incorporate elements of the other models. It focusses on where and how digital skills are supported. A hub, or public access location, can provide a community setting during specific days to support individuals with their digital skills. The provision of support can be provided by embedded Digital Champions, Digital Coaches or a combination of both.

Previous work on digital skills initiatives (e.g., [SCVO Digital Participation Charter Fund Review](#)) suggests that social barriers can be a significant deterrent to engagement e.g. access to childcare, transport or competing commitments. This can also provide an opportunity to locate digital skills support alongside other community activities such as welfare advice, NearMe hubs, café clubs and community transport initiatives.

Another benefit of a hub model is that it can also provide public access to devices and connectivity (See [Devices and Connectivity](#) paper). This provides a holistic one-stop-shop for digital inclusion support.

A limitation of this model is that it restricts support to a physical location. This can be a significant barrier for remote and rural communities, and disabled people or people with long-term health conditions who may not be able to access physical spaces. The hub model should be considered alongside other options.

5 Signposting for digital inclusion

Signposting is distinct from a partnership model. Signposting involves an informal arrangement whereby one organisation can direct the individual to other support available in the community. This is more suitable for organisations which have a low reliance on digital delivery. In terms of best practice, the signposting organisation should check that the service they are signposting to can provide support, and this should be reviewed regularly.

Workforce considerations

Supporting individuals with digital skills can be complex and time-consuming. However, it can also be a longer-term investment that ultimately leads to resource and cost efficiencies for some organisations if individuals can and choose to access services digitally. The workforce is the key enabler in this process in respect of their own attitudes towards digital, their knowledge and skills of the role digital can play in supporting health, care and wellbeing and their motivation to promote digital options so that people can have the choice to engage in services digitally.

To help unlock the 'skills and confidence pillar' of digital inclusion the workforce across the landscape of health and care sectors need improved:

- Understanding of their own digital skills level;
- Awareness and understanding of digital services, tools and resources that exist in their organisation;
- Access to digital skills learning, knowledge and development during work time;
- Understanding of basic accessibility adjustments to support someone to use digital tools and platforms;
- Pathways to refer someone for further digital support when someone indicates a willingness to explore digital as part of their care.

Organisation considerations

All organisations can play a role in ensuring people have access to digital skills support. The level of involvement in providing this support will vary depending on the organisation's reliance on digital to deliver services. Key actions that will be universal for all organisations include:

- Review any learning and development or induction policies to identify opportunities to embed workforce digital skills;
- Map existing digital tools and platforms used in service delivery, either in-house or third party provided, to understand what level of digital skills would be required to use these;
- Embed the Digital and Data Capabilities Framework (NES) to support the workforce with the minimum Level 1;
- Review information governance policies and procedures to enable referrals to other organisations for digital skills support (where this is not able to be provided within the organisation);
- Map clear referral pathways for further digital support e.g., access to digital skills support.

Scenario: Skills and Confidence in practice

The following scenarios involving a person accessing support, a care worker and a Health and Social Care Partnership, highlights the considerations and implications of 'skills and confidence'.

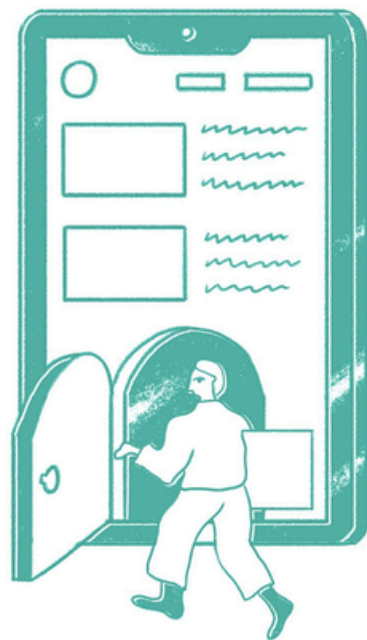
Ruth lives in a sheltered housing complex and is visited regularly by her care worker, Hazel. During one of her visits Hazel asks Ruth about a picture of her grandchildren. Ruth tells her that it's been months since she's seen them and they grow up so quickly.



Hazel notices that Ruth has a smartphone and asks if she ever uses video calls. Ruth tells her that she doesn't know how to work it other than sending messages and taking phone calls. Hazel talks her through how to make a video call and they give it a go. Over her next few visits, they do more video calls until Ruth is confident enough to do it herself.

Scenario: Skills and Confidence in practice

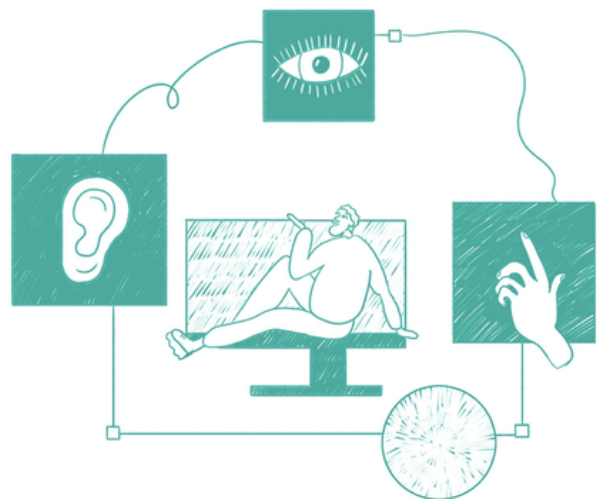
Hazel has been working in social care for 15 years and recently had the chance to take part in Digital Champions training offered through the Health and Social Care Partnership. Hazel has a smart phone and is familiar with some of the technology enabled care supports that can help people to live independently through her homecare role.



The Digital Champions training helps Hazel think about her own skills in using her smartphone and how she might be able to use these skills to help the people she supports with their digital skills and confidence. The Digital Champions training introduces Hazel to different health and wellbeing tools that might be useful to share with the people she supports.

Scenario: Skills and Confidence in practice

The Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) has mapped out the different organisations within their locality areas that provide digital inclusion support and has developed referral pathways as part of their commissioning processes. The HSCP has also developed a digital inclusion skills and confidence learning pathway available to all staff working in health and social care. The pathway is based on the NHS Education for Scotland (NES) [Digital and Data Capability Framework](#).



The learning pathway offers all staff the opportunity to participate in Digital Champions training as part of their introduction to digital inclusion. Staff can build their skills and confidence and then undertake additional training through Turas and NES Technology Enabled Care programmes to further develop their digital skills and leadership.



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