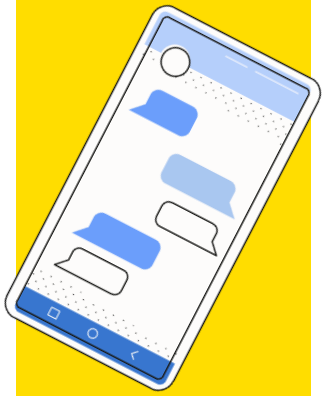
# Technology for Learning and Development Survey

## The Summary Report



Northern Ireland Social Care Council

Ulster University

Invest Northern Ireland

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# 1. Introduction

Approximately 43,000 people are registered with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council to work in social work and social care services in the statutory, voluntary and independent sector across Northern Ireland (6500 social workers, 36000 social care workers and 700 social work students). This report summarises the responses to a joint survey undertaken by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council and Ulster University to assess the digital skills and confidence of those registered with the Council and to explore the use of digital resources to support learning and development for this workforce. The findings will inform the approach taken by the Council and the university in the development and application of digital resources for social work and social care learning and development.

# 2. Methodology

2.1 During December 2018 and January 2019, all registrants with a valid email address were invited through email to complete an online survey (approx. 30,000 people i.e. 70% of the workforce). The survey invite was also promoted on the Social Care Council website, e-zines and social media. Information was shared with social care managers for them to distribute to their staff.

**The survey asked respondents for their views and personal experiences of the following areas:**

**Technology and Digital Tools**

- An assessment of their digital skills and confidence
- Technology and digital tools available to them
- Mobile platforms and web browsers they use

**Learning and Development**

- Factors influencing their learning and development
- Methods they used to access learning
- Location and frequency of their learning and development
- E-learning tools they used at home and work
- Perceived value of technology as a learning and development tool
- Challenges they faced using technology in learning for social care
- Awareness and use of Social Care Council digital learning resources

2.2 959 surveys were initiated and 775 were completed. Responses for the 775 fully completed surveys were included in the analysis (2.5% response rate). This sample was large enough to represent the wider population of people registered with the Social Care Council. The demographics of respondents reasonably matched the demographics of the registered workforce. Further detail about the responses to the questions in the survey and the testing applied to them is available from the Social Care Council on request.

2.3 Responses were compared for variations according to gender, age and job role (social work, social care or social work student). The data was also analysed to identify barriers that could be addressed to encourage more people to use technology to support their learning and development. [1]Cronbach's Alpha test was used to provide assurance on the consistency and reliability of the responses. [2]Kruskal-Wallis test was used to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the groups.

2.4 Additional analysis of the responses from social workers was completed to ascertain whether there was any difference between responses from those employed in the Statutory Sector and those in the Independent Sector. No significant differences were found across the survey topics except for the question on devices used, which showed that laptops were the most common device at work within the Independent sector (75.8%), whereas desktops were the most common device at work within the Statutory sector (91.5%).

## 3. Overview of Survey Findings

**Overall responses to the survey were positive and the analysis reflects a motivated workforce who have a genuine interest in learning and development. The majority of respondents were 'moderately confident' or 'very confident' with the use of smart phones, desktop computers, laptops and tablets. Most of the respondents felt that they had the required skills in digital technology and appreciated the potential benefits of technology to facilitate learning are appreciated by respondents. Commentary on each of the areas within the survey is included in Section 4.**

Although the surveyed workforce can complete most of the digital tasks described in the survey and digital confidence scores were positive, there is a small but significant portion of the population who have expressed difficulty with certain digital skills. With approximately 10% of the workforce reporting they are not using technology or digital learning tools, there are a number of recommendations to improve use of technology and regular engagement with learning and development.

**Recommendation 1 – Digital Skills**
7.1% of respondents indicated a difficulty with the purchasing and installation of Mobile Apps on a device. This is relevant to the usage of learning and development apps by the workforce. It is recommended that a detailed user guide be provided with such apps to aid new users with the installation process.

**Recommendation 2 – Digital Confidence**
The relationship between digital skills and technology confidence was explored. A moderate positive correlation was identified suggesting that higher self-reported digital skills levels are associated with higher technology confidence. Therefore, a particular focus should be given to members of the workforce within all job roles who indicate they are "Only Slightly Confident" or "Not Confident at All".

[1] Cronbach's alpha is used as an estimate of the internal consistency (reliability) of the questions used in the survey. 0.70 and above is good, 0.80 and above is better, and 0.90 and above is best.
[2] Kruskal-Wallis test is a rank-based nonparametric test that can be used to determine if there are statistically significant differences between two or more groups.

**Recommendation 3 – Access to Technology**
Registrants are using a wide range of technologies for work and personal access to digital resources. Therefore, any digital learning resources or training developed must be compatible with desktop and mobile devices to ensure they are accessible for registrants to support learning at work and at home.

**Recommendation 4 – Mobile Platforms and Web Browsers**
Android, iOS/Apple and Windows platforms are all used in significant proportions by registrants. Google Chrome is considerably the most popular web browser, however there are sufficient proportions of registrants using alternative browsers. Therefore, training in using digital resources and the development of digital tools must be compatible with the range of platforms and browsers in use.

**Recommendation 5 – Linking Employment Prospects to Learning and Development**
Respondents were less positive about the positive impact of learning and development on employment prospects than anticipated. Awareness raising of the benefits of learning and development and signposting on career progression would be beneficial for all job roles.

**Recommendation 6 – Promoting Understanding of a Registrant's Responsibility to Complete Regular Learning and Development**
At least 20% of registrants reported they engaged in learning and development only once a year. Communications and engagement campaigns would provide information for all registrants to ensure they are aware of the requirement to complete at least 90 hours of training and learning in each registration period and are able to recognise the benefits of ongoing activity to improve their skills and knowledge.

**Recommendation 7 – Increasing the Use of E-Learning Tools**
Across all age groups and job roles, 5.9% of respondents had never used E-Learning tools and almost 10% were not willing to engage with them at all. It is recommended that efforts be made to demonstrate how to use these tools and promote the benefit of them for learning and development in order to reduce the number of non-engagers. Demonstration of E-Learning tools to managers would also be beneficial in encouraging their use in the workplace.

**Recommendation 8 – Reducing the Challenges of Using Technology**
There is a clear benefit in offering additional digital skills training, as 19.2% of respondents at least "Somewhat Agreed" that they did not have the required skills in digital technology to facilitate their learning and development.

**Recommendation 9 – Increasing Use of the Social Care Council's Digital Resources**
Overall, 39% of respondents have not used the Council's digital resources. The majority of those who used them found them at least "Somewhat Useful". Communication and engagement with registrants and employers to raise awareness of these resources and their application for learning and development would be beneficial.

# 4. Commentary on Survey Findings

## 4.1 Technology and Digital Tools

### 4.1.1 Digital skills

**Information regarding digital skills was captured through responses to a series of 10 statements, each regarding a technology-based skill. For example, "Use a Search Engine to look for information online (e.g. Google)". Other statements were related to skills such as saving a photo found online, finding a previously visited website, installing apps, and buying items online. For each statement, respondents were asked to state whether "They could do this task if they were asked to", "They couldn't do the task if they were asked to", or "They had no idea what the statement was referring to".**

Responses from all respondents to all statements were consolidated to provide an overall outlook. These are summarised as follows:

- **94.7% of responses to these 10 statements were "I could do this if I was asked to."**
- **4.6% of responses were "I couldn't do this if I was asked to."**
- **0.7% of responses were "I have no idea what you are talking about."**

A Digital Skills Score (DSS) was calculated which provided an overall summary of each respondent's digital skills based on responses to each of the 10 skills statements. Digital skills results were similar across the three job roles, with a significant majority stating that they "Would be able to do the named task if asked". Digital skills results were also analysed by respondent age. Although the majority of responses were positive, regardless of age bracket, there was a general trend of DSS declining with age.

These figures suggest that, in general, the surveyed workforce can complete most of the digital tasks mentioned. Nevertheless, there is a small but significant portion of the population who have expressed difficulty with certain digital skills.

Overall, the skills with the largest deficit included:

- **"Solve a problem with a device or digital service using online help"** (13% could not do this if asked)
- **"Check that information you found online is accurate"** (9% could not do this if asked)
- **"Buy and install apps on a device"** (7.1% could not do this if asked)

**Recommendation 1 – Digital Skills**

7.1% of respondents indicated a difficulty with the purchasing and installation of Mobile Apps on a device. This is relevant to the usage of learning and development apps by the workforce. It is recommended that a detailed user guide be provided with such apps to aid new users with the installation process.

### 4.1.2 Digital Confidence

**Respondents were asked to provide an indication of their confidence with using four types of technologies: Smart Phones, Tablets, Desktop Computers, and Laptops. Confidence with each technology was recorded individually using a 5-point Likert scale with the options "Very Confident", "Moderately Confident", "Somewhat Confident", "Only Slightly Confident", and "Not Confident at all".**

The vast majority of respondents were '"Moderately Confident" or "Very Confident" with the use of smart phones (83.4%), desktop computers (83.5%), laptops (82.9%) and tablets (81.4%). It should be noted, however, that a small yet significant portion of respondents stated that they were "Not Confident at All" (2.4%)' or "Only Slightly Confident" (4.9%) with these devices.

A Technology Confidence Score (CS) was calculated for each respondent. This score provides a summary of each respondent's overall technology confidence based on confidence response to each of the 4 technologies. Digital confidence responses showed no significant difference between the job roles. "Very Confident" was the most common response provided by respondents from all job roles, followed by "Moderately Confident". This is a positive response which indicates a workforce which is mostly confident in the use of common technology.

- 54.1 % of responses scored "Very Confident"
- 28.7% of responses scored "Moderately Confident"
- 9.9% of responses scored "Somewhat Confident"
- 4.9% of responses scored "Only Slightly Confident"
- 2.4% of responses cored "Not Confident at All"

Digital confidence responses were also divided by age group. The most common response was "Very Confident" for all age groups except for the 65+ group. There is a small but steady decline in the proportion of "Very Confident" responses as age group increases, and also a general trend of an increase in less confident responses with age.

**Recommendation 2 – Digital Confidence**

The relationship between digital skills and technology confidence was explored. A moderate positive correlation was identified suggesting that higher self-reported digital skills levels are associated with high technology confidence. Therefore, a particular focus should be given to members of the workforce within all job roles who indicate they are "Only Slightly Confident" or "Not Confident at All".

### 4.1.3 Access to technology and use of digital tools

**Respondents were asked to specify which technologies they have access to in the workplace and at home. They were asked how often they use these technologies for work purposes at work, and for personal use at home.**

Access to technology at work:

- Desktop computers were the most common technology available in the workplace (68.6%), followed by smartphones (46.8%), laptops (35.2%) and tablets (22.1%).
- Smartphones were the technology most commonly used for work purposes on a daily basis (57.9%) followed closely by desktop computers (57.5%).
- Other technologies used in the workplace on a daily basis were laptops (29.7%) and tablets (20.8%).

The difference in smartphone availability and usage in the workplace would suggest that a significant proportion of the workforce are using personal smartphones for work purposes. In contrast, in the workplace 61.2% of respondents never used a tablet and 47.2% never used a laptop. Additionally, 28.6% never used a smartphone in the workplace and 24.1% never used a desktop computer in the workplace.

Access to technology at home:

- Smartphones were the most commonly available technology at home (90.5%), followed by tablets (76.3%) and laptops (76.1%), with the least common being desktop computers (29.7%).
- Overall, the device most commonly used on a daily basis for personal usage was the smartphone (93.8%). This usage figure was slightly higher than that reported for smartphone availability in the home (90.5%), Other technology reported as in use was tablets (48.5%), laptops (32.5%) and desktop computers (21.8%). 3.5% never used a smartphone for personal activities, and 5.3% of respondents did not have any access to a smartphone.

Technology access according to job role was also analysed. A desktop computer was the most common technology available within the workplace for all job roles. Smart phones were the most common technology available for all job roles at home.

**Recommendation 3 – Access to Technology**

Registrants are using a wide range of technologies for work and personal access to digital resources. Therefore, any digital learning resources or training developed must be compatible with desktop and mobile devices to ensure they are accessible for registrants to support learning at work and at home.

### 4.1.4 Mobile platforms and web browsers

**Respondents were asked to state which mobile device platforms and web browsers they used at home and work.**

The most commonly used mobile platforms by all respondents were as follows:

- 55.2% Android
- 44.8% iOS / Apple
- 33.0% Windows
- 1.5% of respondents did not know what mobile platform they used at home and work.

Analysis of mobile platform usage by job roles showed a variation according to job role. Android was the most commonly used platform by social care workers, whereas iOS / Apple was the most common platform used by social workers and social work students.

Respondents were asked to state which web browsers they use at home and work. There was no significant variation in web browser usage across job roles with the overall most commonly used browsers reported as follows:

- 80.0% Google Chrome
- 53.8% Internet Explorer
- 28.3% Safari
- 11.1% Firefox
- 7.6% Microsoft Edge
- 0.6% indicated that they did not know which web browsers they use at home and work.

**Recommendation 4 – Mobile Platforms and Web Browsers**

Android, iOS/Apple and Windows platforms are all used in significant proportions by registrants. Google Chrome is considerably the most popular web browser, however there are sufficient proportions of registrants using alternative browsers. Therefore, training in using digital resources and the development of digital tools must be compatible with the range of platforms and browsers in use.

## 4.2 Learning and Development

### 4.2.1 Factors influencing learning and development

**Respondents were asked to state what factors influenced them to learn and develop. Options included "Future Employment Prospects", "I Want to Develop My Knowledge and Skills", "Obligation from Employer", "Obligation from Regulating Bodies" and "Other".**

For all job roles, "I want to develop my knowledge and skills" was the significantly the most popular option (83.4% overall) and it was a particularly popular option for social workers (92.3%). "Obligation from regulating bodies" was 55.4% and "Obligation from employer" was 65.4% overall.

This is a positive result which suggests a motivated workforce who have a genuine interest in learning and development. Interestingly, when compared to "I want to develop my knowledge and skills", social care workers and social workers were much less likely to

indicate “Future Employment Prospects”. Further information relating to this discrepancy was explored with a random selection of 20 respondents from the original sample. Social care workers reported a lack of career structure made it more difficult to link learning and development to improving future employment prospects. Social workers reported difficulties in allocating time for learning and development to help career progression and some also reported they were unclear about the arrangements for the Professional in Practice Framework for Social Work CPD which they were required to complete.

**Recommendation 5 – Linking Employment Prospects to Learning and Development**
Respondents were less positive about the positive impact of learning and development on employment prospects than anticipated. Awareness raising of the benefits of learning and development and signposting on career progression would be beneficial for all job roles.

### 4.2.2 Methods used to access learning and development

**Respondents were asked to indicate the methods they used to access learning.**
Responses were broadly similar across all job roles with overall responses as follows:

- 83.7% Face-to-Face (including classroom and training room delivery)
- 79% E-Learning
- 63.4% Information leaflets
- 6.7% of respondents provided additional insight into sources of learning. The most popular additional sources included internet searches and work-based learning with peers.

### 4.2.3 Location and frequency of learning and development

**Respondents were asked to indicate where and when their learning and development takes place**. For all job roles, the most common response for location of learning and development was The Workplace (80.5%). For social care workers, the second most common location was At Home (52.9%), whereas for social workers this was Day Release/Away from the Office (73.9%). Additionally, 5.7% of all respondents said they undertook learning and development travelling to/from work.

Overall responses for frequency of learning and development, were as follows:

- 33.2% monthly
- 26.8% quarterly
- 20.5% annually
- 1.3% indicated that they received training once – at induction.
- 1.3% indicated they had never received training to support learning and development.

**Recommendation 6 – Promoting Understanding of a Registrant’s Responsibility to Complete Regular Learning and Development**
At least 20% of registrants reported they engaged in learning and development only once a year. Communications and engagement campaigns would provide information for all registrants to ensure they are aware of the requirement to complete at least 90 hours of training and learning in each registration period and are able to recognise the benefits of ongoing activity to improve their skills and knowledge.

### 4.2.4 E-learning tools at home and work

**Respondents were provided with a list of E-learning tools and asked to state which they used to support learning and development at home and work**. Websites were the most common E-learning tool used by all job roles both at work and home. Overall use of E-learning tools was as follows:

- Mobile learning apps (25.4% at work and 50.3% at home)
- Online communities (24.4% at work and 39.6% at home)
- Podcasts (7.1% at work and 20.3% at home)
- Respondents also indicated usage of sources such as vlogs, journals, and social media.

It is interesting to note that E-Learning tools are consistently more commonly used at home rather than the workplace. Social workers did report that they more commonly used websites for E-Learning at work than home, and social work students said they would use some tools equally at home and at work.

Respondents were asked to comment on how useful they found E-Learning tools. There was little variation in the responses from social workers and social care workers:

- 89% overall found E-Learning tools to be at least "Somewhat Useful"
- 5% indicated that these tools were either "Not so Useful" or "Not Useful at All"
- 5.9% had not used E-Learning tools at all.

Respondents were asked if they would be interested in participating in learning and development delivered online at home and work. Overall responses were as follows:

- 59.9% indicated they would be interested in participating at home in their own time
- 62.6% indicated that they would be interested in participating at work
- 9.9% indicated that they would not be interested in participating at home or work.

The majority of respondents in each age group said they would be willing to engage with E-Learning tools at home in their own time, with the youngest age group (15-24) most positive at 72.1%. The majority of respondents in the 25-44 age group and 45-64 age group were willing to also engage at work, however this was not the case for the 65+ group at 14.3%.

**Recommendation 7 – Increasing the Use of E-Learning Tools**

Across all age groups and job roles, 5.9% of respondents had never used E-Learning tools and almost 10% were not willing to engage with them at all. It is recommended that efforts be made to demonstrate how to use these tools and promote the benefit of them for learning and development in order to reduce the number of non-engagers. Demonstration of E-Learning tools to managers would also be beneficial in encouraging their use in the workplace.

### 4.2.5 The value of technology as a learning and development tool

**To better understand the perceived value of technology to support learning, respondents were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with six positive statements about the value of technology to support learning**.

The majority of responses were positive, indicating that the potential benefits of technology to facilitate learning are appreciated by respondents. The most commonly "Strongly Agreed" with statements were in relation to the flexibility of access from anywhere at any time (64.8% Strongly Agree) and that the technology is easily available and can be used continuously for learning and reference (60.5% Strongly Agree).

A "Technology Value Score" (TVS) was calculated to summarise each respondent's level of agreement or disagreement to the statements regarding the benefits of using technology for learning. The majority of responses across all job roles were in agreement with the technology value statements. Social care workers expressed the highest average level of agreement.

TVS were also calculated for each age group. Analysis found that as respondent age increased, they were less positive about the value of technology as a learning and development tool. It was also found that respondents with higher confidence in the use of technology were associated with stronger agreement with the value of technology. Similarly, respondents with higher digital skills were associated with stronger agreement with the value of technology.

### 4.2.6 Challenges of using technology in learning for social care

**Respondents were asked to state their level of agreement or disagreement with seven statements regarding the challenges associated with the use of technology for learning.**

There was no significant difference in responses grouped by age or job role in relation to the challenges associated with technology for learning. Interestingly, opinion was varied throughout all the challenges included in the survey. Overall responses were as follows:

- 64.9% of respondents at least "Somewhat Agree" that there is not enough time to undertake digital learning due to work demands.
- 42.8% at least "Somewhat Agree" that the use of this technology to learn reduces the support available to the learner
- 34.0% at least somewhat agree that there is not enough line manager support and commitment.

Opinion was divided on a number of the challenges:

- 41.8% at least "Somewhat Agree" that the technology is not available in the workplace, however, 40.1% at least "Somewhat Disagree" with this statement
- 26.9% at least "Somewhat Agree" that it is difficult to find the right device, 29.2% feel neutral about the difficulty, and 43.9% at least "Somewhat Disagree"

Technology Confidence Scores were calculated for respondents. Those with higher Technology Confidence Scores were less likely to report challenges with using technology for learning. Similarly, respondents with higher Digital Skills Scores were also less likely to report challenges in using technology for learning.

Comparisons also showed that those who demonstrated increased agreement with the value of technology for learning were less likely to report challenges in using technology.

The majority of respondents did not feel that they lacked the required skills in digital technology (66.7%) or that they lacked the motivation to complete courses (72.1%). This indicates a largely motivated workforce, the majority of which do not feel hindered by their level of skills in digital technology.

**Recommendation 8 – Reducing the Challenges of Using Technology**

19.2% of respondents at least "Somewhat Agreed" that they did not have the required skills in digital technology to facilitate learning and development. Therefore there is a clear benefit in offering additional digital skills training,

### 4.2.7 Awareness and use of Social Care Council digital learning resources

**Respondents were asked to indicate which of Social Care Council's digital resources they were aware of.**

The most well-known resource was the Council's Website (80.0%), followed by the Council's Portal for Online Registration Services (51.7%) and Facebook page (26.5%).

Awareness of each of the Council's digital resources was assessed by job role. For all job roles, the Website is the best-known resource, followed by the Portal. Approximately 25% of respondents were aware of the Facebook page and Learning Zone. The "Understanding Child Development" Mobile App series is known by a significant portion (42.8%) of the social worker group.

When respondents were asked how often they have used these digital resources to support learning, the most common overall response was "Never" (38.5%). This was followed by "Quarterly" (25.4%) and "Annually" (15.9%).

Frequency of use for each of the Council's digital resources was assessed by job role. The most common response for social care workers was "Never" (42.7%). For social workers, it was "Quarterly" (40.5%) and for social work students, "Weekly" (28.6%).

Perceived usefulness of the Council's digital resources was assessed by job role. The most common response from social care workers was "I have Not Used Them" (44.3%). Other than that response, the most common response from all groups was "Somewhat Useful" (social care worker: 26.2%, social worker: 38.7%, social work student: 35.7%).

**Recommendation 9 – Increasing Use of the Social Care Council's Digital Resources**

Overall, 39% of respondents have "Never" used the Council's digital resources. The majority of those who have used them had found them at least "Somewhat Useful". Communication and engagement with registrants and employers to raise awareness of these resources and their application for learning and development would be beneficial.