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All-Party Parliamentary Group for Assistive and Accessible Technology

ATech Skills for Adult Social Care

Building the Care Workforce to Put People in Control of Their Lives

December 2025

Accessibility

ATech Skills for Adult Social Care:

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Foreword

Technology is at the centre of government plans for adult social care, from the use of ATech and telecare to the widespread adoption of digital care plans to facilitate the sector's integration with NHS services. Despite this ambition, the adult social care workforce has often been slow to adopt digital practices – hampered by a lack of investment in skills and professional development and inadequate routes for career advancement and specialisation.

Social care professionals play a vital role in ensuring disabled and older people have the agency, choice, and control to live the lives they want to lead. These relationships are often crucial in ensuring that disabled and older people can fully benefit from technology. It is therefore critical that staff are equipped with the necessary ATech and digital skills to make this happen.

The Kent and Medway Digital Skills and Innovation in Health and Care (DSIHC) project forms the central case study of this report, as an example of how policymakers, the education and skills system, and the technology industry can create the learning opportunities that the 21st century adult social care workforce needs.

ATech Skills for Social Care outlines a set of actionable recommendations for government, educational bodies and industry to reform the education and skills system for the adult social care sector across the country to reflect the increasing importance of digital skills and assistive technology.

The report was co-chaired by Councillor Teresa Murray, the Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Adult Services and Health at Medway Council, and Councillor Diane Morton, the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health at Kent County Council. With thanks to our steering group members, as well as our inquiry sponsors Kent Further Education – East Kent Colleges Group, MidKent College, and North Kent College – Medway Council, and Kent County Council.

Introduction

Technology skills are widely recognised as essential to the future of the adult social care workforce

The Government has made technology a central part of its health and social care reforms. The Department of Health and Social Care's 10-Year Plan envisages a move from hospital-based care to more interventions being delivered in the community to both treat and prevent ill-health – powered by a shift from analogue to digital technologies that will offer people greater control over their care.[1]

Recognising the importance of the adult social care sector in delivering change across the health and care system, Secretary of State Wes Streeting has pledged to harness "the full potential of cutting-edge technology to transform social care, helping people to live independently in their own homes and improving the quality of care."[2]

Skills for Care lists digital skills as a core requirement for everyone working in the social care sector. It has highlighted several reasons why such skills are important:[3]

- Government policy: policy makers in Government have put technology at the centre of their plans for the future of adult social care, from the use of assistive and accessible technology (ATech) and telecare to helping people live independently to driving the widespread adoption of digital care plans and facilitating the sector's integration with NHS services.
- The expectations of commissioners and regulators: social care providers are increasingly expected to use technology in their day-to-day operations, for example, in tendering for local authority contracts via online portals and interacting with key bodies such as the Care Quality Commission.
- Shrinking resources: the loss of funding has incentivised care providers to adopt digital ways of working for basic tasks, such as using email to communicate with staff and schedule annual leave dates.
- The changing expectations of people who receive care: as digital technology has become central to people's domestic lives, people who draw on care are more likely to

[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/deleted-10-year-health-plan-for-england-fit-for-the-future
[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cutting-edge-tech-introduced-in-social-care
[3] https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resources/documents/Support-for-leaders-and-managers/Managing-a-service/Digital/Core-digital-skills-in-social-care.pdf

expect care workers to help them enjoy its benefits, for example, to connect with family and friends over Zoom.

- Service innovations: new ATech products and services provide opportunities for care providers to change and improve their services while also offering people who draw on care more opportunities and choice in how they live.

Despite these factors, the adult social care workforce has often been slow to adopt digital practices. The Adult Social Care Workforce Data Set indicates that 39% of staff had undertaken some training in IT, digital, and data in 2024/25. Most of this figure comprises data management and GDPR training, which 38% of staff had completed. Online safety and security courses - the next most common technology-related training - had been undertaken by only 3% of the total workforce, with 1% or less learning about their organisation's in-house systems and applications, assisted digital and accessibility, and digital leadership skills.[4]

According to research commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Care published in 2021, knowledge and awareness of care technology vary significantly across the sector.[5] This ranged from those who felt they had to "muddle by" and frequently asked for help to highly skilled technology users who were able to adopt new technologies, troubleshoot problems, and help colleagues solve technological issues.

However, most senior staff who had responsibilities for digital skills in their organisations felt there were gaps in the competencies of frontline staff. The biggest gaps were believed to be in operating digital devices as part of their job (37%), supporting care recipients to use technology (35%), and knowing which technologies to use with whom (34%).

The report found that the care staff who took part in the research generally wanted to improve their digital skills and tended to view digital competence as important to their career progression. Care providers and local authorities also believed digital technology would play an increasingly vital part in the sector.

Aspirations to develop the skills and capabilities of the adult social care workforce have long been hindered by two key structural challenges. The first is a lack of funding to pay staff a suitable salary and to invest in their skills and professional development. The second structural barrier is that the sector does not provide staff with enough routes for career advancement and

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[4] https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Adult-Social-Care-Workforce-Data/workforceintelligence/resources/Reports/National/The-state-of-the-adult-social-care-sector-and-workforce-in-England-2025.pdf

[5] https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2021-12/NHSX_Technology_and_Digital_Skills_Review_Main_Report_November_2021.pdf

specialisation. For decades, adult social care has been severely underfunded.[6] This has suppressed wages and made it hard for employers to attract, retain, and upskill their staff. Three-fifths of care staff are paid below the National Living Wage, with around one in five of care home staff experiencing in-work poverty.[7] There are also very few paths for career progression within the sector. As a consequence, many skilled and experienced care workers leave the sector, with even more people being discouraged from entering it in the first place.

The Government's workforce reforms aim to accelerate the adoption of digital skills and technology

As part of its plans to create a National Care Service for England, the Government has set in train a number of initiatives that seek to tackle these structural challenges while also accelerating the adoption of technology in social care. The Department for Health and Social Care has set an objective to make sure all social care records are fully digitised by the end of the current Parliament. It is also creating a set of national standards for the use of technology in social care to ensure that people who draw on care and their families and care providers can choose the most effective and safest options.[8]

The Department has worked with Skills for Care to develop a Care Workforce Pathway.[9] This outlines the skills, knowledge, values, and behaviours required to work in the adult social care sector and defines a series of role categories that encompass the different types of positions held by people in the sector. The Pathway is designed to be used by employers and others to guide the career progression of care staff, setting out how employees should acquire skills, learn, and develop to achieve promotions and specialise in specific areas.

Skills for Care has also developed the Digital Skills Framework. This builds on a commitment made by the last Government in the *Next Steps to Put People at the Heart of Care White Paper* (2023) to create a "comprehensive digital learning offer" for the adult social care sector.[10] This free resource can be used by employers to plan staff training at both organisational and individual levels to support colleagues' personal development. It provides a framework of seven

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[6] https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmhealth/368/report.html
[7] https://www.health.org.uk/press-office/press-releases/uk-care-workforce-twice-as-likely-to-live-in-poverty-as-average-worker
[8] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-reforms-and-independent-commission-to-transform-social-care
[9] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-workforce-pathway-for-adult-social-care/care-workforce-pathway-for-adult-social-care-overview
[10] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adult-social-care-system-reform-next-steps-to-put-people-at-the-heart-of-care/next-steps-to-put-people-at-the-heart-of-care

key areas of effective digital working and is organised into two levels: "digital skills for all staff" and "go further". The framework also provides signposts to training opportunities.[11]

Finally, in April 2025 the Department of Health and Social Care announced a Level 5 Award in Understanding Digital Leadership in Adult Social Care.[12] The award is aimed at care managers, senior social care practitioners, local authority commissioners, and others who work directly in social care, or in support of the sector, at a senior level within their organisation. It covers three broad areas:[13]

- The Use of Technology and Data in Adult Social Care: developing an understanding of the national policy and legislative context around the use of technology and data, and how it benefits people and improves care.
- Implementing Technology in Adult Social Care: learning how to plan, assess, and select new technology for use in a care setting and understanding the importance of external organisations in supporting the delivery and ongoing use of technology.
- Leading Change, Learning, and Improvement in Adult Social Care: how to overcome challenges to using technology in care, lead a positive digital learning environment, and drive continuous improvement in the use of technology in the delivery of care.

The award can be tailored by awarding organisations to focus on technologies that meet the requirements of different learners – from ATech and smart home technology to digital care records and diagnostic tools.

Box 1.1: The Care Technologist Training Programme[14]

The National Care Forum is creating a Care Technologist training programme in which learners will develop skills to help people who draw on care and support to use technology to live independently, make choices and stay connected. Funded by the Rayne Foundation and modelled on training developed by Scottish Care, the programme will train learners to work with individuals to produce and deliver person-centred care plans.

It will assist learners to:

- Help people find the right technology and create personalised plans.
- Provide hands-on assistance to install and use technology.
- Advocate for the benefits of technology for people who draw on care.

[11] https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Support-for-leaders-and-managers/Managing-a-service/Digital-technology-and-social-care/Digital-Skills-Framework.aspx
[12] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cutting-edge-tech-introduced-in-social-care
[13] https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resources/documents/Developing-your-workforce/Qualifications/Awarding-organisations/Level-5-Award-in-Understanding-Digital-Leadership-in-Adult-Social-Care-Qualification-Specification-April-2024.pdf
[14] https://www.nationalcareforum.org.uk/care-technologist-training-project/

- Use technology to empower people, reduce loneliness, and ease care burdens for families.

The course will cover:

- Understanding and planning with technology.
- Implementation, support, and digital inclusion.
- Ethical use, data protection, and accessibility.
- Co-production, funding, and evaluation.
- Cultural awareness and best practice.

Evidence from Scotland shows that the role has improved staff recruitment and retention.

These initiatives fit into the broader context of the Government's sector-wide reform programme. This includes the establishment of the Casey Commission to help pave the way for the creation of a national care service "underpinned by national standards, delivering consistency of care across the country".[15] The Commission will report in two phases, identifying critical issues to be addressed in the medium term by the spring of 2026, before making longer-term recommendations for the development of a new model of care to meet the needs of our ageing population by 2028.[16]

Alongside this, the Government has invested £500 million in a fair pay agreement for the adult social care sector to improve pay and conditions for the workforce. In 2026, a new body will be established to negotiate an agreement with sector stakeholders, with the first agreement expected to take effect in 2028.[17] The body will aim to improve recruitment and retention while boosting the public's recognition of the sector's importance.

Taken together, the Government's reforms have the potential to significantly incentivise both care organisations and people working in the sector to invest in digital skills, including around ATech. With more predictable pay and working patterns, individuals will be better equipped to plan their careers and match their skills, interests, and ambitions to specific roles. Employers will benefit from lower staff turnover and reduced reliance on agency staff, as well as a more permanent and reliable workforce.

[15] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-reforms-and-independent-commission-to-transform-social-care
[16] Ibid
[17] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/500m-for-first-ever-fair-pay-agreement-for-care-workers

The missing piece: Preparing the education and skills system for change

In 2022 Policy Connect and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Assistive and Accessible Technology published *Smarter Homes for Independent Living*.[18] This report explored how Government, the social care sector, and the technology industry could unlock the benefits of technology for disabled and older people to help them live more independent and fulfilling lives. We highlighted the lack of education, training, and professional development opportunities for health and social care staff in ATech, and that there are too few formal career pathways for care professionals who want to specialise in this area. As the public policy developments described above show, since the publication of *Smarter Homes*, there have been significant moves towards improving the digital skills of the social care workforce.

Yet to succeed, these initiatives must be matched by reforms to the education and skills system. *Smarter Homes* outlined some of the necessary changes. These included increasing the assistive technology content of health and social care further and higher education programmes – including National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) – and providing learners on such courses with more practical work placements in environments where ATech is used. In particular, graduate programmes in ATech and care would help practitioners develop their expertise in this field. The report also urged adult social care departments and providers to take steps to improve their organisations' institutional expertise in ATech by establishing specialist roles and career progression routes within their organisations and teams.

Box 1.2: Interventions that strengthen the care workforce: a realist synthesis review (Kelly et al 2025)[19]

Kelly et al (2025) conducted a literature review of interventions that can strengthen the care workforce. They examined 151 academic and grey literature sources on interventions undertaken by governments and care sector organisations in 46 countries, including initiatives designed to improve education and training for the care workforce. Their findings are structured around four phases in a practitioner's career:

1. **Pre-service education:** Linking the syllabuses of formal educational programmes with on-the-job experience is particularly effective. For example, the researchers found that consistent national educational requirements for the sector, overseen by a

[18] https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/research/smarter-homes-independent-living
[19] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40657591/

central body, enhanced the quality of pre-service education and are associated with wage increases, more advanced training, and specialisation.

2. **In-work training:** The literature showed that a life-long approach to education and learning in the social care sector could lead to higher job satisfaction, as care staff often develop an interest in certain conditions and impairments, as well as operational roles and tasks relevant to their jobs. Brief training workshops can increase the skills and knowledge of staff, but there is also evidence that training is most effective when delivered over time and through a variety of activities. Creating specialist roles is known to help build expertise across an organisation's workforce and to provide career progression for the specialist. Some studies pointed to the importance of considering the demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds of staff in designing training.
3. **Exit stage (prolonging careers in the social care sector):** The review found that stepped training pathways leading to careers in nursing and administration can help with staff retention. This can be supported by increasing the integration of the health and social care sectors.
4. **From entry to exit (interventions that operate throughout people's working lives):** Strategic leadership from government and organisational executives is needed to make sure staff are able to build satisfying and rewarding careers in the social care sector. For example, shared values and a consistent learning and training framework that staff can follow and progress through during the course of their working lives can encourage staff to stay in the sector as they move between different employers. The researchers highlight the role played by Skills for Care in England, which "works across the public and private sectors, develops knowledge through comprehensive data collection, and delivers free resources for strategic and operational care workforce activities".

The aim of this report is to make recommendations on how the education and skills system for the adult social care sector can be reformed to reflect the increasing importance of digital skills and ATech, particularly for both care organisations and the people they support. It does this by highlighting a series of case studies that demonstrate what can be achieved when local authorities, industry bodies and care providers combine strategic leadership with expertise and funding to invest in a vital part of the country's workforce that is often neglected by the education and skills system. The Kent and Medway Digital Skills and Innovation in Health and

Care (DSIHC) project - our central case study - is an example of how policymakers, the education and skills system, and the technology industry can create the learning opportunities that the 21st-century adult social care workforce needs. It provides a model that the Government should work to replicate across the country, augmented by the good practices described in our other case studies. Our recommendations show how this can be achieved.

Social care professionals play a vital role in helping disabled and older people to live the lives they want to lead. Together with families, friends, and other professionals, the relationships social care staff form with the people they support are essential for giving them agency, choice, and control. These relationships are often crucial in ensuring that disabled and older people can fully benefit from technology. We must equip staff with the necessary skills to make this happen.

Education and skills system

Our Commission's evidence sessions revealed a need for more formal qualifications and training opportunities from further and higher education institutions. Social care employers in Kent and Medway said that embedding ATech training into more entry-level courses for younger learners would help to create a new pipeline of digitally capable staff. It would also support employers by clarifying the digital skills and competencies learners are developing, helping them set clearer expectations for new hires and create better-informed job descriptions.

The case studies below show how some learning providers are creating innovative learning programmes that can meet the needs of a variety of learners.

The Kent and Medway Digital Skills and Innovation in Health and Care (DSIHC) project

The Kent and Medway Digital Skills and Innovation in Health and Care (DSIHC) project is funded with £2 million from the Local Skills Improvement Programme and delivered throughout the three college groups in Kent and Medway. Taught at six campuses, the project provides hands-on entry-level education and professional development training in ATech for care professionals across the region.

Local Skills Improvement Plan

The project builds on commitments in the area's most recent Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), which proposed establishing initiatives to meet the needs of local employers and address key challenges through a "range of providers and innovative solutions".[20] The LSIP identified digitisation and automation as key developments that are changing the workforce skills required by industry, including in the health and social care sector. It highlighted the impact that the development of new technologies, such as smart devices, is having on the workplace, as well as the role these products might play in helping the region's ageing population continue living independently.

The DSIHC project aims to support Kent and Medway's health and social care workforce to meet the opportunities and challenges presented by these trends by:

- Encouraging more people to work in the sector;
- Supporting the development of new enhanced pathways by promoting the creation of ATech roles; and
- Enabling the development of more efficient and tailored health and care technologies.

The curriculum

The curriculum was launched in autumn 2024, starting with entry-level courses and, more recently, introducing courses for existing practitioners. It comprises two ATech pathways, which map the different modules that students can study:

- Assistive Technology in Health and Social Care: This pathway provides professionals with the specialised knowledge, skills, and competencies required to implement assistive technology ethically and responsibly. The curriculum for this pathway focusses on the practical application of ATech, enabling professionals to apply industry best practices when using ATech with people who draw on care and support. The modules are available from Levels 2 to 5. With the exception of Level 5 qualifications, all modules are delivered as blended learning programmes.
- Digital Skills for Care: This pathway is designed to instil fundamental digital confidence among health and care professionals by equipping them with the necessary skills to harness the data, cloud technology, artificial intelligence, and other emerging

[20] https://kentemployerskillsplan.org/kent-medway-lsip-2023/

technologies. These courses are available from Levels 1 to 5. Digital Skills modules are taught online as self-directed study with support from a tutor.

The modules can also be adapted to the requirements of individual employers.

Independent Living Smart Spaces

The centrepiece of the programme is provided by its Independent Living Smart Spaces, specially created by smart home and independent living technology experts, Automated Spaces. These dedicated classrooms have been opened at each of the six campuses and are equipped with a range of ATech that students can use to gain hands-on experience.

The classrooms are organised around a number of training scenarios that replicate a series of domestic and clinical situations. Students learn how ATech can be adapted to meet the needs of people with different impairments and medical conditions.

In addition to equipping the demonstration rooms, Automated Spaces has provided three persona-based, scripted scenarios that teaching staff can use to demonstrate how the various technologies work in practice. The scenarios are about a person with dementia living at home, a person living in a residential care setting and a person living in sheltered housing.

Each of the three scripts provides:

- A detailed description of the scenario;
- A list of specific challenges associated with the scenario;
- An explanation of which of the ATech in the room are relevant to the scenario, along with a plain English description of each device and how it can be used in the situation being explored; and
- A summary of the outcomes that the person and the people around them, such as care staff, informal carers, family members, housing providers and others, might experience as a result of having had access to ATech.

As of December 2025, over 850 learners have begun or completed ATech modules across the three colleges.

Outreach and future plans

Students are also given opportunities to meet with care professionals and people who draw on care and support - for example, Ashford College hosted a "creative cafe" in which students each had 10-minute conversations with 10 leaders from the care and technology sectors.

The project is building on these state-of-the-art facilities and expertise to develop the wider health and social care curriculum at the colleges by developing new digital skills modules for the over 1,000 students studying related courses. Project leaders are also exploring how to design courses in a way that makes it easier for care organisations to release staff for training and create continuing professional development opportunities for the further education workforce. Programme leaders also regularly attend regional health and social care conferences and networking events, using a mobile roadshow toolkit to demonstrate the ATech learning opportunities available.

The University of Dundee's MSc in Educational Assistive Technology

Since January 2021, the University of Dundee has offered an MSc in Educational Assistive Technology (EduAT).[21] The course was developed to fill a gap in advanced ATech qualifications - other than the already well-established university degree courses for rehabilitation engineers and clinical scientists.[22] Although the MSc's primary focus is on supporting disabled people to use ATech in educational contexts, the programme also emphasises the multidisciplinary nature of the assistive technologist role, which draws knowledge, skills and experience from health and social care and technology industry roles as well as from the teaching profession. Students have a wide range of professional backgrounds including specialist and mainstream schools and colleges, higher education, care providers, private ATech service, local authorities and NHS services.

Another key feature of the programme is its ambition to help build the wider ATech workforce through its "train the trainer" model. The programme is designed to encourage its graduates to promote the knowledge and values taught by the course at the organisations where they work, sharing their skills and experience with their colleagues and helping to embed good practice at the institutional level.

The programme is supported by an advisory group of experts from across the ATech sector, who act as critical friends to the programme team.

The curriculum

The MSc has six core modules that are taught in a specific order to help build students' knowledge:

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[21] https://ebooks.iospress.nl/doi/10.3233/SHTI230661

[22] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/healthcare-science/roles-healthcare-science/physical-sciences-and-biomedical-engineering/rehabilitation-engineering/training-development

- The Educational Assistive Technologist module defines the core principles of the role, focusing on its modular nature and how it can change in different service settings. The module also explores the wider research, public policy, and regulatory context as well as its influences in the disability studies and educational theory literature. This establishes the "EduAT method" – a person-centred approach that puts the individual's priorities first while ensuring professional standards are maintained.
- Introduction to AT Systems and Mainstream and Specialist AT, the second and third modules respectively, look at a range of AT software and hardware and how to make best use of them. Students hear guest speakers, including expert users, industry professionals, and academic researchers.
- The Assessment for AT module explains the theoretical basis for AT assessments and some of the key frameworks that have been developed to guide them. It also builds learners' understanding of the templates and processes that are necessary to undertake a high-quality person-centred assessment and explores eligibility criteria and referral routes. The module helps students identify the types of assessments that are appropriate for their own workplace.
- The AT in Educational Programmes module teaches students how to use ATech in the classroom.
- The AT Partner Relationships module sets the assistive technologist role within its wider professional and industry contexts. It outlines possible routes to the wider recognition and professionalisation of the role. It also looks at how to make referrals to other parts of the education, health, and social care systems in the UK.

Students also take elective modules from the university's wider computing department and undertake a dissertation project.

The MSc is taught over six months. Most students have full-time jobs and study part-time, often using their workplace as the basis for their coursework. The programme is largely delivered online, with students attending campus for one week per year of study for in-person teaching. During the week on campus, second year students also present their dissertation projects to their peers and invited disabled people from the university's User Centre.

Filling other gaps in ATech education and training

The MSc has provided a platform from which the University has been able to help address gaps in ATech education and training opportunities for practitioners who may not be in a position to study for a full masters degree. For example, the university has partnered with the augmentative

and alternative communication charity Ace Centre to provide accredited masters modules as short courses. The two organisations have also worked with Natspec TechAbility to develop Understanding the Benefits of Assistive Technology - a free online continuing professional development course for education professionals that provides a basic introduction to what ATech can achieve and which learners can also benefit from using.[23]

Care and ATech sector organisations

Care and ATech sector organisations have a vital role to play in developing the skills and competencies of the workforce. Industry organisations are often best placed to understand their members' needs and develop learning opportunities that meet them. The following case studies highlight successful examples of where sector bodies have created ATech training programmes that fit with the different roles and responsibilities of adult social care staff. A key feature of these initiatives is that they are designed and delivered by trusted organisations to employers that may have only very limited institutional experience of using ATech within their services. As the Government works to make ATech a central part of adult social care and allied professional roles, it will need to collaborate with such bodies.

TSA's Virtual Home and TEC Quality Standards Framework

TSA is a membership body of organisations that commission, provide and supply technology-enabled care (TEC) services and solutions for older and disabled people. Its members include NHS trusts, local authorities, care providers, housing associations, and technology suppliers.[6]

TSA aims to enhance understanding and adoption of TEC across the country and has long provided training opportunities to the adult social care sector. In the past, this has focussed on delivering in-person training around the country on the use of digital technologies and related topics. However, after reviewing its training programme, the organisation has shifted towards an online model of workforce development. It also narrowed the scope of its training from covering a broad range of technologies and applications to developing a core offer based on a few key areas, co-producing a series of modules with sector stakeholders.

Virtual Home

TSA's Virtual Home is the centrepiece of its education and training programme. The tool is used by both social care professionals and learners as a training resource, as well as by people who

[23] https://acecentre.arlo.co/w/events/14-understanding-the-benefits-of-at

draw on care to explore technology options in their own home.[7] Users take a 360-degree tour of a house, navigating to different rooms where they can click on technologies and learn about them. Organisations can buy a license which allows the licensee to customise the tour and furnish their home with products used by their services.

After touring the home, learners can choose to take one of two e-learning courses: explorer level or expert level. These tests assess whether learners understand the technologies in the situations and environments in which they are used. There are also scenario-based modules that prompt learners to consider which technologies might be relevant to specific situations, such as a fire or a fall. The modules also ask them to consider contextual differences – for example, how someone living in a house might have different needs if they lived in a bungalow.

There are currently around 9,000 people using Virtual Home. TSA plans to further develop the platform by adding more scenarios and including some that explore how older and disabled people can use technology away from domestic settings such as at work and on transport. TSA also plans to promote virtual homes as a way of supporting the continuity of learning from people's initial education to their ongoing professional development. Most recently, the platform has been embedded into health and social care courses taught at Sheffield Hallam University which requires students to use it in their studies.

TEC Quality

A second part of TSA's strategy to build the technology skills of the adult social care workforce is delivered by TEC Quality: an independent Assurance Partner that certifies local authorities, tech suppliers, and care providers. TEC Quality has developed the Quality Standards Framework, which enables organisations to be assessed across a range of areas, including person-centred care, ethics, continuous improvement, and the broader technology ecosystem.

The framework can be built into local authority procurement processes to ensure care providers and technology suppliers meet its standards.

In June this year, TEC Quality introduced mandatory continuing professional development courses for certain infrastructure roles. These requirements have been developed to acknowledge that most failures occur at the operational level, even when senior management has all the relevant paperwork and checks in place. The mandated CPD targets three roles:

- Operators in alarm receiving centres;
- Responders who attended calls instead of ambulances; and

- Equipment installation and maintenance staff.

Organisations seeking certification that have these roles must ensure staff complete the relevant courses.

National Care Forum's Leading Through Digital Change

National Care Forum (NCF) is a membership body for not-for-profit care providers. Founded in 2003, NCF performs a variety of roles on behalf of its members. These include keeping them up-to-date with developments in the care sector, organising regular forum meetings to share ideas and good practice and hosting an annual conference. NCF also represents members and their concerns to Government.[24]

Leading Through Digital Change

NCF delivers Leading Through Digital Change - a training programme that aims to turn sector leaders into confident technology advocates for their organisations. The programme was commissioned by Skills for Care in 2022. Although the programme was originally conceived as a digital leadership programme for registered care managers, it has attracted a much wider range of learners, including company directors. In fact, NCF encourages anyone interested in technology to take part in the programme, recognising that many digital leaders in the care sector do not hold formal leadership positions.

The programme is delivered online during four day-long weekly sessions:

- The Digital Basics
- Being a Digital Leader
- Data and Cyber Security Knowledge and Governance
- Critical Thinking and Action Planning

Building learners' confidence

The programme aims to address any anxieties or concerns around using technology with people who draw on care. It does this by helping learners understand how tech can be used in the context of the services they provide.

[24] https://www.nationalcareforum.org.uk/

One of the key sessions provides a "deep dive" into 10 different types of ATech, giving participants a better sense of the range of products and services available. Importantly, every technology is explained through a real-life story about how people can benefit from using it.

Coproduction has also been embedded as a core tenet of the programme. It also stresses the importance of cultural change in helping care organisations successfully adopt technology, and the vital role that coproduction plays in facilitating such change – by involving both staff and people who use their services in decision-making.

A final key feature of the programme is the last session, in which learners are encouraged to make the case to their directors and commissioners for technology by delivering a 10-minute presentation explaining why their organisation should adopt a device they learned about on the course.

Box 2.1: Professional Association of Assistive Technologists

The Professional Association of Assistive Technologists (PAAT)[25] is a new body that aims to improve quality, standards, opportunities and impact for Assistive Technology users, Assistive Technology practitioners and leaders in the field. It will launch in 2026 and is already accepting expressions of interest. The Association is open to professionals from the social care sector (as well as education, employment, and other sectors).

The PAAT will work to enhance the profession by helping members gain stronger recognition for their ATech skills and experience, including in recruitment, and providing access to "opportunities for professional development." The PAAT was founded by Dawn Green and Fil Mcintyre who work in the SEND further education sector (at Karten Network and TechAbility receptively) and David Hursthouse and Prof. Jane Seale, whose work has centred more on social care (at Leonard Cheshire and the Open University respectively).

Local authorities

Our evidence sessions heard that there is a rising demand within local authorities for adult social care staff to have ATech skills. While technology has long been recognised by councils as an important part of service delivery, adult social care commissioners increasingly recognise the importance of having the right organisational culture to make sure that the tech is used in a way that genuinely serves both the needs of staff and people who draw on care and support. This section's case studies highlight the importance of continuous learning within an

[25] https://pa-at.org/

organisational culture that values coproduction and collaboration between individual staff, agencies, and communities. They also show that the best outcomes are often only achieved when influential senior leaders are involved in driving change - demonstrating the need for ATech knowledge and skills at all levels of the organisation, especially at the highest levels.

Somerset Council's Technology Enabled Care Service

Somerset has a resident population of 571,600. A quarter of the population is aged 65 or older, with people aged 75 or older accounting for 11% of residents. The overall population is expected to grow by 15% over the next 25 years, with the share of residents aged 75 or older projected to double during that period.[26]

The Council was made a unitary authority in 2023. Its adult social care service has two parts: an operational service made up of frontline social care teams and an adult social care commissioning and quality service.[27]

Building an assistive technology training programme

Until recently, the service had been slow to adopt technology and lacked expertise in tech. That changed in 2023 when Somerset's Local Transformation Programme committed to using technology to make people's lives better, and led to the creation of a dedicated Technology Enabled Care Service to deliver the new strategy.

The education and training for both frontline staff form a core part of the TEC service's role. To help keep costs down and make sure the new training meets the needs of the different teams at the Council, they have created their own training programme. Provided in collaboration with suppliers, the in-person training incorporates staff feedback that they want to be able to see, feel and touch the technology. Staff learn which products they can order and how to assess people's technology needs.

Technology training is now mandatory for all new staff, who must complete induction activities within their first six months. The TEC service has found that integrating tech into general onboarding processes helps new starters understand how it fits with other adult social care practices. This encourages staff to embed technology into everyday activities, rather than treating it as a specialist intervention for only people with certain types of needs.

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[26] https://democracy.somerset.gov.uk/documents/s52391/Annual%20Report%20Lead%20Member%20ASC%20Housing%20FINAL%20May%202025.pdf

[27] https://somersetprovidernetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Appendix-4-ASC-Strategy-2023-2026.pdf

The programme provides staff with a variety of learning opportunities. These include a weekly drop-in session for the commissioning team covering different topics, a monthly service-wide tech chat, and another monthly session for new staff and existing colleagues who need to refresh their training. It also organises workshops for the Council's annual "Carnival of Practice".

The TEC service measures the effectiveness of the programme through pre- and post-training questionnaires. It also keeps track of how many trained staff go on to organise technology for the people they support. These metrics are being used to plan future activities.

Working with partners

In addition to the main training offer, the Council has partnered with NHS Somerset's technology-enhanced learning team to create an online module. This aims to provide further education students and existing health and social care staff with a general awareness of technology and the different types of situations and people it can support. The module takes up to around 30 minutes to complete and is hosted on both the Council and NHS Somerset's learning platforms.

The TEC service is also advising on the creation of the Somerset Health and Social Care Academy planned in Bridgewater. This purpose-built venue will feature a demonstration of a virtual ward and host an independent living centre showcasing technology. The online module will also be available to visitors and learners.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich's Digital Health and Care Technology (DHACT) Service

The Royal Borough of Greenwich is home to over 289,000 people. Since 2011, its resident population has increased by 13.6%, making Greenwich the fastest-growing London borough. However, the older population has expanded even more rapidly, increasing by 15.6% over the same period. In 2021, 8.4% were identified as having a disability or condition that limited their activities "a lot".[28]

[28] https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/8035/health_and_adult_services_local_account_2024_to_2025.pdf; https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/6311/health_and_wellbeing_strategy_2023_to_2028.pdf

Integrating health and social services

It is against this demographic backdrop and the opportunity to give people different outcomes that the Council has worked with local and regional NHS partners to introduce its Digital Health and Care Technology (DHACT) service.[29] The DHACT service is designed for people who are eligible for support from adult social services, as well as people supported by community health or those who need immediate support (including hospital discharge and admission prevention). Funded primarily through the Better Care Fund, the service is run by a multidisciplinary team that brings together social workers and occupational therapists from the Council and nursing staff from the NHS. This is supported by commissioned partnerships for specialist delivery and management of technology and data. The existing telecare team has been integrated into the new service as a specialist monitoring and response function.

The DHACT service aims to put digital technology at the heart of health and social care service provision. It seeks to empower people to have more choice and control in how they manage any needs they may have. To implement this new approach, the adult social care and NHS teams have undergone a significant cultural transformation programme. The culture was created by combining new ways of working with a dedicated staff education and training programme.

Promoting ATech skills through culture change

The programme began in 2022 when Rethink Partners were commissioned to undertake a six-month research project exploring the ATech needs of the Greenwich residents. It also examined the factors that encouraged and hindered the adoption of ATech. The Council and Rethink Partners worked to organise a series of coproduction activities with service staff and members of the public, including people from communities whose voices might not normally be heard in such projects. These activities enabled the research team to gain an understanding of their attitudes, beliefs, assets, capabilities, gaps, fears, and biases around the use of technology for independence.

The research informed the development of a new outcomes framework, consisting of the outcomes specified in the 2014 Care Act and six bespoke high-level categories: emotional wellbeing, safety, physical wellbeing, activities of daily living, living independently at home, choice, and control. These outcomes have been embedded into care planning and referral forms to make it easier for technology to be considered in these activities and to enable services to monitor its use against the framework. This ensures referrals are outcome-based

[29] https://committees.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?Id=314

rather than technology-focussed – supporting people to consider what needs to be achieved rather than the solution.

Another output from the project with Rethink Partners was a vision for the service, which was co-produced with staff and residents. This stated that the service would be jointly run by the NHS and the Royal Borough of Greenwich to transform the way health and social care is provided by delivering integrated, person-centred care.

Facilitating professional development through hands-on support and regular training

The DHACT service has supported this transformation project through a combination of practical support to adult social care and NHS teams, and an ongoing ATech training programme embedded within wider continuing professional development cycles.

Staff from the service work across different teams to support colleagues to understand the impact and outcomes for those they are working with who have been identified as likely to benefit from technology. These engagements also provide opportunities for the service's staff to engage colleagues in other teams in wider discussions about technology in the context of the services they provide. The DHACT service is also building a network of ATech ambassadors to spread skills across teams, helping to build their internal capacity to deliver change and share expertise.

As well as providing practical support, the service oversees a training programme, which includes:

- Mandatory training for all staff: These sessions cover good social work practices before exploring how technology can support good practice.
- Specialist sessions: The service runs an ongoing series of sessions tailored to specific teams, care pathways, different types of impairments and medical conditions and specific technologies.

The service also provides training for new staff and access to a range of online resources and guides.

Box 2.2: The Barnsley Assistive Technology Team

The Barnsley Assistive Technology Team[30] provides specialised Augmentative Communication Aid and Environmental Control services across Yorkshire and Humberside. Based at Barnsley Hospital, the team is run by a multidisciplinary group of clinical scientists, technologists, speech and language therapists and occupational therapists. It aims to improve the independence of disabled people by providing electronic assistive technologies.

In addition to delivering services, the team works to inform local and train NHS and council staff across Yorkshire and Humberside to use assistive technology with the people they support. It offers a programme of nine assistive technology training modules covering subjects ranging from access methods that allow disabled people to use technology, the key principles of augmentative and alternative communication, aid assessments, and managing people's expectations to develop an AAC service, to collaborative team working.
The team's website also hosts a series of resources including how to videos and information packs on different technologies and service good practices.

[30] https://assistivetech.barnsleyhospital.nhs.uk/services/assistive-technology-advice-support/

Recommendations

Government

1. The DHSC should further embed ATech into the 'care workforce pathway for adult social care'. This should include:
    a. Support the development of a Care Technologist role and related qualifications. To achieve this:
        i. The pathway should either recognise technology as one of the 'specialist areas of practice' so that Care Technologists are defined as 'practice leaders', or create a separate Care Technologist role category.
        ii. The pathway should list learning opportunities, which could include courses developed as part of the Care Technologist Training Project, the East Kent Colleges Group training at Levels 2-5 and some modules of the MSc in Educational Assistive Technology.
    b. Add new ATech learning opportunities to the care workforce framework as they are developed by the sector, including those listed above.

2. The DHSC's dedicated funding for upskilling the social care workforce should recognise ATech as a priority.
    a. Expand the range of qualifications eligible to be funded through the 'Adult Social Care Learning and Development Support Scheme', to include additional qualifications related to ATech.
        i. This would include the East Kent Colleges Group training and the training developed as part of the Care Technology Training project.
    b. Use a portion of the £100 million investment in Community Help Partnerships to create an ATech Learning Resources Fund that can be drawn upon by local areas to establish ATech Learning and Demonstration Suites. Located on college sites, the suites would support learning on social care courses (including the proposed new V-Levels) and allow care providers and individuals to see what is possible with modern ATech.

3. The DWP should reform adult skills funding rules to remove barriers to the provision of ATech learning opportunities.
    a. Learners over 18 should be fully funded to take Level 3 and below social care qualifications, even where learners are currently in employment. This could be achieved by designating social care as a priority skills need nationally, or by allowing areas to designate a set of local priority skills needs.
    b. The government should review the prohibition on colleges taking on debt in view of the barriers colleges face to making capital investments, such as the purchase or construction of new buildings to house ATech Learning Suites and other learning spaces.

    c. The Technical Excellence Colleges TEC scheme should be extended to create TECs for Health and Social Care, which would include ATech Learning and Demonstration Suites.
4. In anticipation of the new powers to oversee adult education, conferred by the English Devolution Bill, Combined and Strategic Authorities should develop adult social care workforce strategies for their areas that include digital skills training.
    a. The Adult Skills Fund could be used to invest in ATech education and training courses for the care workforce, including by adapting the model pioneered in Kent and Medway and creating new educational programmes for the sector.

Sector

5. In line with the recommendations of the Workforce Strategy for Adult Social Care in England (2024), the sector should collaborate to enhance the Digitising Social Care directory of digital skills training opportunities. This could be achieved by:
    a. Surveying social care organisations and skills providers to discover and add training opportunities not currently listed (such as the East Kent Colleges Group training and TSA's Virtual Home & TEC Quality CPD courses).
    b. Identifying gaps in the current range of training opportunities and commissioning the development of new courses.

6. ATech skills should be required as part of social care service design to ensure both effective services and to increase the incentive for employers and individuals to invest in training. This could include:
    a. Specifying required ATech skills for the workforce within care standards, service design plans, assessment frameworks, and contract tender documents.
    b. Using the evaluation of care services to measure and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of ATech training, to build the evidence base for further investment in ATech training.

7. ATech skills should be included in qualifying training and CPD for professionals allied to the adult social care sector, such as occupational therapists and handypersons. This could involve
    a. Building on the work of the Royal College of Occupational Therapists which provides resources to its members on evidence-based practice with ATech, and collaboration between CEDIA (the Industry Association for Smart home installers) and Foundations (the Association of Supporting Home Improvement Agencies) to help handypersons learn home automation ATech skills.
    b. The soon-to-be launched Professional Association of Assistive Technologists, should consider the establishment of a forum for members with an interest in social care, bringing together Care Technologists with professionals from Allied Health, Employment Support, SEND Education and other sectors.

About Policy Connect

Policy Connect is a cross-party think tank. We specialise in supporting parliamentary groups, forums and commissions, delivering impactful policy research and event programmes and bringing together parliamentarians and government in collaboration with academia, business and civil society to help shape public policy in Westminster and Whitehall, so as to improve people's lives. Our work focusses on five key policy areas which are: Education & Skills; Industry, Technology & Innovation; Sustainability; Health; and Accessibility. We provide the secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Assistive and Accessible Technology (APPGAT). We are a social enterprise and are funded by a combination of regular annual membership subscriptions and time-limited sponsorships. We are proud to be a Disability Confident and London Living Wage employer, and a member of Social Enterprise UK.

About the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Assistive and Accessible Technology (APPGAT)

The APPGAT aims to disseminate knowledge, generate debate and facilitate engagement on assistive technology amongst Members of both Houses of Parliament. The group is chaired by Josh Fenton-Glynn MP (Labour), with parliamentary Officers Lord Shinkwin (Conservative), Sadik Al-Hassan MP (Labour), and Lord Low (Crossbench), and Members including Steve Darling MP (Lib Dem), Rt Hon. Lord Blunkett (Labour), and Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson (Crossbench).