Learning technologies in social care: a brief guide for learners

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1. Introduction

Learning technologies have much to offer people working in social care, and it's not just about doing online courses. This brief guide offers an overview of the ways in which technology can improve your knowledge and skills as a worker, as well as providing a selected list of free online learning resources relevant to social care. The guide is aimed primarily at people working in social care, but we hope it may also be of use to carers, friends and family of people needing care and support.

2. An overview of technologies for learners

Digital technologies offer learners a range of choices that were unimaginable even five years ago. From online universities to 'bite-sized' chunks of mobile learning and from professional networks to online portfolios, learners are increasingly using the internet to improve their workplace knowledge and skills.

From the learner's perspective, learning technologies fall into three distinct groups:
- learning content
- learning networks; and
- learning management tools.

2.1 Social care learning content

E-learning content varies greatly, from the simplest of website pages to full 'whizz bang' online interactive simulations. All types of e-learning content are used in the social care sector. Below are some brief descriptions of the most common types of learning content that are directly accessible by individual learners. Section 3 contains a list of free learning resources relevant to people working in social care.

Free access e-learning modules
These are self-contained pieces of online learning, with specific learning outcomes, available free on the web. They are generally short, anything from 5-minute 'bite-sized learning' to an hour or so of learning time. They are often supplied by national organisations with a remit in social care, for example the Social Care Institute for Excellence, or by educational bodies such as the Open University. This content can be accessed by anyone, with the only requirement being a connection to the internet.

- Advantages of free access e-learning modules
  - No cost to access
  - Low-risk way to try out e-learning content
  - Good way to support informal learning or professional development
  - Can be accessed anytime and anywhere with a connection to the internet
  - Can be undertaken at your own pace, and in private.

- Disadvantages
  - Can be hard to locate on the web

- Quality and/or how current the content is, can be variable
- Assessment is rarely included, so it's hard to check that you have understood the material correctly
- Often no way of recording your completion of the learning
- Modules may not be linked to standards or qualification frameworks
- Usually no technical or tutor support. As the learner, you are 'on your own'.

Free access e-learning courses
These are entire courses, delivered online and free to the learner. Also known as MOOCs (massive open online courses), this approach to delivering learning is rapidly increasing globally. The largest collection of MOOCs is available via Apple's iTunesU (iTunes 'University'), and this is a good place to start browsing. You don't need to have Apple technology to access iTunes; you can download it onto most devices. MOOCs are often created by educational bodies, many in the USA but also notably by the Open University in the UK.

The advantages of free online courses are similar to those of online modules. The disadvantages are also comparable, although courses are more likely than modules to include some form of assessment so you can check your learning. However, a lack of comprehensive technical or tutor support, or lack of accreditation, may be bigger deterrents if you are taking a course than if you are doing a short module.

Video content
Digital technology has made video cheap to create and easy to share. YouTube, by far the most popular video hosting website globally, contains free instructional and training videos from many sources relevant to UK social care, including SCIE's Social Care TV, the Alzheimer's Society and the Open University. Learners who feel uncomfortable with text-based information may find video attractive. One problem with video, however, can be the lack of a sufficiently fast internet connection to deliver it smoothly.

E-books
E-books, at their simplest, are digital versions of books and they offer a number of practical advantages in terms of portability and ease of access. They can also make use of multimedia to offer a much richer experience than paper books, as well as linking to the internet. You don't need a special e-book device such as a Kindle. You can read many e-books on your desktop computer or laptop, although you may need to get some free software to do it. E-books are popular with social work students who need to access textbooks and reference books. Within the care sector some local authorities, for example, have subscriptions to e-book suppliers for a range of social work and social care titles.

2.2 Learning networks

The rise of online social media, where users can create share their own content, offers a lot of opportunities for formal and informal learning. Some social care

employers are making use of online networks to help staff access and share knowledge and learning. Even if your employer does not do this, there are still free networks you can access directly as a learner.

Webinars
Webinars are 'seminars on the web', also known as online workshops or web conferences. Webinars allow trainers or presenters, in one place, to reach learners in another location or many locations in real-time. Text messages, slideshows, voice and video can all be shared simultaneously. The technologies support one-way presentation approaches and also more interactive group learning approaches.

Blogging and micro-blogging
Blogging is short for 'web log', and is basically an online diary. Blog sites also allow other people to comment on blog posts, so they are more interactive, informal and personal than, for example, a company website.

Micro-blogging means sending, receiving and replying to short messages with other people in real-time. The most common micro-blogging tool is Twitter, a free service limited to 140 characters. As an individual learner, you can use micro-blogging to keep up-to-date with colleagues, ask questions and share your ideas.

Online professional networking
Professional networking sites enable users to create a profile of themselves and their professional experience and interests, and to connect with others within a given field of interest. They also support special interest groups, where members can raise questions and discuss issues.

Some examples of learning networks relevant to social care are provided in Section 3.

2.3 Learning management tools

E-portfolios
At its simplest, an e-portfolio is an online collection of examples of your work. Most people who have studied at college or university in recent years will have experience of using e-portfolios. They are also quite widely used in the delivery of health and social care workplace qualifications. Typical functions of an e-portfolio include:
- collecting and organising documents or other digital resources, for example, images and videos, that evidence your learning
- sharing of selected resources with selected audiences. This might include college tutors, workplace training assessors, or current or future employers.

Many educational, training and professional organisations offer e-portfolios as a service to their customers. For example, the National Skills Academy for Social Care's e-portfolio focuses on care leadership skills self-assessment, whilst the College of Social Work e-portfolio focuses on social workers' professional

development. These kinds of portfolios are usually only accessible to you for as long you are a member of the particular organisation.

Personal knowledge management

Digital technologies offer many ways to find and organise information that is useful to your everyday work and learning; a process sometimes called personal knowledge management.

- **Online searching**

Most people are familiar with putting a word or phrase into Google or another search engine and viewing the results page. Very often, this gives us the information we need. However, getting a little more advanced in how you search online can really help your personal learning and development. For example, as well as a standard search, Google offers specialist searches including Scholar, Books, Blogs, Videos and Images.

Google Scholar, for example, contains mostly journal articles, academic books and papers. It is as easy to use as the regular Google web search, and has a helpful 'advanced search' option that can automatically narrow search results to a specific journal or article.

- **RSS**

RSS, short for Really Simple Syndication, is a way of managing new information as it is published. Also known as 'news feeds', 'web feeds' or just 'feeds', RSS allows you to see at a glance what's new on your favourite websites. Websites send out a regular feed (a list of new material such as articles or news) and you can visit them only to read the items that interest you. It is a great way to keep up-to-date with what is happening in your professional areas of interest.

- **Social bookmarking**

Social bookmarking systems, such as Delicious, allow users to save links to web pages or other online resources that they want to remember and/or share with specific groups of people. As an individual, you can save, tag, share and easily find websites of interest to you, as well as see what others with similar interests are bookmarking.

Section 3 includes sources of further information about personal knowledge management.

3. Selected free resources

3.1 Collections of free social care learning materials

Apple iTunesU
An increasingly popular source of free online learning, iTunesU is used by many universities to deliver free courses. A number of relevant courses can be found by searching in 'social welfare' and 'sociology'. You don't need to have an Apple device to use iTunesU, but you do need to download the iTunes software onto your device. You just need to search for 'iTunes download' and follow the links. Once you have iTunes, look for the iTunesU tab at the top of the home page and use the dropdown menu in the tab to search the subject areas available.
http://www.apple.com/uk/itunes/

E-learning for Healthcare
e-LfH is a Department of Health programme providing learning content free of charge for the training of the NHS workforce across the UK. Some of the resources are also available to social care workers, provided their employer is registered with the National Minimum Dataset for Social Care. Ask your employer about access
http://www.e-lfh.org.uk/home/

IRISS Learning Exchange
This is a digital library indexing thousands of learning resources specifically for social services education and training. It includes information sheets, official publications, interactive learning resources, video clips, case studies, podcasts and radio broadcasts; aimed at Scottish Social Services but many resources relevant to, and covering, all of the UK
http://lx.iriss.org.uk/

Open University OpenLearn
OpenLearn is the Open University's free resource centre for learning materials. Many social care related materials are in the 'Body-Mind' section
http://www.open.edu/openlearn/body-mind

Open University on iTunesU
The OU is currently the publisher of the largest collection of social care relevant learning material on iTunesU
http://www.open.edu/itunes/subjects/health-and-social-care

SCIE e-learning modules
E-learning modules of varying length from the Social Care Institute for Excellence, covering topics such as dementia care and communication skills
www.scie.org.uk/publications/elearning

SCIE Social Care TV
Short online films on a range of topics from the Social Care Institute for Excellence. Although not designed as e-learning, these videos are useful as learning support materials
www.scie.org.uk/socialcaretv

3.2 Social media services with social care content

Knowledge Hub at Local Government Association
You do not have to work for local government to join these professional online communities. There are a number of topics of interest to people working in social care, including the Fostering Information Exchange and The College of Social Work Community
https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/home

LinkedIn
One of the best-known professional networking sites; you need to set up a basic profile to participate. Once you have done this, you can search in the 'Groups' section for discussion groups relevant to UK social care, and there are 100s
http://www.linkedin.com/home

PA Net
Website providing advice and guidance for personal assistants and direct employers, which also has a discussion forum
http://panet.org.uk/

Twitter
The micro-blogging site requires you to register but you don't have to tweet unless you want to. Try searching for 'social care' or more specific topics of interest such as 'personalisation' or 'dementia' in the Twitter search box, so see what others are saying. Join in, if and when, you feel comfortable.
https://twitter.com/

Vimeo
Sometimes described as a 'professional' version of Youtube
https://vimeo.com/

YouTube
A great source for learning, YouTube does not require any form of registration. Just put topics of interest in the search box, or browse the 'charity and non-profits' channel, for example
http://www.youtube.com/

3.3 Learning materials on specific social care topics

- **Alcohol and drugs**

Alcohol Learning Centre: Alcohol Identification and Brief Advice
Training resource for healthcare and social care professionals delivering services in the alcohol harm reduction field
http://www.alcohollearningcentre.org.uk/alcoholeLearning/learning/IBA/IntroPage/index.html

Kirklees Council: Drug Training for Free
An introduction to the issues of drug misuse; suitable for parents, carers, employers etc
http://www.drugtrainingforfree.co.uk/

Re-Solv: Online training
Five modules and self-assessment on volatile substance abuse
http://training.re-solv.org/

SCIE: Parental Substance Misuse
Three modules explore parental substance misuse and the effects on children and parenting capacity
http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/elearning/parentalsubstancemisuse/index.asp

- **Cancer care**

Macmillan Cancer Support: LearnZone
Online learning aimed at professionals and public. You need to register to use the site. Topics are wide-ranging, from breast screening to topics for workers such as business case development for services
http://learnzone.macmillan.org.uk

- **Dementia**

Alzheimer's Society: YouTube channel
Videos feature people with dementia and their friends and family, recounting personal experiences, as well as ways to help families with dementia, advice on what to do if you're worried about your memory. The videos are aimed at the general public
http://www.youtube.com/user/AlzheimersSociety

Dementia Services Development Centre
A virtual, dementia-friendly care home to enable learners to explore good environmental design for people with dementia
http://www.dementiacentreni.org/virtualhome

E-learning for Healthcare: E-learning for Dementia
Skills for Care has worked in partnership with E-learning for Healthcare to provide free access for adult social care employers registered with the National Minimum Data Set for Social Care. You can't sign up to it directly as an individual learner, but ask your employer about access
http://www.e-lfh.org.uk/projects/dementia/access-the-e-learning/

NHS Education Scotland's Knowledge Network: Dementia – Promoting Excellence
Videos and other online learning resources that reference Scottish Vocational Qualifications, but the content is relevant for all health and social care workers
http://www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/home/portals-and-topics/dementia-promoting-excellence.aspx

Norfolk and Suffolk Dementia Alliance: The Learning Location for Dementia Care
Includes a self-assessment tool to gauge your current knowledge of dementia, and a range of learning resources
http://www.learning-location.com/dementia-care/

SCIE: Dementia Gateway
A collection of different resource types, including e-learning, focused on dementia and dementia care
www.scie.org.uk/publications/dementia/elearning.asp

SCIE: Using ICT in activities for people with dementia.
Offers a downloadable print-based guide
http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/ictfordementia/index.asp

- **Dignity in Care**

Dignity in Care Network: With Respect
Training materials for home care and residential care, hosted by the Dignity in Care Network. It offers a downloadable print-based version, rather than online learning
www.dignityincare.org.uk/Topics/championresources

- **Drug safety**

Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency: E-learning
MHRA provides an e-learning resource on recognising and reporting adverse drug reactions
http://www.mhra.gov.uk/ConferencesLearningCentre/LearningCentre/index.htm

NHS Diabetes England: E-learning
E-learning on the safe use of insulin and other therapies. It is designed for healthcare staff, but is accessible to non-NHS staff, provided they are registered
http://nhsdiabetes.healthcareea.co.uk/england

- **End-of-life care**

End of life care for all (e-ELCA)
Skills for Care has worked in partnership with E-for Healthcare to provide free access to e-ELCA for those adult social care employers registered with the National Minimum Data Set for Social Care. You can't sign up to it directly as an individual learner, but ask your employer about access
www.endoflifecareforall.com

Help the Hospices: Current Learning in Palliative Care (CLIP)
A collection of online tutorials of approximately 15 minutes each
www.helpthehospices.org.uk/clip

Norfolk and Suffolk Palliative Care Academy: The Learning Location for Palliative Care
Includes a self-assessment tool to gauge your current knowledge of end-of-life care and a range of learning resources
http://www.learning-location.com/palliative-care

- **First Aid**

The Red Cross: Everyday First Aid
Video introduction to first aid for the general public, as well as children's first aid and a first aid quiz leading to an Everyday First Aid certificate. It is also available as a mobile app for Apple, Android and Blackberry
http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/First-aid/Everyday-First-Aid

The St John Ambulance: First Aid Advice
Videos and other materials on common first aid situations for the general public
http://www.sja.org.uk/sja/first-aid-advice/videos.aspx

- **Health and safety**

Health and Safety Executive: Slips and Trips
A short online health and safety course relevant to care home settings
www.hse.gov.uk/slips

Scottish Social Services Council: Health and Safety for Social Service Workers
E-book available on iTunes, contains useful quizzes and tests including a virtual care room where you identify hazards and risks
https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/health-safety-for-social-service/id537176596?mt=8

- **Infection control**

IRISS: Learning Exchange Preventing Infection in Care collection
Curated collection of resources in infection control in care environments. Includes downloadable workbooks and videos
http://lx.iriss.org.uk/category/learning-exchange-collections/preventing-infection-care

- **Learning disability care**

IRISS: Mindreel
Large resource of about 100 films addressing a wide range of mental health issues. It includes learning disability; mainly personal perspectives and also documentary, drama and animation
http://mindreel.org.uk/

Rix Centre: Multimedia Advocacy
The Rix Centre not-for-profit research charity has produced a short e-learning taster introducing the concept of multimedia advocacy for people with learning disabilities
www.multimediaadvocacy.com

- **Mental capacity**

Mental Health Foundation: Assessing Mental Capacity Toolkit
Online tool to help care staff and others evaluate, reflect and learn about an assessment of mental capacity they have completed
http://www.amcat.org.uk/

SCIE: Mental Capacity Act (MCA)
Nine modules exploring the MCA, including best interests, decision-making and how to support people to make their own decisions
http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/elearning/mentalcapacityact/index.asp

- **Mental health**

Centre of Excellence in Interdisciplinary Mental Health at the University of Birmingham
Short films on a wide range of mental health topics, with an emphasis on service user experience. Although not designed as e-learning, these videos are useful as learning support materials
www.ceimh.bham.ac.uk/tv

IRISS: Mindreel

Large resource of about 100 films addressing a wide range of mental health issues, including dementia and learning disability. They are mainly from the point of view of the person with mental health problems and includes documentary, drama and animation

http://mindreel.org.uk/

SCIE: Parental Mental Health and Families
Eight modules on how mental ill-health of parents can impact families
http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/elearning/parentalmentalhealthandfamilies/index.asp

SCIE: Sexual, reproductive and mental health
Eight modules on sexual health in the context of mental health problems
http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/elearning/sexualhealth/index.asp

- **People management**

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service: E-learning
ACAS provides ten short e-learning courses on issues such as managing absence, working parents and age discrimination. You need to register for this service
http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=2113

- **Personalisation**

IRISS: Learning Exchange Personalisation collection
Curated collection of resources on personalisation and self-directed support, including legislation, policy and e-learning resources. It is mainly focused on Scotland, with some resources being available UK-wide
http://lx.iriss.org.uk/category/learning-exchange-collections/personalisation-self-directed-support

SCIE: Personalisation E-learning
Two modules on how to support individuals through the personalisation process
http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/elearning/personalisation/index.asp

SCIE: Personalisation E-guide
A web-based guide to the story so far, of the personalisation agenda in adult social care, incorporating videos
http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide47/Home/Personalisation/1

- **Safeguarding**

SCIE: Adult Safeguarding
Video-based modules with additional course content in the 'study area' that references the University of Bournemouth and Learn to Care's competencies on adult safeguarding
http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/elearning/adultsafeguarding/index.asp

- **Stroke care**

NHS Education Scotland: Stroke Training and Awareness Resources
Interactive learning with quizzes, animations, video clips and case scenarios. There is also a printable personal learning log and certificate
www.strokecorecompetencies.org

- **Telecare**

Dementia Services Development Centre: E-books
A range of free e-books on the use of telecare with different client groups
http://www.dementiashop.co.uk/ebooks

3.4 Learning materials on personal knowledge management

Commoncraft: Short videos on social media, technology and net safety
Elegant and engaging videos from US-based 'explanation' experts, offering clear introductions to a range of social media and technology concepts
http://www.commoncraft.com/

IRISS: Confidence through Evidence
An introduction to using evidence in your work practice
http://toolkit.iriss.org.uk/

IRISS: Guide to social bookmarking
http://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/social-bookmarking

IRISS: Guide to Google advanced search
http://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/google-advanced-search

IRISS: Guide to Google Scholar
http://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/google-scholar-and-related-search-tools

IRISS: Information Literacy
Online tutorial introducing information literacy. Enables you to find, evaluate and share information, including activities to help you develop your skills
http://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/information-literacy

IRISS: Social Networking: Friend or Foe
Online learning resource looking at the potential value of social networking tools for social work and social care workers
http://content.iriss.org.uk/socialworkshop/

SCIE: Managing Knowledge to Improve Care
Principles and practice of knowledge management for people in social care organisations
http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/elearning/knowledgemanagement/index.asp

3.5 Learning materials for learners new to technology

BBC Webwise
Collection of quality resources on basic online skills, safety and privacy, etc
http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise/0/

Digital Unite
Free learning content aimed at novice users, plus a tutor network, organisational training and qualifications for aspiring digital champions
http://digitalunite.com/

Learnmyway
Portal with a collection of resources for new online learners
http://www.learnmyway.com/