



Digitally Kind

Bridging the gaps between digital policy,
process and practice to improve outcomes



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Acknowledgements

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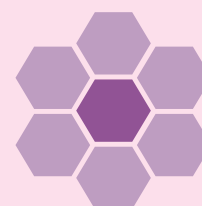
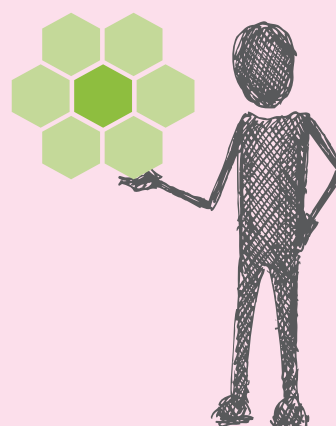
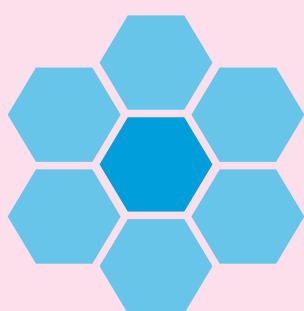
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Summary Of Digitally Kind Considerations

VALUES AND GOVERNANCE	ACCESS	SAFETY AND WELLBEING	KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS	PARTICIPATION
Organisations				
<p>Does the digital policy align with the values of the organisation? How?</p> <p>Does the digital approach contribute to or hinder the delivery of the outcomes of the organisation?</p> <p>How does digital delivery policy relate to other organisational policies?</p> <p>What are the external policies and procedures the organisation needs to comply with?</p> <p>What digital expertise exists on the Board?</p> <p>What is the organisational culture towards technology adoption?</p> <p>Is there a clear rationale for why each digital tool or platform is used?</p>	<p>Are staff provided with professional devices for work-related activities?</p> <p>Is there a clear rationale for why each digital tool or platform is used?</p> <p>How is access and management of digital channels allocated, monitored and restricted?</p> <p>What consideration has been given to any lack of digital access for end users and staff?</p> <p>Which budgets do different types of technology come from?</p> <p>What is the process for assigning time or resource to digital engagement activities?</p>	<p>What risk assessment is used to review the use of online technology?</p> <p>Is there a process for managing unofficial online accounts?</p> <p>Is there scope for flexible working to manage digital delivery?</p> <p>How are staff supported in managing and reporting abuse or harmful content? Is their personal wellbeing considered?</p> <p>Have all relevant staff members received safeguarding training?</p>	<p>Do staff members have the appropriate level of autonomy to focus on outcomes? Is it too high/low?</p> <p>Have all relevant staff received digital training?</p> <p>Have all relevant volunteers received digital training?</p> <p>How are staff skills evaluated and updated?</p> <p>Do trustees have the digital knowledge required to govern digital delivery?</p>	<p>Who writes or owns the current policies?</p> <p>How are individuals, staff and volunteers engaged in the process?</p> <p>Is there a feedback loop?</p> <p>Are there particular terms being used that staff find difficult or challenging to interpret?</p> <p>What meetings, fora or processes are in place for people to raise issues and discuss options?</p> <p>What is the role of senior leadership in developing the digital approach?</p>

VALUES AND GOVERNANCE	ACCESS	SAFETY AND WELLBEING	KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS	PARTICIPATION
Funders, Policy Makers & Regulators				
<p>Does the digital policy align with the outcomes of the funding? How?</p> <p>What are the external policies and procedures the organisation needs to comply with?</p>	<p>What risk assessment is used to review the use of digital technology?</p> <p>Which budgets do different types of technology come from?</p>	<p>Have all relevant staff members received safeguarding training?</p>	<p>Have all relevant staff received digital skills training?</p> <p>How are staff skills monitored and updated?</p> <p>Do both funder and grantee organisation trustees have the digital knowledge required to govern digital delivery?</p>	<p>How are individuals, staff and volunteers engaged in the process?</p>
Digital Services & Platforms				
<p>Do terms, conditions and community guidelines support the safe use of a platform by youth organisations?</p>	<p>How equitable is the end user experience?</p>	<p>What specific guidance and tools are available for organisations working with young people?</p>	<p>What specific training and opportunities are available for organisations working with young people?</p>	<p>How are youth organisations, young people and volunteers involved in platform policy, design and management?</p>



Overview

The use of digital technology has increased rapidly over the last decade and intensified further since the COVID-19 pandemic. This is true for organisations as well as individuals, particularly in the third and public sector, and there are many success stories of effective digital transformation to be celebrated. The use of technology in services can clearly support wellbeing for individuals through increased participation, social connection and access to resources. But there are also challenges in ensuring there is appropriate infrastructure, guidance, and support in place for organisations to develop effective digital policies and practice and ensure outcomes are improved rather than undermined.

What Is This Resource?

This resource is designed as a starting point to open up conversations for organisations and to give an overview of a range of technical, social and cultural considerations around the use of digital when working with individuals. This report aims to support discussions on how to think about what your organisation needs from a digital policy; how to align policies, processes and practice around the use of digital; and how to identify, explore and address the gaps that may exist between organisational policy and practice around digital.

The ideas and suggestions set out in this paper are based on reflections from participatory workshops with over 40, primarily youth-focused, organisations through a project called the #NotWithoutMe Labs.

Who Is It For?

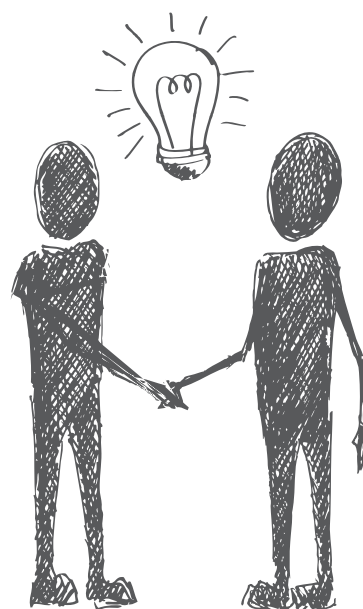
This resource is primarily aimed at **organisations** working with young people through direct programme delivery or providing support, advocacy or advice services. However, many of the principles hold for any organisation delivering services with the public.

We have also highlighted a short set of considerations for **funders, policy makers (including regulators)** and **online platforms**.

How to Use This Report

This report can be read as a whole or in sections.

It is possible to digest this resource in its entirety. However it has been designed to also allow topic areas to be taken as standalone discussions to enable readers to focus on the specific issues that they or their organisation are grappling with. A summary of the considerations is displayed on **pages 2-3** and the relevant questions are at the start of each consideration section.



Introduction

How Did We Get Here?

For the past five years, the Carnegie UK Trust's #NotWithoutMe programme has supported a range of policy, practice and research initiatives challenging digital exclusion for young people who may experience increased risk of harm. From funding digital project delivery across the UK, as presented in 'A digital world for all?' (Wilson & Grant, 2017); supporting research with Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership that explored the digital experiences of looked-after and accommodated young people in the city (Anderson & Swanton, 2019); to running an Accelerator programme to boost capacity and skills in organisations seeking to work digitally with young people (Cryer, 2020).

As we delivered these digital activities and others over recent years, the more we started hearing about the uncomfortable but less-voiced challenges, grey areas, tensions and unknowns that practitioners are dealing with on a daily basis about how they use digital technology to deliver their services. These issues include:

- Should I reply or should I block if a young person I've been working with contacts me on social media?
- Should I keep a copy of a young person's passwords if they ask me to?
- Should we moderate any or all peer-to-peer interaction online? If so, on what basis?
- Should I respond to or ignore messages if they are received outside of my paid working hours? Does this set a precedent?
- Should I use my own mobile phone for work-related purposes as I haven't been provided with one by my organisation?

Latterly, we have also begun to see a shift within some organisations from a position where 'not doing anything' with regards to digital was

seen as the least risk-inducing response, to one of a growing recognition that this is not always the case. We have seen this accelerate since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, with services rapidly needing to move entirely online and organisations forced to examine some of these issues very quickly.

At the same time, many organisations, including the Trust, have called for increased support to ensure that civil society organisations become more digitally capable and confident (Bowyer *et al.*, 2020). This includes technically upskilling staff, but also means ensuring there is a focus and critical reflection about the ways and whys of delivering services digitally (Good Things Foundation, 2020) (SCVO, 2020). We also believe this includes an increasing understanding of the importance of good quality work for individuals, with aspects such as 'sense of purpose', 'peer support' and 'employee involvement' (Irvine *et al.*, 2018), all of which can be aided or hindered by how organisations use technology in service provision.

What Have We Done?

In 2019, the Carnegie UK Trust ran a series of small-scale 'Lab' events across the UK to further research these challenges and to test out new approaches that might enable safer and more effective use of digital services in achieving the best outcomes for young people. These sessions were intended as an opportunity for individuals to critically explore, assess and experiment with what is suitable and appropriate for their community and organisation in the context in which they operate.

The #NotWithoutMe Labs built on findings from the Trust's Digital Futures and Enabling Wellbeing programmes to explore **the intersections between digital, kindness and safeguarding**, particularly when working with children and young people who may experience increased risk of harm.

The #NotWithoutMe Labs

Utilising paper-based activities and discussions, the Labs sought to draw out insights and considerations both unique to each participating organisation and common across many in the use of digital in service delivery. The Labs provided a safe, exploratory space for professionals to consider the many tensions that exist in digital delivery, including between:

- Children's right to be informed, play and express themselves and their right to privacy and safety
- Organisational responsibilities and staff autonomy
- Technical capabilities and personal abilities

The Labs were not intended to diminish the importance of essential safeguarding processes and policies. Instead, they aimed to explore how those policies might be implemented more effectively in a digital context, without unduly limiting engagement and opportunity for young people, or putting unrealistic expectations on staff. We wanted to gather evidence on experience and share approaches directly from practitioners and real-life examples.

Three full day #NotWithoutMe Labs in London, Glasgow and Cardiff were delivered with a mix of 40 predominantly youth-focused organisations. These organisations ranged in size, geography and function, including statutory services and voluntary organisations. A number of organisations were then supported to explore the topics further internally with their staff and the young people they were working with.

To allow the most effective conversations in the Labs we felt it was important in our role as facilitators of the sessions to remain agnostic regarding the solutions, appreciating that the implementation of technology is never truly

'neutral'. We were careful not to advocate for a 'technology-first' approach or suggest that 'going digital' is the only or better response. The Labs aimed to open up the space for conversation about these different approaches, noting also that the solutions may include a combination of responses.

The following set of discussions and considerations is based on this body of work and analysed thematically. The Labs were delivered across 2019 so we recognise that this research was undertaken in a pre-COVID-19 context and so, where possible and relevant, we have reflected this within the final write up.

How We Hope This Resource Will Help

Purpose

This resource has been designed as a starting point to open up conversations around digital delivery. It gives an overview of a range of technical, social and cultural considerations, rather than provide prescriptive recommendations or to act as a step-by-step handbook. Fundamentally, this isn't a 'how to write a digital policy' guide (there are already many fantastic resources including from the [NSPCC](#) and the [UK Safer Internet Centre](#)), but a tool to help organisations examine systemic questions such as '*how to think about what your organisation needs from a digital policy*'; '*how to align policies, processes and practice around the use of digital*'; and '*how to identify, explore and address the gaps that may exist between organisational policy and practice around digital*'.

We are aware that 'general guidance' or ideas can only ever provide part of the answer. This project is not proposed to be taken in isolation and is intended to complement upcoming specialist or sector-specific work which can provide deeper insight on a range

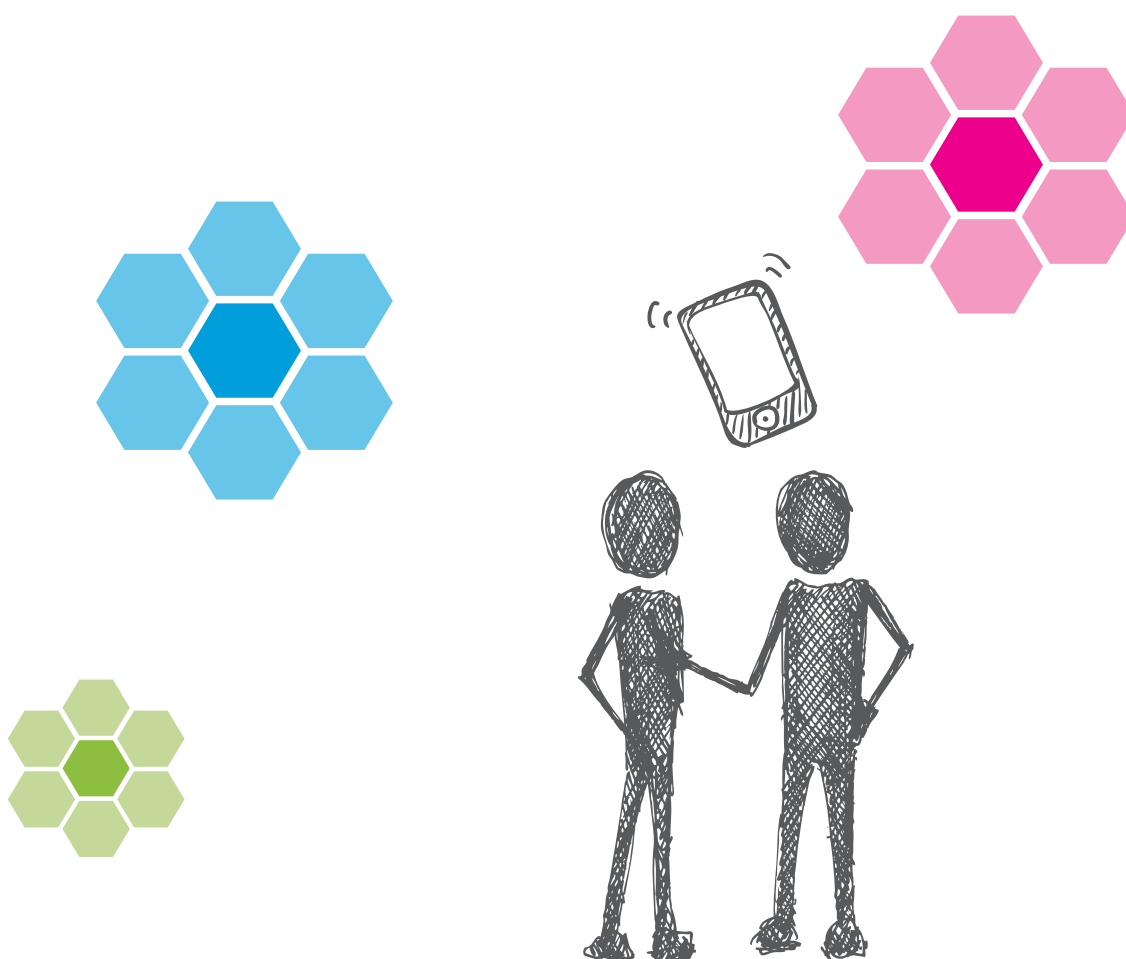
of specific issues. This includes the [DigiSafe](#), Principal Children and Families Social Worker (PCFSW) Digital Professionalism and Online Safeguarding project (with guidance [here](#)), [UKCIS Digital resilience Framework](#), Department for Education's [Safeguarding and remote education during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) or [Inclusive digital safety](#). We also hope that organisations will utilise, hack and adapt the considerations and activities to fit their own spaces.

It is our hope that these insights and tools will help organisations that work with young people, funders, policy makers and platforms to reflect on the effectiveness of current digital practice. We hope it will also provide opportunities to enable all stakeholders to share expertise, understand each other's needs and develop long-term responsive solutions that will ultimately provide the best services for young people and the professionals that support them.

Who Is It For?

This resource is primarily aimed at [organisations](#) working with young people through direct programme delivery, or as a support, campaign or advice service. However, many of the principles hold for any organisation delivering services with or for the public. For any organisation using this resource, it is important to contextualise it because some of the discussion points may be more, or less, relevant in particular settings. We also include considerations for [funders, policy makers including regulators](#) and [online platforms](#).

We encourage you to get in touch: if you would like further information about the project, please contact info@carnegieuk.org



The Rise in Digital Service Delivery

Mobile devices, messaging apps and social media platforms can be powerful tools to inform, support and empower young people. Over the past decade, there has been a growth in appetite from organisations wanting and needing to use digital tools in their work with young people to support their development and wellbeing. This shift to digital may be as either the primary delivery tool or as part of a package of offline and online services.

This trend intensified with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic that forced many organisations to either completely pivot to digital delivery or rapidly accelerated previous digital transformation plans. No longer able to deliver face-to-face services, or only in a very limited manner, organisations have had to find remote solutions. Given the fluctuating nature of the pandemic and the responses required, it is likely that delivery will continue to have to be a blend of remote and face-to-face for some time. Even if restrictions are fully removed, the shift to digital delivery is unlikely to be completely reversed – as young people's expectations and organisations' confidence, capability and infrastructure have evolved.

The Challenge for Organisational Policies and Digital Delivery

Organisational policies and processes designed to support and safeguard young people and staff, have, for many, been outpaced by technological developments or trends. As a result, policies can often feel at odds with the realities and demands of daily service delivery. Meanwhile, practitioners may lack the requisite skills and confidence to implement policies effectively in a fast-changing technological environment. Even when these policies, processes and practice are aligned, young people are likely to respond differently depending on their needs, the risks they face and their expectations around digital services. Policies and processes are often too generic to be relevant and inform responses to a diverse range of experiences.

These many factors combine to create complex strategic, practical and participation challenges.

The opportunity to address these issues is often reduced by competing organisational priorities, limited resources and the combination of a fast-changing digital environment with a historically risk-averse culture. It is recognised that policies for managing risk have been developed for good reason when working with groups experiencing different forms of vulnerability.



What Do We Mean by 'Organisational Digital Delivery Approach'?

Throughout this resource we refer to an 'organisational digital delivery approach' as a summary term and as a lens through which to explore the question '*how can professionals use online platforms, connected devices and digital tools to deliver an organisation's service with or for young people in the most effective and safest way?*' By 'effective', we mean that the policy, process and practice around the use of digital are aligned at all levels to deliver the best outcomes for children and young people.

This approach goes beyond staff use of technology in relation to the organisation, such as policies outlining appropriate or inappropriate ways to speak about the organisation online, website policy or cloud storage procedures. All of these may come under a digital policy more broadly. The approach we are describing also

incorporates the policies that specifically support interaction with young people. For example:

- Use of social media to interact with young people or promote organisational services
- Use of online platforms to facilitate conversations between young people
- Use of personal or professional devices, including smartphones, laptops and tablets
- Support for young people to get online or set up online accounts

An organisational digital delivery approach is a concept that aims to help organisations explore and answer these questions both in policy and in practice. This may take the form of a single discrete piece of policy work with specific scope and link to other policies, but it may also be an approach woven throughout existing policies and processes around safeguarding, data governance, cyber security, human resources, communications, participation or many others.



A Kindness Lens

Digital delivery has historically often been understood, set up and managed in a more transactional way than face-to-face services. While this can provide many benefits in terms of speed, reach and efficiency, it is important to ensure these tools are serving an organisation's mission and outcomes. If organisations can find a bridge between their desire to deliver person-centred practice and the capabilities and the affordances that digital provides, then digital can positively add to meeting outcomes. If not, then a tension may remain that could in some cases undermine an organisation's mission.

Some of our initial conversations in the early stages of the #NotWithoutMe Lab centred around 'digital safeguarding', and the emergent hypothesis led us to question whether the way digital tools are used is always in line with the organisation's overarching approach, outcomes and mission or if they are at odds. With this in mind, the Labs were framed around kindness, to explore whether an approach based on values might allow a slightly different conversation about the challenges and complexities of digital and social media use, and about the barriers to good practice.

Thinking about kindness as a value in public policy is part of a growing field – one which argues for a shift away from a technocratic and bureaucratic approach, and towards solutions that are centred on relationships. Put simply, we know that people do better – whether in communities or in their interaction with public services – when they experience meaningful human connection.

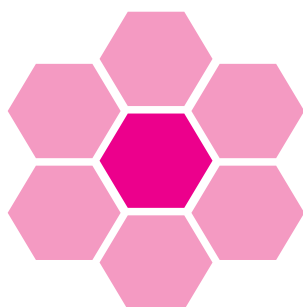
Yet, conversations about kindness and relationships still sit on the margins of a public policy approach that prioritises creating efficiencies.

Work by Julia Unwin for the Trust demonstrated how our decision making focuses on the 'rational lexicon' of targets and metrics, of resource allocation and value for money (Unwin, 2018). All of these things are important – because we need our public services to be safe, open, transparent and accountable.

However, we also know that it is relationships that are at the heart of our wellbeing. But our current approach, under pressure from austerity, rising demand and a media narrative that tells us not to trust public services, places far greater emphasis on the 'rational' than the 'relational'; and this has led to a 'squeeze' on kindness in our public services.

In our practical work, we have begun to explore what kindness looks like within different institutions, highlighting the need to challenge what gets in the way – namely, organisational approaches to performance management, risk management and professionalism (Ferguson & Thurman, 2019). Applied to the context of digital and safeguarding, it is these same barriers that influence procedures, policies and practice that (often) fail to support the best interests of young people.

On **performance management**, we noticed that so many conversations about 'digital' are about enabling transactions and focus on the capacity of technology to drive efficiency and reduce



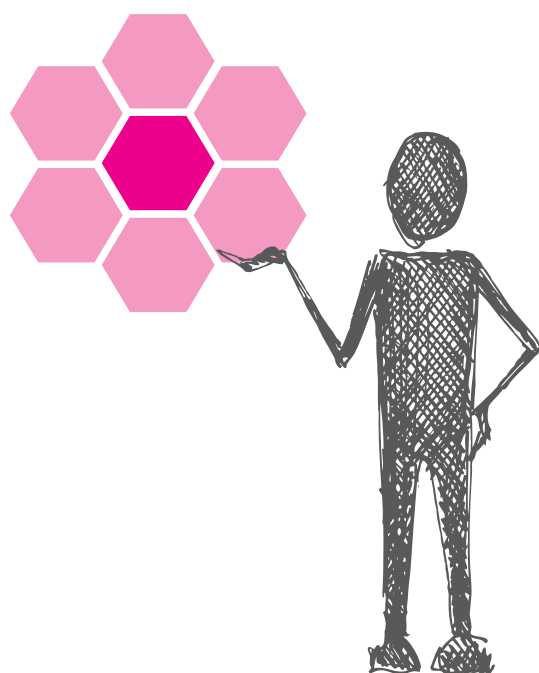
costs. There appears to be less understanding of how to invest in digital as something that could be used to *enhance* relationships and to engage with the complexity of doing this in a way that is appropriate and safe.

A major reason for this appears to be **organisational attitudes towards risk**, which ran through all our conversations about the use of digital. Driven by unprecedented levels of scrutiny and media challenge, we have developed organisational cultures which can focus on blame and risk aversion. And this often manifests itself in blanket policies that aim to *eradicate* risk, while at the same time inhibiting the flexibility that is needed for frontline staff to focus on what it is that *matters* to young people – and to use different digital tools to meet those needs.

Across our public services and other institutions, there is a real tension between being **professional** and dispassionate, and responding to human need. At present, this tension is being held by frontline workers, who have to choose between policies and guidelines that do not allow them to provide the best support to young people, and actions and behaviours that put them at risk of censure. Building in supportive structures that enable frontline workers to exercise autonomy and flexibility has the capacity not only to improve outcomes for young people, but also to ease this burden and contribute to employee wellbeing.

Issues relating to young people and digital technology always involve risk and complexity. Introducing kindness as a value to underpin organisational approach would neither remove nor simplify these risks, but it might help to navigate differently – in a way that is more human, more responsive, and that allows practitioners to focus not on policy and procedure, but on the needs of the young people they work with.

Although the conversations that informed the discussions in this resource were conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic, we have observed elsewhere that the pandemic has demanded that organisations embrace digital technology in new ways, and as a result many of these ‘barriers’ to kindness have fallen away. We see more questions being asked around digital use: *What has been implemented as a crisis response? What protections were or are now in place for staff and young people? How has this been reassessed if the only way to engage with people is via digital platforms?* The discussion in this report should be seen in this context, allowing organisations to consider how to sustain and enhance what has been possible during the pandemic.



Why Is an Organisational Digital Delivery Approach Important to Consider?

From reviews of existing digital policies and discussions through the #NotWithoutMe Labs, the core issues from the perspective of existing policies and guidance can be categorised into four areas of challenge (which can overlap with one another):

Four existing policies and guidance challenges

Category	Challenge
Absent	No reference to digital interaction with young people
Narrow	Only focused on individual examples, platforms or situations
Out of date	There are references but they specifically reference historic or obsolete platforms, processes or technology
Overly restrictive	They state no contact or no use of digital without context or explanation

In exploring what changes should be made to organisational ways of working, there needs to be clarity around the impacts the current system is having, both intentionally and unintentionally. In each of these categorisations, organisational policies, processes and practice are not working effectively to support the best outcomes for young people, with potentially negative impacts on the wellbeing of the young people themselves and staff delivering the services.

Impact on Young People

A lack of transparent and ongoing critical consideration of how, when, where and why digital technology is used with or for service delivery can have a number of impacts on young people (Anderson & Swanton, 2019). Insights from the Labs and our previous #NotWithoutMe work include:

- **Feelings of isolation:** without clarity and understanding, restricted use of digital technology has been reported to make young people feel unimportant, not cared for or loved, for example if messages go unresponded to and requests ignored. It can also limit organisations' ability to inform and engage their communities about their services, resulting in missed opportunities.
- **Cause of confusion and frustration:** experiencing an inconsistency in service or unpredictability of staff behaviours, for example some staff using WhatsApp or Facebook to contact young people, but others do not, was highlighted as unsettling and worrying for some young people. In more extreme examples, when rules and decisions around technology and its use were opaque, this was also cited as an area of conflict between staff and young people, even going as far as to become a 'battleground'.
- **Issues around trust and respect:** many current policies, particularly highly restrictive ones, may result in young people feeling that the default assumption is they will misuse technology in some way, and they are not respected enough to behave sensibly and appropriately with regards to the organisation. These conversations also raise issues around privacy and what spaces young people have a right to be private in. In particular settings, it has also been noted that lack of clear digital guidance has also caused issues around the inconsistent use of technology as an incentive or punishment.

- **Missed learning opportunities:** there are some policies that will impact young people in different, more acute ways. For example, some organisation Wi-Fi settings default restrict or block content relating to sexual health and relationships, yet for many young people, online resources are a key place to access information, support, and networks. This issue can be especially problematic for particular communities, examples relating to experiences of LGBTQI young people were highlighted at the Labs.
- **Unintended consequences:** a restrictive digital policy does not mean it will absolutely be followed, and it may lead to 'workarounds'. Not allowing spaces for organisational conversations around digital may inadvertently lead to some young people engaging in more risky behaviours, such as going to less-safe places to connect to Wi-Fi.

Staff Wellbeing

While the initial impetus for undertaking this project was the impact that restrictive or absent digital approaches were having on young people's wellbeing and participation, it became clear there are also serious implications for staff wellbeing, as well as individual and organisational reputation.

Many of the practitioners we spoke with during this project reaffirmed the negative impact on their own wellbeing of internalising multiple tensions around how digital is used in their work. It was noted that staff in these organisations are primarily focused on improving outcomes for a young person (regardless of the specific type of work they are delivering), but that policies and processes may currently be more directed towards outputs, activity and safety or risk management – thus a professional can find their drive to improve outcomes at odds with current organisational policy. A lack of collective clarity and understanding around boundaries of digital practice is putting staff at risk through potential misapplication of policies or practice and individualised opaque decision making.

Compassion fatigue and burnout because of unregulated and unsustainable use of digital technology were also cited repeatedly. There were multiple examples in relation to issues around contact with young people online. For example, it was frequently mentioned that "*there is a human response to want to respond immediately when a young person reaches out*", even though that message may have come through an 'inappropriate channel' such as a social media direct message or been sent outside 'office hours' which risks setting an unmanageable precedent for staff to have to deliver.

These feelings of worry are compounded for many staff by the recognition that their current everyday practice is often out of line with official organisational procedure, despite this practice being driven by the demands of those who they are serving and a desire to deliver positive outcomes. Practitioners at the Labs did not want a "*digital free for all*"; they wanted clear but applicable guidance and appropriate support channels.

There was a feeling that it would be challenging to raise this topic 'now' by staff for fear of having been doing the wrong thing for an extended period of time. There was therefore a clear need to create safe spaces to discuss concerns and challenges, without fear of 'getting it wrong'.

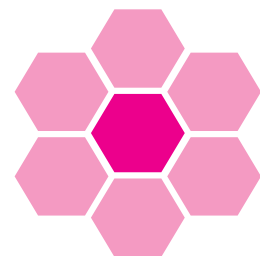
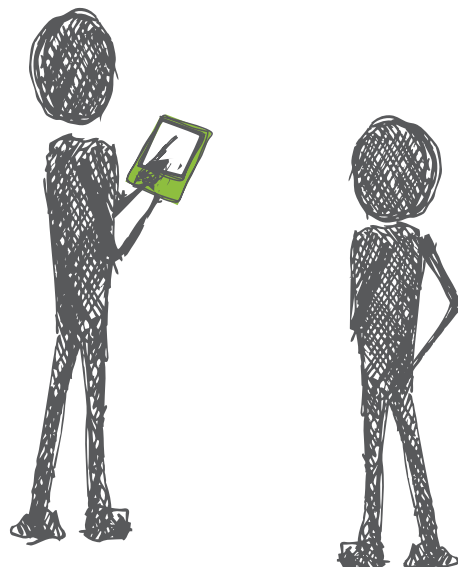
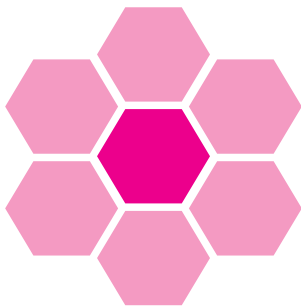
Again, we have seen many of these issues accentuated after the #NotWithoutMe Labs in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a greater shift to the use of digital and potential for an 'always on culture' (White, 2020). The pandemic has also stimulated the need for rapid responses that may have met initial need, but now need mainstreaming and refining for the long term.

A Complex Environment

To ground our understanding in the environments in which the organisations at the #NotWithoutMe Labs were operating, we asked each of the practitioners to map the existing policies, procedures, guidelines, legal requirements and preferences that they *must* or *should* be conscious of when developing policies and processes for the use of digital when engaging with young people summarised on [page 15](#).

The responses were structured at different 'levels', in terms of who had greatest ownership or control over that element. The hope would be that each of the policy 'levels' complement and build upon one another to create coherent policy and practice. And if not, the exercise was intended to highlight where the different elements sit in tension with one another.

This collection is not an exhaustive list, nor is it representative of what every organisation would need to account for, as some responses represent specific sectoral needs. However, it serves to communicate how cluttered the space can feel, with overlapping complexities often competing for attention. This adds to the cognitive load of practitioners who must bear all this in mind when developing a digital approach, while responding to a young person in need. The result can be that the young person and 'kindness in practice' can risk getting lost in well-intentioned or necessary regulation and policies. It is important to note these are not displayed in order of importance or priority of compliance.



INTERNATIONAL

- UNHCR – Voice of the Child Article 12
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Social media terms and conditions
- EU guidelines

NATIONAL

- National Youth Agency guidance
- Department for Education – keeping children safe in education
- STEM initiatives
- ‘UK Council for Internet Safety’ guidance
- Digitally Agile National Principles
- Protection of vulnerable groups and children’s legislation
- 5Rights Framework
- Child protection training
- Scottish Social Services Council Codes of Practice
- British Association of Social Workers
- UK Digital Strategy
- Cyber essential scheme certification
- Essential digital skills framework
- National youth work guidelines
- OFSTED
- Education Workforce Council – code of conduct
- Youth interim board
- Safeguarding board
- Welsh language requirement and policies
- DBS requirements
- Social Care and Wellbeing Act
- Single Equality Bill
- RIPA
- Corporate parent guidelines
- CLD code of ethics
- Youth Work NOS – new digital and safeguarding standards
- Jisc digital capabilities framework
- NSPCC How Safe conference
- Keep Children Safe Online Conference

- 10 Golden Rules Crown Prosecution Service policy
- CEOP guidance

FUNDER

- OSCR/ACF guidance and requirements
- Individualised policies in place by funder
- Child protection policies (not specific about digital)
- Due diligence
- Reporting/recording requirements
- Expectations
- Duty of care – service delivery
- Funder culture (possible risk aversion)

ORGANISATION

- Digital policy
- Social media policy
- Social media training
- Safeguarding policy
- Safeguarding training
- H&S policy
- Risk appetite
- Organisation culture
- Organisation values
- Expertise within organisation (including Board)
- Volunteers
- Employee Code of conduct
- Wi-Fi Policy
- Wi-Fi access
- Employee attitude
- Welsh language skills
- Internal risk assessments
- Existing IT policy
- Communications policy
- IS process – central admin management controlled/use of contractors
- Code of ethics

FAMILY/GUARDIANS/KEY ADULT SUPPORT

- Rules and boundaries
- Conversations with child
- Family beliefs
- Guidelines for parents of contributors

- Relationship to young person
- Restriction of methods of communication
- Online safety
- Knowledge of social media
- Own social media use

PRACTITIONER

- Professional ethics and standards
- Own experiences (informal)
- Relevant training – safeguarding, youth worker, digital
- Lived experience
- Understanding of best practice
- Age and maturity
- Digital agreement with service users
- Confidence
- Digital competence
- Keeping professional boundaries
- Risk
- Confidentiality
- Disclosures
- Accountability

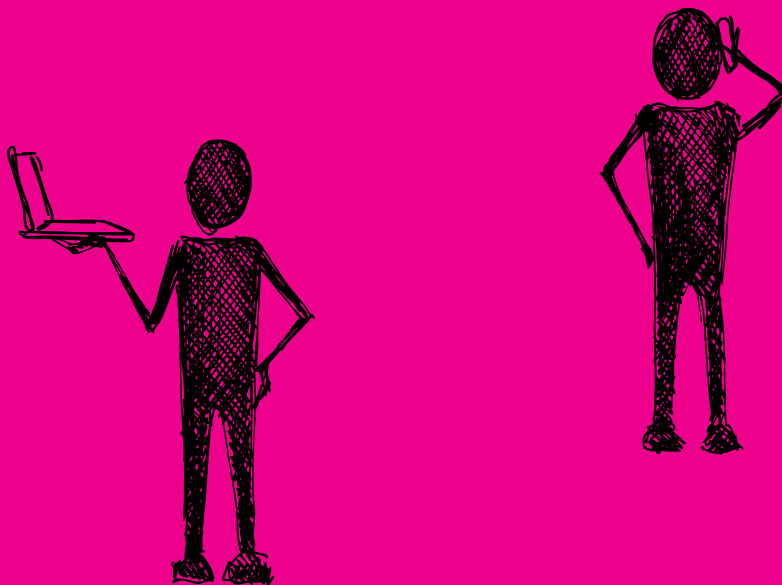
YOUNG PERSON

- Access to devices or the Internet
- Social media understanding – age, mentality, confidence
- Expectation of availability/response
- Representation
- Digital agreements – co-production with young people
- Knowing they can engage with us online
- Channel/contact method preference
- Peer support
- Capacity
- Consents
- Interpretations of digital and social media
- Understanding organisational processes
- Restrictions of access
- Preferences
- Vulnerability
- Identity

Considerations

This project has predominantly focused on issues for **Practitioners and their Organisations** to explore in developing an organisational digital approach, but we also include a short set of recommendations for **Funders, Policy Makers and Regulators**, and **Digital Platforms** to directly support organisations through this process and to shape the digital environment.

Given the potentially broad interpretation and reach of digital across many aspects of work, considerations can also be grouped into specific domains summarised on [page 2](#): values and governance, access, safety and wellbeing, knowledge and skills, participation.



For Practitioners and Their Organisations

The following sections provide a summation of areas to consider when developing organisational digital delivery policy and practice. They have not been presented in order of importance or priority but have been grouped thematically. Each consideration summarises the key discussion points during the #NotWithoutMe Labs and offers reflective starter questions for organisations to explore.

These considerations have been split into three areas of interest: **Organisational** exploring the strategic considerations; **People** considering who is involved, why and how; and **Resources** examining the tactical and tangible considerations.

Digital Audit

Prior to getting into the specific discussions, there are two overarching considerations for organisations to explore as a helpful starting point. The responses to these questions are not intended to be overly detailed but support all those participating to have a mutual agreement, or at least understanding of the current organisational context.

- **What is the current digital approach in terms of policies and practice?**
- **Where is the organisation currently using digital technology in service delivery?**

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Culture: Aligning with Values

Approach:

'Adding-On' or 'Embedding-Within'
'Laggards' vs 'Early Adopters'

Delivery Choices:

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Purpose and Management
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Cost:

Impact of Free Tech
Invisibility of Digital Engagement
Perception of Digital Cost

Organisational Considerations

Culture: Aligning with Values

- **Does the current digital approach align with the values of the organisations? If not, where and why not? Are there clear examples of where they do align?**
- **Does the digital approach contribute to or hinder the delivery of the outcomes of the organisation?**
- **Do staff members have the appropriate level of autonomy to focus on outcomes?**

Organisational values should, in theory, underpin why and how any organisation's work is undertaken. They are the core principles from which all activities stem and should guide decision making in a way which supports the organisation's mission to be achieved. Unsurprisingly therefore, values became a significant point of discussion across the #NotWithoutMe Labs, with a consensus that any organisational values need to be genuinely reflected across all policies and practices, including digital. This also led to broader reflections around what outcomes are sought by an organisation and how the use of digital contributes to or unintentionally undermines those aims.

Some practitioners noted they had very explicit organisational values, for others these values were harder to define, more subjective or their organisation did not have them in place. However, there was a general sense that even when values were clear, they were not always driving or even reflected in the organisation's digital policies and practices. For example, organisations may value learning, yet staff are not able to get sufficient training around digital. Or an organisation may value the voice of young people in service design, but have very limited digital communication channels for those young people to participate. There were also concerns that values clashed with

ideas about professionalism, specifically in online spaces, given the potential for blurred personal and professional boundaries.

The discussions highlighted that practice around values was deemed to be 'good' when organisational values were demonstrated, particularly in the ability of individual decision making and increased trust. Practitioners highlighted the need for autonomy to make decisions, but they must be supported by set best practice or guiding principles from their organisation. In the context of digital and organisational values, there should be support for the development of a digital policy, guidance and parameters, but this should also enable staff to have the individual autonomy and trust they require to deliver work in a way which best meets the needs of the individuals they are working with.

Since the #NotWithoutMe Labs, the challenges of COVID-19 have, for many, brought the issues of organisational values further to the fore. In uncertain and challenging times maintaining organisational values is key to steering decision making and to ensuring that stretched resources are focused most effectively.

Approach

'Adding-On' or 'Embedding-Within'

- **Is the digital delivery policy currently a standalone policy?**
- **Do digital elements appear in other policies?**

Given the vast array of activities that digital impacts upon in many day-to-day operations, a fundamental question explored through the Labs concerned how to actually get to grips with the development of an organisational digital delivery approach.

Should digital delivery considerations be embedded within existing policies and practice (staff codes of conduct, safeguarding, recruitment etc.), acting as an extension of existing practice rather than a new element? Or should digital delivery be pulled out as a separate policy with explicit focus?

Overall, the #NotWithoutMe Labs suggested that there are universal principles which could (or should) be applied in all contexts, but consideration should be given to the unique affordances of digital and how the digital medium may amplify risks or modify behaviours. For example, online platforms make it much easier to share information publicly – if the person sharing does not fully understand the risks or know how to adjust their settings, then they may accidentally share personal information with a much larger or different audience than they intended to. This is a risk that is much less likely to occur offline as the barriers to sharing are much greater and the audience may be more visible. Another example of how digital may shape behaviours differently to offline is in the expectation of a response and staff availability. In an offline setting, individuals using a service may be more conscious of ‘office hours’ and plan their engagement around those times, or understand that staff are not accessible outside those hours in that physical space. Online, however, our expectations of ‘opening hours’ and response times are different – and young people expecting an instantaneous response at any time online may feel frustrated if it is not provided. This in turn creates additional pressures on staff to be more available, thus shaping their working practice. This approach has also been seen in the recently accepted UNCRC General Comment 25, which recognises that rights are universal but highlights specific ways that digital may limit or support those rights.

Discussions on specific policy placement fed into a wider conversation about whether digital in itself is an inherent part of service delivery or just an additional service channel, and if there is value in reframing how we think about digital and instilling it into everyday practice. Questions raised included: *‘How is digital and expectations around digital framed in recruitment and on-boarding policies such as job descriptions, recruitment criteria or introductory materials?’* And also whether, for example, digital should be positioned as ‘inherent’, and not ‘in addition’, to staff responsibilities which could manifest in digital being removed from role titles. Everyone, therefore, has a responsibility to understand and consider digital within their working practice.

‘Laggards’ vs ‘Early Adopters’

- **What is the general organisational culture towards technology adoption?**
- **Does the current culture allow individuals or the organisation to respond flexibly to support needs?**

The pace of adoption of new digital technology, and particularly digital platforms, was highlighted as another clear area of contention in developing and delivering a consistent digital approach.

Often the gap between existing policy and desired practice is seen through the lens of active risk aversion, slow adoption or lack of skills. This may be true in some instances, with some practitioners in the Labs expressing their own ambivalence to technology or were highly concerned about the negative impacts it may have. Within a service context, this cultural view of tech may impact on how and when services can be delivered, or how well staff feel they are responding to the needs of the young people they are working with. For example, services not using certain newer platforms and, therefore, not

utilising spaces or channels that are known and liked by the young people they support.

However, there is also the reverse of the argument to consider. There is a challenge presented by those who may have high digital skills and be early adopters of various types of technology: what about those *too* quick to adopt new technology? What is the impact of those who are potentially rushing to digital products without considering or understanding the full scope of consequences and how the new technology fits with the intended outcomes of the organisation? These decisions may be driven by or at least partly derived from the aforementioned organisational culture, which may emphasise different approaches to risk.

We have seen this question become particularly pertinent over the last year as the COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly accelerated the use of digital tools such as Zoom or WhatsApp groups to maintain services and meet urgent needs. While some may have found this liberating other organisations and individuals may have lacked the time, knowledge and support to fully assess the appropriateness of services and what the long-term impact and sustainability may be. All of this may increase the risk for young people, add stress to staff and negatively impact on outcomes later on.

These questions do not just apply to the use of new technologies because the use of existing technologies or platforms in new contexts, such as with different groups of young people or to aid alternative outcomes, should also be considered. During the Labs we heard examples of organisations testing certain applications internally only, and then very rapidly rolling them out to use ubiquitously, or exploring their use with one audience and then swiftly defaulting to that platform for all groups. There were also heavily debated questions of whether organisations should (or had the right to) be in some of these spaces in the first place, just because the young people liked and used them and the appropriateness of organisations having corporate presence in these spaces.

Delivery Choices

Ownership and Control

- **Are there multiple 'levels' of digital delivery for the organisation, e.g. at the national, regional and local level? If so, is there clear communication between them?**
- **Is there a process for managing or flagging unofficial online accounts?**
- **Is a clear escalation process in place?**
- **Have all relevant staff received digital training?**

Many of the Lab attendees were very optimistic about the uses and possibilities of digital platforms, particularly for smaller organisations that do not have the resources or capacity to host their own websites but are now, for example, able to have a Web presence due to social media.

However, challenges were also raised by some practitioners around the lack of clarity or consistency about if, when or why different parts of the same organisation may create their own social media accounts. In one respect, Lab attendees noted the real positives about the flexibility of having profiles that could be localised or tailored in response to the specific needs of that group, but equally they highlighted concerns that these pages could be sharing incorrect information or using language or a tone not in keeping with the overall organisational approach. This ease of setting up online accounts that deliberately or unintentionally look like 'official' organisational pages was also a significant concern, with staff being

uncertain whether or not to report specific accounts they had seen or even who to report it to.

Several practitioners also noted the tension caused between localised delivery and national decision making. Local branches of the same organisation may work with different young people, with differing team structures, ways of working, challenges and priorities, but all delivered under a national brand. Despite this localised delivery approach, digital channels are, in some cases, still managed centrally with decisions being made at a national level, which made it more challenging to reflect the localised approach and engage effectively at that level when delivering services. Alternatively, organisations may have a federated model of governance and funding, with more local versions and accounts which can make it easier to create a more relational digital presence, but much more challenging in terms of consistency across the different strands of the organisation.

In many cases the lack of a clear digital policy and recognised good practice made it unclear as to the rules regarding who could set up accounts (both organisational and in a professional context) and the use of branding and naming conventions. In reality, this allowed for inconsistency of communication, messaging and general confusion from young people and staff.

Overall, better transparency and training around the digital policy was seen to be a key solution to ensure that central digital teams would not need significant oversight of localised profiles or worry about the wrong use of language. Also individuals would know what to do if they felt something had gone wrong in the process.

Purpose and Management

- **Is there a clear rationale for why each digital tool or platform is used?**
- **Is there sufficient resource to deliver each tool or platform effectively?**
- **Have all relevant staff members received general safeguarding training?**
- **Is it clear to people what they can expect from different channels and where they can get support they may need?**
- **Do all staff have permission and/or clear lines of communication to respond to people?**

Social media channels are undoubtedly an effective way for many organisations to promote their services to their target audiences. This can be through engaging prospective users, developing better relationships with their communities, selling their services or developing their fundraising base. But this array of different potential purposes caused its own challenge for some organisations where there were varied interpretations (or straight disagreements) regarding the objectives for the use of digital.

Some organisations highlighted that their social media channels were seen internally as purely marketing opportunities and explicitly not as routes to deliver services, with the direction of content going only one way, from the organisation to the public. 'Services' and 'social media' were considered by some to have very different purposes, with distinct responsibilities and separate teams managing them. Yet, inevitably, these organisations were, for example, still receiving disclosures and requests for services through these social media channels, through comments or inbox messages. This raised

the issue of what should be the responsibility of organisations to ensure all staff, including marketing or communications, are well equipped to deal with potential situations that may arise through social media or digital platforms, such as disclosures in public spaces, through channels managed by individuals who are not trained youth workers and therefore have not had safeguarding or other relevant training. Furthermore, there are challenges for staff if the escalation processes are not clear when things go wrong online or they feel unable to deal with a situation.

Similarly, another related tension emerged around the number of different platforms being used publicly to interact with young people. Some noted their organisations were taking a very focused approach and limiting their channels, with others holding a ‘use them all’ attitude. Naturally, the considerations and implications of use are different for different platforms, with each having its own benefits and risks. Having a broad online presence was seen to increase the opportunity for young people to be able to engage with the organisation and seek out relevant services, specifically in the spaces where their users are already likely to be. But this comes with the cost of having to resource these multiple platforms, and concern that too many accounts, while easy to set up, were far more difficult to maintain. The increased number of platforms also increased the risk of missing messages or responses from young people. Though it was highlighted that there are also bespoke digital platforms and tools that can streamline these social media accounts and manage multiple channels, reducing some of these risks.

Alternatively, a narrow but curated presence on a specifically chosen platform or small range of platforms was seen as potentially more feasible to deliver well for many organisations. But, there was still not always a clear understanding on whether this was the best approach to achieve the desired outcomes, or whether in some cases organisations were simply using the platform the team already felt most comfortable with, rather than understanding what would be best to use for the community they serve.

The underlying issues for many was that there was not always a clear rationale for when or why different tools were used. More decisive instruction about what to use as an organisation was felt to be helpful. But also a critical examination of whether there was genuine capacity to deliver the service through the channel effectively.

Technical vs Social Solution

- **Is new technology the default solution when issues arise? What guides your organisation to make the decision?**

An overarching discussion in the Labs questioned when a technical solution is appropriate versus when a situation requires social solutions, such as behavioural or cultural change – or indeed a combination approach. In addressing digital risk and management, it may be natural to look first for digital solutions, and although tools such as filters or device managers may assist in some areas as cheap and efficient stop-gaps, practitioners were concerned that they would not resolve many of the underlying challenges and may serve to obscure or add to the existing issues.

Best practice for passwords typified this challenge. Young people forgetting key passwords for various accounts is not a new issue, but for some at the Labs there was a sense that the go-to response (if not writing down on a post-it and keeping in a drawer) was driven by available technical options such as password managers or remote reset functionality. However, there were concerns that these options were the focus of attention, at the expense of other social solutions including increasing conversations around responsibility and ownership, creating a password system or using a passphrase for improved recall. While these may initially be more time consuming

to implement, it was felt they may actually address the root cause of the issue and potentially be used as a broader learning opportunity to engage with young people.

Broader Organisational Policies

Aligning with other Organisational Policies

- **What existing internal policies and procedures impact the way staff interact with digital?**
- **How is staff wellbeing considered?**

Recognising that no policy acts in isolation, it was important to explore how other organisational policies impact the digital practice, safeguarding and decision making by staff. While the focus of the #NotWithoutMe Labs was on digital use and impact, many of the underlying challenges and potential solutions sat in non-digital domains, such as working hours, skills and equipment. Therefore, the Labs were an opportunity for individuals to examine what other organisational levers could be altered to support the development of the organisational digital approach. Could, for example, flexible working policies be used to reduce staff burden if they are compensated for being online and available when the young people are available, such as later in the evenings, rather than staff being mandated to work standard office hours but feeling that they have to do additional unpaid overtime to cover the times young people need them? Or what organisational provision is available for staff mental health and wellbeing to help them navigate many of the varied challenges in managing personal and professional boundaries online?

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on working hours, conditions and practices in all sectors, which has been very

challenging for many, but has also produced some developments in relation to digital delivery and practice. For example, remote working may create better conditions for implementing the flexible working policies that were discussed in the Labs, in place of the traditional office-based approach. However, other factors such as having a private space to work and suitable access to confidential supervision that may be needed for effective remote service delivery may be more challenging to provide consistently for all staff if they are home-based.

Learning from Precedent

- **Are there historic policies and practice in place that could be useful in developing digital delivery?**

In developing digital policies, the Lab attendees noted that there is scope to learn from policies that have been in place for many years, for example lone worker, street work and community work policies, which also focus on the individual protection of staff, boundaries and wellbeing in physical spaces. Even though the Internet, smartphones and social media have been part of mainstream life for many years now, there is still a general tendency to regard all things digital-related as being new and requiring a whole new approach – when in fact many of the core challenges are the same or similar to things that have emerged and been addressed previously, just in a slightly altered context. While digital has some unique characteristics that need to be considered, much can often be applied from previous experience, research and implementation. For example, text messaging is now a well-recognised and supported communication method across many youth organisations which, when first introduced a number of years ago, felt like a radical shift – so what can be learnt from

the practice and policies developed in this transition?

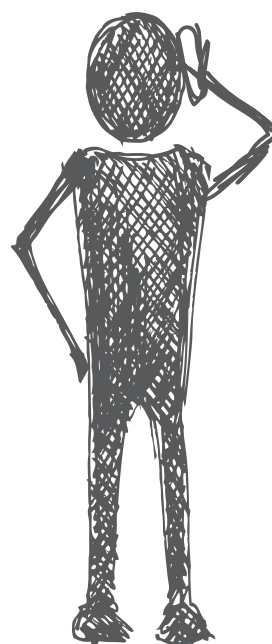
More broadly, it was raised that there are parallels in many of the challenges in terms of balancing risk that could be further explored to learn from in other sectors or specific interventions such as sexual health policy development.

Compliance with External (National) Policies

- **What are the external policies and procedures your organisation needs to comply with?**
- **Are any in tension with your current or intended digital practice?**

While much of the focus of the #NotWithoutMe Labs was on what organisations themselves could do internally or what they have direct control over, organisations also have to deliver their work in the context of external policies that they must (or should) comply with. Many of these were outlined on [page 15](#) and range from the highly technical digital regulation applicable to all organisations, to the more service-specific legislation, such as industry codes or professional body legislation.

It has been difficult in recent years to have a discussion that involves digital technology and interactions with external users without General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) being raised in some form. However, opinion varied across the Lab attendees in terms of the significance of GDPR in this space. For some, GDPR was noted as 'just another on a long list of considerations', and there was concern that it was sometimes used as a blanket justification for overly risk-averse or restrictive policies and practice. But there was also a very real tension between 'service need' to record individual data as an effective and responsible way of tracking young people and the GDPR need to gather specific consent. Some services now required what was seen as a convoluted verification process for members, raising concerns that it will disengage people who won't have access to immediate support. The [Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\) Children's Code](#) that came into force in 2020 may help provide some clarity for organisations on what is required to respect children's rights to privacy and consent and how to manage their data fairly. However, it is probably too early to tell what the full impact may be in terms of service delivery.



People Considerations

Who Is Involved in the Process?

- **Who are all the groups of stakeholders who may need to give input into the design, development and delivery of an organisational digital approach?**
- **Who writes or owns the current policies?**
- **What staff skills, knowledge or expertise will be needed?**
- **When are there too many people involved?**
- **Can a 'tiered approach' to involving different groups of stakeholders be taken rather than just one group?**

Naturally, the process of developing effective digital policies requires a careful understanding of who should be involved, when it should take place and who should lead this process. It also raises the question of whose responsibility it is to make decisions about the direction and use of digital in delivery and the associated risk and safeguarding considerations.

There was a recognition that all staff should understand and participate in this process in some way. However, it was clear that specific aspects of digital policies would be of greater relevance to certain parts of an organisation

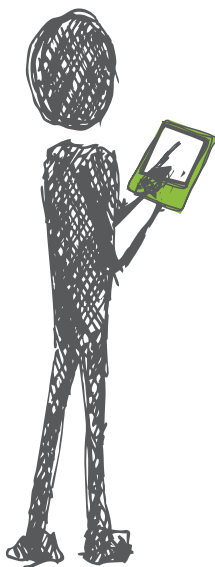
and its stakeholder network. Furthermore, responsibility and accountability for practice as a result of policy will also sit across different parts of the organisation and may cause tensions. For example balancing the thoroughness of policy wordings needed from a legal perspective with accessibility needs to ensure these processes are understandable by all. These differing responsibilities and accountability of individuals or departments involved can also make it difficult to create a shared vision. This is before accounting for the views and role of those important stakeholders outside the organisation, crucially the young people themselves.

The Lab attendees stressed the importance of ensuring that all relevant parties are in the room at some point to co-produce (at best) or at least have input into what is needed from the end policy and resulting practice. This did not mean physically getting all the relevant individuals at the discussion table at the initial conversation. Conversely, the first discussion may actually be focused on mapping out who needs to be involved in the process, how and when you would do this to be most effective.

Given these considerations, the Lab practitioners began to outline the different individuals and departments that would have some interest or responsibility in developing the organisational digital approach (again, these are example groups which in reality may overlap or not be relevant to all organisations).

While ideally there is no hierarchy, as all involved have different but important input, the reality is that some individuals will have more power or urgency than others, which will affect the decision-making process.

Individuals and departments identified at the #NotWithoutMeLabs who may need to be involved in developing the organisational digital approach



Service User Involvement

- **How are services users engaged in the process?**
- **How do their views and opinions shape policy and practice?**
- **What feedback is provided to people who use the service on the ideas or issues they have shared?**

All organisations are motivated to do more to engage those they work with in informing and shaping their services, including in the development of any organisational policy. In most cases for the #NotWithoutMe Labs this was young people (noting that young people are far from a homogenous group).

However, there was a clear position from the Labs that young people should not be relied upon to be the sole 'digital experts'. There was fear that this would absolve organisations of their responsibility to invest further in their own workforce. Furthermore, this engagement process should be interested in young people's opinions and ideas for system change, not just their recounting of their personal experiences. This engagement should also avoid disempowering adults unintentionally by reinforcing stereotypes and assumptions that they are in a knowledge deficit when it comes to digital and digital-related practice, particularly in relation to young people.

A clear advantage of co-creating digital policies with young people is that it allowed the opportunity for all parties to explore and negotiate expectations. Through the #NotWithoutMe Labs we heard examples of both staff and young people 'overstepping' digitally. For example, while there were multiple examples raised of young people

connecting with personal staff accounts, we also heard comments directly from young people about having to change the type of content they wanted to share because they did not want staff (who they were connected with on social media) seeing it. There were also experiences shared by young people of posting personal content on their social media accounts, and for staff to then (unprompted) contact other services in response to that content, and young people feeling that it was an overreaction and an invasion of privacy. It was noted by one young person that there was a lack of understanding about the role technology plays in young people's lives and that different spaces were thought of (and used) as more public and private spaces as somewhere to share thoughts and feelings. They felt that organisational responses should respect and reflect that. The process of co-creating digital policies between an organisation and the individuals they work with can help manage realities and outline the expected etiquette through a much more democratic and transparent approach.

Similar to concerns from staff around timing, it was also highlighted that some young people were also less inclined to speak about their past digital interactions with staff or behaviour online, which may have been against the guidelines, in case they were subsequently punished. Developing a new digital policy was noted as a potential opportunity to address some of these issues in a positive and neutral way.

There is also a specific case highlighted that a number of young people transition from receiving services into being youth workers themselves, and there is significant potential in considering how best to use the knowledge, skill and experience of those young youth workers in developing good digital policy and practice.

It was also highlighted that it should not be assumed that young people are always

going to be positive about the use of digital, in favour of more technology use or even that they use a lot of technology. This should be considered in relation to how young people are to be included in policy development. Furthermore, having all input mediated through online channels will exclude those with limited or no access to digital technology.

Staff

Service Delivery Staff

- **How have staff been engaged in the process?**
- **Have staff had the space to build confidence in digital and technology?**
- **How are staff skills evaluated and updated?**

Involvement of frontline staff was seen as key to the successful development and implementation of any organisational digital approach. There were many encouraging experiences shared during the Labs of teams actively and positively engaging in this process, eager to develop practice through testing and learning with regular dialogue. However, a reluctance from staff to engage in the topic in the first instance was a clear issue for a number of organisations.

Some practitioners may be personally 'tech-pessimistic'. They may perceive digital as a barrier to human connection or a cause of avoidable risk and harm. Aside from their ambivalence to the use of digital in their personal life, they may have valid concerns about the impact of digital on young people's privacy, risk and harm. Practitioners in the Labs highlighted that there may have been a historic lack of clarity, engagement and skills support around digital policy and guidelines that had created a significant barrier to staff engaging now, as it was felt it signalled a move away from what many felt was 'traditional youth work'. One way to mitigate this

may be to ensure the needs of the young person are always used to frame discussions around digital. Focusing on how to improve outcomes for young people and the relevance of digital within young people's lives to achieving may help some staff to become more optimistic about digital.

While some staff may start from a position of tech-pessimism, others may be 'tech-optimists' but have had negative organisational experiences. Those who have experienced poorly designed, unsupported or unsustainable digital projects previously may view any changes to the current system as following the same path or may feel that any change does not benefit young people and could even cause unnecessary risk or harm. From a sector perspective, as well as a legacy of existing policies, training and systems, there is a wider legacy of poorly implemented digital transformation that requires unpicking and learning from.

It was also highlighted during the Labs that often the majority of staff felt they lacked digital skills required to participate fully and safely with young people using different platforms.

While these range of challenges came to the fore in the initial discussions, it was clear that many of these issues could be overcome with the right type of engagement with staff over an extended period. It was recognised that staff didn't need to be tech experts, but do need to be confident in communicating on a variety of digital platforms and this requires upskilling, training and investment, not just as a one-off but as on an ongoing basis. Practitioners at the Labs shared different models to address this skills and confidence development. These included a digital champion approach – starting with the most enthusiastic staff member to model best practice and cascade learning, as well as regular more formalised training sessions delivered both internally and with external expert support.

As with many of the other considerations in this report, the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the need to re-engage or engage staff for the first time around their use of digital because, for many organisations during the most stringent stages of lockdown, digital was the only channel to deliver most youth work.

Volunteers

- **How have volunteers been engaged in the process?**

Many of the organisations represented at the Labs rely on a dedicated and extensive network of volunteers to support services being delivered. It was noted that volunteers will always receive on-boarding training, but the inclusion of a specific focus on digital use, and particularly social media, was not universal. Questions were raised as to whether some volunteers were even aware of the existing digital policies and what their level of accountability is if they use digital services in their volunteering. For example, are volunteers allowed to reference the organisation they volunteer for on their social media profiles or handles? Or can volunteers provide advice or answer questions on behalf of the organisation in online spaces? On public social media accounts, particularly Twitter, we see a variant of 'Personal views are my own' or 'Retweet does not mean endorsement', but it was unclear how much power these statements actually have, or what the impact would be for a volunteer if they were found to be sharing inappropriate content. Lab attendees suggested these comments were pretty ineffective in decoupling the volunteer accounts from the 'official' accounts, which sometimes made it difficult for young people and staff to navigate.



Senior Management

- **Have the senior leadership team been driving or advocating for the digital policy development?**

As with most system changes, senior leadership involvement, understanding or knowledge around digital policy development was seen as essential to providing the necessary investment in terms of time, funding or attention to deliver the process properly.

However, this was not always the reality for all practitioners, as some noted that they received minimal support from senior leaders or board level. In some cases, senior leaders were not using social media or were not confident with many of the digital platforms that were being used by the organisation in its service delivery, which was felt to hamper focus and engagement on the topic.

There was also a feeling from a few of the Lab attendees who suggested that managers or those at a more senior level actually see digital as a distraction, and further consideration around the use of it was a diversion of resources that could be better spent elsewhere. More broadly, there was a sense that this type of approach did not allow for effective sharing of learning and practice across organisations and led to much more siloed working. As a result, individuals were led to think they have to take things from scratch, resulting in organisations developing their own toolkits, guidelines or training, and it was felt this led to a significant amount of overlap, repetition, wasted resources and ultimately poorer outcomes for the young people due to time lags in developing materials or projects.

However, there was recognition that this perception about senior leadership may in some respects be unfair, and it became the 'easiest' fall-back option when systems were not delivering effectively. Some in the Labs argued that that others in the organisation would actually be better placed to lead the digital developments but with

clear and obvious support from senior figures. Understanding the desired role of senior leaders in developing a digital approach also becomes particularly pertinent given the ambition for more collective leadership in many organisations.

COVID-19 has undoubtedly forced all senior leaders and boards to give much greater focus to digital, which has resulted in accelerated or amplified digital transformation within organisations. While this has been challenging and rushed in many cases, it may have been a catalyst for some beneficial changes that had been slow to take hold previously. However, senior leaders and boards will be well aware that a crisis response should not dictate strategic planning. While the overall shift to digital is unlikely to be reversed, many recent changes will now be under greater scrutiny and will need to be refined for the longer term to ensure they are delivering on the outcomes for young people and are sustainable for staff.

Trustees and Board members

- **What digital expertise exists on the Board?**
- **Do trustees have the digital knowledge required to govern digital delivery?**

In terms of other levels of governance, it was highlighted that an organisation's Board members also had a key role to play in supporting the development of an effective digital approach. For some it was felt that Trustees were perhaps not being used to their greatest advantage, and more could be done to engage with them on issues around digital. First and foremost, understanding the digital expertise and experience their Board possessed individually and as a collective.

Shared, Accessible Language

- **Has the language in the policy been tested with different audiences to gauge its accessibility and how well is it understood?**
- **Are there particularly terms being used that staff find difficult or challenging to interpret?**

Ensuring that everyone is speaking the 'same language' and agreeing on interpretations is core to effective action. One comment at the Labs highlighted the challenge when this is not in place: "*reading our digital policy felt like it had been written by a dinosaur talking to an alien*". In this example, the policy had been drafted, for clear reasons, to very legal and technical standards, creating challenges for staff interpreting the policies and also how they communicated the reasoning to young people they support. There was consensus across the Lab attendees that the language used in any digital-related policies and processes (or organisational policies in general) should be understood not just internally by staff, but also by the young people they are working with. This would enable and contribute to transparency in the organisation's ways of working. The option of also creating a 'young person-friendly' version of policy that would be better understood was raised, but countered by the idea that if this is possible, why not use this language for the internal policy too?

One of the specific language points raised was in the use of 'broad' or 'catch all' terms in existing procedures, strategies and frameworks. Words such as 'appropriate' or 'reasonable' were common and noted in some contexts as very useful in allowing staff autonomy to use their own discretion in delivering their service and reinforced feelings of trust. However, it was also noted that staff needed to feel supported to understand what they mean and how to apply them if there was uncertainty, and so the need for more learning opportunities was clear. Staff also need to feel that they would be supported if they got something wrong (for the right reasons).

Fundamentally, work needed to be done within each organisation to work with staff to understand if they find the current digital language empowering or disempowering.

Resource Considerations

Time and Space

- **Are there existing meetings or fora where the digital topics can be raised?**
- **Do you need initial dedicated time?**
- **Is there a process to ensure ongoing time to reflect?**

A core message from each of the Labs was the need for organisations to commit time and space to further consider and ensure a robust process to develop their digital approach. This space, it was suggested, may come either through raising the issues in existing fora, or creating a new dedicated space. However, carving out time in established meeting spaces to consider an organisational digital approach is not always a straightforward request, and currently, far from having dedicated discussion time, many practitioners highlighted it is simply not even on the agenda. Furthermore, practitioners highlighted that creating space to raise these types of issues often requires a catalyst or external driver or to cut through the 'business as usual' approach. While this may be a particular individual, as previously discussed it could be from senior leadership, some Lab practitioners noted that discussions only began in response to a specific incident. This reactive approach was seen to be far from ideal for both young people and staff. It is also important to note that this dedicated time and space must not be viewed as a 'one-off', but one that requires continued attention as external and internal organisational contexts change and the needs evolve.

Again, COVID-19 has, for some organisations, been a catalyst for many changes, and may have resulted in an

increased discussion – at all levels – about the role, use and governance of digital in delivering services and supporting young people. The discussions may have been dominated by the many challenges and gaps in skills and resources, but the subject is now very much on the agenda, which hopefully will lead to more positive outcomes longer term.

Technology: Role of Devices

- **Are staff provided with professional devices for work-related activities?**
- **Does current device provision enable staff to undertake their work effectively?**

While many of the conversations raised at the Labs concern behaviours, there are specific technology-related questions that can compound or alleviate issues. A key area of discussion was around devices, with many staff feeling that they were not given the adequate tools to deliver within their roles. A number of practitioners cited limited hardware with limited capabilities and connectivity. For example, many staff and volunteers do not have a 'professional' smart device – a device provided through their organisation specifically for them to use in relation to their work. This may lead to increased risk for both staff and young people as staff who are frustrated at the lack of tools to deliver the best outcomes for young people resort to using alternative devices and channels. Specifically, staff using their personal devices to store sensitive information. This was cited as exposing both themselves and the young people to potential risk through lack of supervision or inappropriate data security. Furthermore, a concern was raised that young people who are

unable to contact support staff in a way that is most helpful for them may not receive the help they need and end up at increased risk or disengage from the service.

This lack of equipment was particularly acute for teams not regularly or directly delivering youth work, such as the communications and marketing teams or team leaders. Therefore, a key question raised was whether, to enable sufficient boundaries between ‘the professional’ and ‘the personal’ and to reduce overall organisational risk, should all staff have professional devices such as a phone, laptop or tablet that is owned by the organisation but used by a professional to carry out their work? Though some organisations may argue they do not have the financial resources to cover this cost, the counterargument disputed that “*You wouldn’t say you can’t have fire escapes because they’re too expensive*” and that the provision of professional devices should now be classed as the cost of doing business and therefore an explicit part of an organisational digital approach.

It was also stressed by practitioners that it was not just about having any technology, but the *right* technology to enable them to undertake their roles efficiently, examples include staff having work phones without cameras meaning they still needed to use their personal devices for recording, or youth centres having extremely out of date equipment. Even where technology was available, IT issues were pervasive from the technology not working properly, staff not having the right level of access, to websites or kit being blocked. However, it was also noted that many of these challenges may have been as a result of the implementation process, or subsequent (lack of) training rather than an issue with the technology alone.

A few practitioners at the Labs also reflected on their specific circumstances where there can also be procurement challenges, for example, when the existing digital approach means that the IT and procurement teams are used to dealing with business solutions, delivering a Wi-Fi service in a residential setting to resemble a family home experience creates difficulties, such as the experience in supporting residential children’s homes. This highlights the importance of ensuring all stakeholders help to shape and feedback on

policies and processes, improving outcomes and avoiding costly errors or duplication.

Cost

Impact of ‘Free’ Technology

- **What risk assessment is used to review the use of online technology?**
- **Does the process enable staff to use digital to support young people?**

Historically, if an organisation wanted a platform to share dedicated information about itself or for more specific tasks such as enabling communication between young people it worked with, you would generally have to go through a procurement process to buy or create bespoke technology. This would likely include risk assessments, safeguarding, cost and capacity considerations to enable sign-off in a business case. However, given the abundance of free technologies, some of this process can be bypassed because access to this technology does not have a financial cost attached to it. Again, for many of the practitioners at the Labs it was not clear if they should, or are required to, complete a business case for the use of a free online platform such as a social media site. Or whether another form of assessment would be more appropriate.

The prevalence of ‘free’ tools and services on the Web has also, in many cases, made it much easier for staff to set up their own channels that meet their own and their community needs without having to (a) find the money to pay for it and (b) navigate complex or slow procurement processes. This

has led to increased agility and innovation but may, in some cases, lead to increased risk. Most 'free' products do not charge because they collect and sell data, they carry advertising, or they have limited features sets. In each case the young person and the practitioner may be exposed to increased risk – for themselves and the whole organisation. For example, certain apps may require integration with other systems which may expose sensitive data to third parties, or the lack of privacy features in free versions may lead to inappropriate sharing. However, blanket rigid policies around the use of such tools may then not allow staff to experience and understand platforms or engage with young people in the ways that are most suitable for them.

Frontline staff have a role to play in considering these aspects when they use digital, supporting young people in developing their own digital literacies and in highlighting needs to all stakeholders. IT, procurement and data governance representatives all have a role in communicating the importance of their requirements and in hearing how services are used in practice and working with others to find the relevant solutions.

Invisibility of Digital Engagement

- **What is the process for assigning time or resources to digital engagement activities?**

There was a general frustration that the time and complexity involved with managing online platforms, particularly social media accounts, and interactions across multiple platforms simply wasn't recognised by organisations. Assumptions remain prevalent that doing something online, particularly through social media, is significantly easier and quicker than other methods, for example email or a phone call. This was compounded by much of the work being undertaken outside of standard working hours, as this is when they would have young people

needing responses or messaging. Staff therefore felt that they weren't given the required time to deliver this work effectively or they had to do the activities without being compensated. There were clear calls for more open conversations and realistic timeframes to be put in place with regards to online activities.

Perception of Digital Cost

- **Which budget lines do different types of technology come from?**

Technology can be cheap (if not monetarily free) and it can also be very expensive. Given the risks around many publicly available solutions as previously noted, the alternative option is to develop bespoke solutions. However, the Labs highlighted a recurring issue around assumptions that a suitable tailored solution will be highly expensive, leading to disengagement or dismissal of a project before proper exploration work has even been undertaken.







Many organisations noted that digital-related costs were often seen as 'add-on costs', not centralised within the core costs, and were left to individual project or team budgets. As a result, the cost of technology was also highlighted as being firmly associated with internal trade-offs. Staff reflected on feeling technology costs cannot be justified when, for example, the opportunity cost of a new smartphone is seen to be delivering a project with a young person.

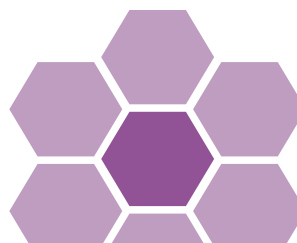
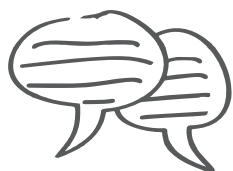
It was also raised during the Labs that many organisations do not have a risk assessment for 'not doing digital' and there is generally not a budget line for 'not doing something digital'. The counterfactual or opportunity cost is not considered. The focus is generally on how much something will cost, rather than on how much it will save, or on the cost of continuing a practice that may not be working.

For Funders, Policy Makers and Regulators

Developing an effective digital delivery approach is only ever a means to an end of improving outcomes for users of that service. But these organisations do not work in vacuums – there are also questions and considerations to be asked of a wider set of organisations than those directly delivering services. Primarily, how are broader structures set up to support organisations delivering services? Does this network of wider organisations including sector support bodies, funders, trade unions, policy makers or regulators contribute to effective digital decision making?

This support can include those directly financially assisting these organisations, creating broader sectoral change or holding them to account through regulation. Steps that these organisations can take include:

-  **Recognition that this is an issue** – Further engagement on the topic to better understand the range and extent of the issues.
-  **Broader funding to support services explore these topics** – Organisations need time, space and funding to work through these considerations, testing and learning iteratively driven by the needs of their communities to find out what works for them. Organisations need resources to be able to shift from a statement of the issues to action.
-  **Sector-specific support** – This resource provides very general recommendations, but services will have particular safeguarding or risk assessment needs, so there is a need to ensure further tailored exploration.
-  **Ongoing space for dialogue** – A convening space is needed to bring together services to discuss these issues, share good practice and create a more joined-up approach. Collective action will also support more high-level attention being paid to the issue.
-  **Don't leave organisations on their own** – Many of the issues that were raised in the Labs linked back to organisations developing practice on their own without access, understanding or reference to what others are doing well in this space.
-  **Offer new training and support existing training to be expanded** – Build on the training opportunities already in place and the support mechanisms to ensure services can participate.



Funder-specific Action

Funders' duty of care is ever-increasing, as is the extent and nature of due diligence on where funding is going and how it is used. Funders are getting more sophisticated in their understanding of assessing and supporting the development of better outcomes with recipient organisations, but a key question remains as to whether this includes the use of digital within everyday organisational practice and particularly with regards to digital safeguarding.

The perception of a number of organisations at the Labs was that funders (though far from a homogenous group) were often just at the same level, if not further behind the delivery organisations, in understanding the considerations and implications of digital delivery. When completing due diligence activities, few had to answer specific digital delivery or safeguarding related questions.

The Labs also highlighted perceptions around funder culture. Specifically that in most cases they were deemed to have a lower risk appetite and were therefore somewhat unintentionally driving more restrictive behaviours in organisations themselves. Funders may also be treating digital in isolation or as an add-on to a programme rather than core business. Practitioners cited historic examples of receiving funding specifically for developing digital tools, which had positive impacts in themselves, but this raised caution that this type of discreet funding also had the potential to inhibit organisations integrating digital into core ways of working if this was not how funding was structured.

The role of funders was also seen as presenting a real opportunity to support organisations develop their digital delivery, acting as a lever to enable more critical digital approaches. But the underlying message from the Labs with regards to funder interventions was clear – make sure it is an empowering approach. Funders can and should support more effective digital approaches without the process becoming a burden, being purely administrative or reinforcing overly restrictive mindsets. The worst outcome was seen to be for funders to start adopting responsibility for digital explicitly, but for it to add to the pressure and risk-averse attitude.

Ultimately the key questions were summarised into three steps:

1. Can funders ask better questions about an organisation's digital approach, including safeguarding and recognise better answers when they hear them?
2. Are recipient organisations able to respond? (Are staff trained, procedures checked and built into processes?)
3. Is there sufficient support in place from funders to help organisations reach where they want to be?

Funders have responded to the increased digital needs of the pandemic with many new initiatives and approaches that may address some of these questions. It is likely greater prominence and scrutiny of how digital is applied in youth support and engagement – and the range of internal and external factors this relies on – is a trend that will continue.



For Digital Services and Platforms

While this project is not limited to understanding the use of social media within organisations, there are clear challenges in the design of digital platforms that make it more difficult for practitioners to adhere to policies and deliver effective services for young people, particularly with regards to digital safeguarding and risk management.

Platforms shape the interactions we have on them and it was a clear response from the Labs that platforms can do more to address how they are adding to challenges. The functional abilities of platforms can limit or modify how staff are able to behave online, creating new challenges and tensions between service provision, values, policies and safeguarding. However, it is recognised that the situation is further complicated because young people are not 'supposed' to be the audience for many of these online services as many platforms have a minimum user age of 13. The reality is that many young people are active across a number of platforms and therefore platforms need to respond.

While an organisational digital policy can go some way to supporting safe and effective use of digital services, there was also a clear feeling that platforms are not designed in a way to protect young people. *(Please note that examples were provided during the research in 2019, and so it is recognised that some platforms may have updated their functionality since the data was collected).* Specific examples raised at the Labs ranged in size, scale and specificity and include:

Example 1: Organisations need to promote their services. Historically, organisations have used physical leaflets. However, many young people are reporting that they would like to hear more from organisations through online channels. Organisations are highly reluctant to use particular channels because, as a public page, they are not able to turn off or hide their followers, therefore creating a ready-made list of potentially vulnerable young people for anyone to access. Alternatively, if they kept their profile private, they are potentially preventing young people from finding that service when they need it. Organisations have to balance the challenge of promoting their service and protecting users.

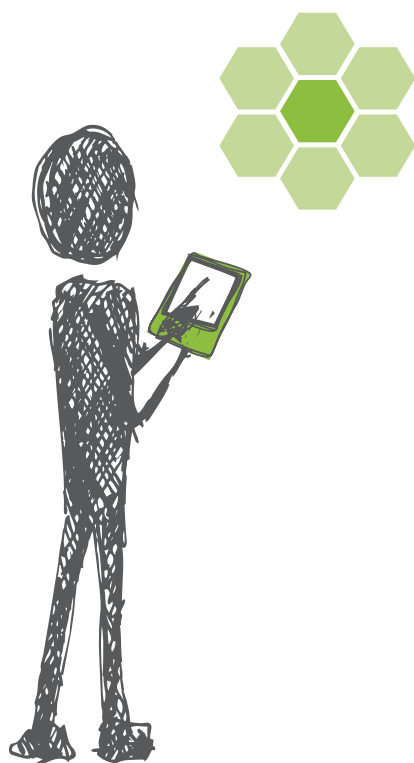
Example 2: The terms of service of some platforms do not allow individuals to create pseudo accounts. While the reasoning for this seems straightforward and sensible to try and avoid fake accounts, this poses a challenge for some staff, particularly those supporting young people in a care-experience setting where they want to support young people to access information and the clubs and groups they are a part of, which is mostly distributed through platform groups. So, does a staff member:

1. Use the organisational profile? But does this risk signalling (to other peers) that a young person comes from a care setting and breach confidentiality?
2. Use their personal profile? But does this cross the personal/professional boundary?
3. Create a duplicate or fake account for purely work-related purposes? But this breaches the platform's terms of services and can be taken down at any time.

✓ Engage with Services and Individuals

The Labs highlighted the opportunities for platforms to continue to build on their dialogue with services to understand the concerns they face in supporting and safeguarding young people online and supporting services to use their platforms safely and effectively. There are many existing programs to support third sector organisations with free licences or advertising credits to help with the digital delivery, fundraising or to promote their services, such as the [Social Impact Partnership](#) from Facebook, [Google](#), [TikTok](#) and [LinkedIn](#) and there are guides for educators, but there is less support specifically for working with young people in non-formal settings. These should be unrestricted and without conditionality.

Platforms should also continue and extend engagement with a broad range of users in their design and testing of their services to understand the consequences and impact of their services in a meaningful, genuine and transparent way with clear accountability structures.



✓ Engage with Legislation

Over the past two years there has been a significant amount of momentum in regulating digital platforms for the first time, and platforms should actively engage with these proposals.

There are successful examples such as the [Age Appropriate Design Code](#), now the ICO's Children's Code, which organisations such as [5Rights](#) have been leading to ensure that privacy is the default. The code sets out 15 standards of age appropriate design reflecting a risk-based approach. The focus is on providing default settings which ensures that children have the best possible access to online services while minimising data collection and use, by default.

At the same time, there have also been a number of significant and promising steps forward in relation to regulating against online harms through a systemic duty of care approach, including the announcement of an upcoming [Online Safety Bill](#) in 2021. But there is still a way to go. The Trust has an [extensive body of work](#) advocating for this approach whereby harms would be measured and platforms would be required to take reasonable steps to reduce them and it recommends platforms proactively engage with the online harms agenda.

✓ Offer Resource and Expertise

Historically, the relationship between many of the third sector organisations is through funding. But there were calls during the Labs for the third sector to ask for *advice*, as well as funding, for moderating platforms and managing communities. The [Social Switch project](#) is an example of a partnership with this type of approach.



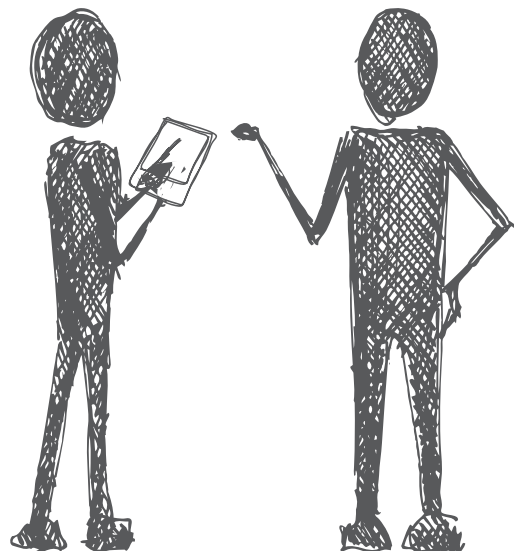
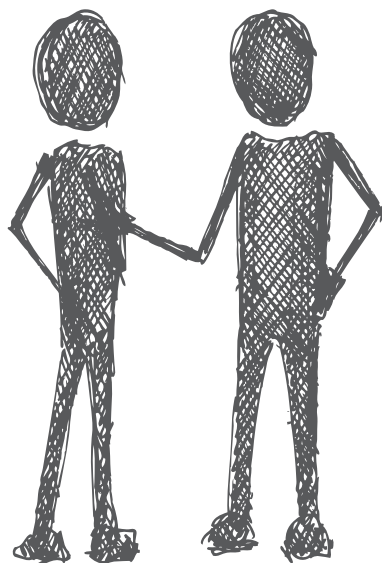
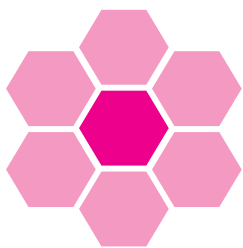
Summary

It is important to recognise that there are, in most cases, no right or wrong answers in developing organisational digital policies and procedures. They are almost always dependent on the context, objectives and values of the organisation. This resource is intended to support organisations open up some of these conversations and enable them to work through their own solutions. Furthermore, these digital policies and procedures are intended, not as additional paperwork or 'red-tape'. Rather, to improve outcomes for the young people using the service, to make working life better for staff through a more collaborative, transparent and effective way of working and to improve the decision-making process for the use of digital technology.

It is also critical to note that many of the ideas discussed in this report *are* or *will* come

into tension with one another at some point. Organisations will need to think critically about how to assess and balance risk. We have presented the concept of kindness as one way of navigating the process in terms of enabling staff to be the best they can be for the young people. Key to effective design and delivery is the recognition of the value of time and space to come together and talk through the issues.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many to accelerate their digital transformation and much of this work should be commended and shared. As these working practices and external situations continue to evolve, often rapidly, there has never been a more pertinent time for organisations to assess how and why they are using digital to support achieving their outcomes.



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The Mix, Shout. Young Minds [OneSpace](#)

Individuals participated from the following organisations:

We thank all those individuals who participated and particularly to those organisations who took these ideas forward within their own organisations with young people. Participation in this project does not imply endorsement.

- A New Direction
- Barnardo's
- Cardiff Council
- Cardiff Volunteer Centre
- Cardiff Youth Service
- Carers Information Service
- Catch 22
- CBBC
- Children in Wales
- Children's Hearings Scotland
- Children's Society
- CLIC Sargent
- College Development Network
- Conflict Hub
- Digital Media Enterprise
- Digital Youth Work Consultant
- East Lothian Council
- Girlguiding
- Girlguiding Cymru
- Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership – Children's Rights Service
- Glasgow Kelvin College
- High Life Highland
- Highland Council
- Kensington and Chelsea Children's Services
- LGBT Youth Scotland
- Looked After Children Unit, Care and Protection Division, Children and Families Directorate
- Media Academy Cardiff
- NSPCC
- Paisley YMCA
- Pembrokeshire Youth Service
- Princes Trust Scotland
- Promo Cymru
- QR Info Pod
- Royal Caledonian Education Trust
- SCVO
- Shift.MS
- Swansea MAD
- Ty Hafan
- UNICEF UK
- University of East Anglia
- Welsh Centre for International Affairs
- YMCA Cardiff
- Youth Cymru
- Youth Link Scotland

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