

Written evidence submitted by the eHealth Forum at the Royal College of Nursing (DHS0044)

This is a submission from the Royal College of Nursing eHealth Forum, which is the professional group representing digital nurses in the RCN. We wish to provide evidence to the committee on Policy 4: **Workforce literacy and the digital workforce**

Commitment 1: Co-creation of a national digital workforce strategy with the health and care system setting out a framework for bridging the skills gap and making the NHS an attractive place to work

Commitment 2: Enable the recruitment, retention and growth of the digital, data workforce

There is evidence of an increasing focus on the need to develop digital skills in the nursing workforce, as well as the development of digital skills and leadership in this area. Strategies that we are aware of, that have made a difference to digital skills leadership in the nursing workforce include:

- The appointment of a CNIO for England and a team of individuals at NHS-E&I with a focus on digital skills in nursing (and midwifery) practice. This high profile leadership is important to give focus to national activities.
- The development of a digital skills leadership programme through the Florence Nightingale Foundation – who through their national Digital Leaders programme have provided valuable support to a generation of digital nurse leaders.
- The establishment of a regional CNIO network (set up by the CNIO in England) which is providing local leadership to digital nurses working in NHS Trusts.
- The establishment of the Phillips Ives review, which will provide a strategy for digitally enabled nursing for the health care in the future. This includes how we develop digital skills across the existing and new workforce as well as a specialised digital nursing workforce.
- The Digital Readiness Education Programme from Higher Education England. This has a number of initiatives that are in progress to develop the workforce to support digital technology use in the NHS. At present there is little provision for the clinical workforce either for a) wider skills development in the general workforce or b) clinicians in nursing who wish to develop clinical skills. The digital self-assessment tool, while important, is something that could be ignored by professionals and NHS Trusts.

These developments are welcome and have proved valuable to the digital nurses who are now working actively in many NHS Trusts. However, there are still some areas that need to be addressed to ensure that we have a workforce that is able and capable of working in a digitally enabled NHS of the future:

- A lack of recognition of the need for digital skills as a core requirement for professional practice remains across the leadership of the NHS and HEIs delivering education to our future workforce.
- Inequity in the availability of education and support for nurses to access the required training they need to develop such skills.
- A recognition of the need for professional, skilled, educated digital nurses to support the digital transformation process across NHS organisations. This needs to be resourced from ward to board, with nurses at all levels. Digital transformation will not occur without having a nursing presence to input into decisions and enable practice change. At the RCN congress we passed a resolution for all Health and Care organisations to have a CNIO, as this is something that is lacking in many organisations.
- A solo CNIO in any organisation cannot maintain digital sustainment on their own without the necessary manpower to support and enable ongoing digital delivery to the profession.

- Nurse educators need to embed digital into their clinical training – this is equally relevant for individuals working in practice as clinical educators and those working in Higher Education Institutions providing education to nursing and midwifery students pre and post registration.

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