# Three Ways Artificial Intelligence Can Be Used

## A brief look at AI Assistants, Generators and Agents

Let's explore the different ways that practitioners working in social care and public services might encounter AI being used in their work.

Not all AI works in the same way. Broadly speaking, AI can be deployed in three distinct ways: as an assistant, as a generator, or as an agent.

Understanding these different approaches will help you know what to expect from different AI tools, determine how much you want to rely on them, and understand what level of human oversight they need.
Each approach has different capabilities, opportunities, and limitations - and therefore different implications for how you work with AI and how you use the outputs it provides.

The first way AI is used is as an assistant - where AI helps and enhances human decision-making, but it is following your instructions, and you remain completely in control at every step. Think of it as a very sophisticated assistant that helps you be more efficient and effective.

AI assistants might help you complete administrative tasks, search through files to find relevant information, or highlight potential concerns or trends in lengthy reports. For example, it could scan through notes and flag mentions of specific themes, needs, or concerns, saving you time in your analysis.

Although the AI does analytical work to gather and present information, you remain completely in control of all decisions. The AI is simply helping to speed up processes and spot things you might have missed. It's like having a colleague who can read incredibly fast and remember everything, but who works for you while you make all the decisions.

Some examples you might already have encountered include:
Email programmes like Gmail's Smart Reply or Microsoft Outlook's suggested responses that offer quick email reply options or highlight urgent messages.

Adobe's AI Assistant or Microsoft 365's summarisation features that can analyse documents and quickly extract key points.

Search functions like Google Search that understand what you're looking for even when you don't use exact keywords. For example, recognising that ‘child development milestones' and 'when babies start walking' are related queries.

Case and file management software that can recall relevant previous cases when you're writing up overviews, reports or assessments, helping you to spot patterns or precedents.

Microsoft 365 Copilot suggesting how to complete sentences or find relevant information in your documents.

The important thing to remember about AI being used as an assistant is that it gives you information to enhance and inform your judgment - it doesn't replace it. You're still the person making all the decisions; the AI just helps you access and process information more quickly and efficiently.

The second way AI is used is as a generator. This is where AI systems can perform tasks more independently, creating new content or outputs without constant human guidance at every step. These systems can analyse data, generate content, make recommendations, or even carry out certain processes semi-automatically.

For example, this approach might automatically sort enquiries, requests, complaints or cases by priority level based on urgency indicators, generate initial draft reports, assessments or actions based on information already gathered, or create content like summaries of meetings, training materials, or draft correspondence.

Some examples you might encounter in public services include:
Triage and routing systems in health services or local authority contact centres that automatically prioritise incoming enquiries, requests, needs, concerns or complaints based on urgency indicators and direct these to appropriate teams.

Tools like Grammarly or Microsoft 365 Copilot that create draft summaries, reports, or documents based on your instructions.

Chatbots that can respond to citizen’s enquiries independently, providing information and guidance without human intervention for frequently asked questions.

Automated scheduling systems that arrange follow-up appointments based on availability, preferences, and priorities.

Case management platforms that generate initial assessments by analysing multiple data sources and producing draft reports for practitioner review.

Unlike AI used as an assistant, AI as a generator can create entirely new content and make independent recommendations. These AI tools are not just helping you find information, they're analysing that information and producing outputs or suggestions for you.

However, while these systems work more independently, human oversight and final decision-making still remains essential.

For example, in social care, if AI generates an initial risk assessment for

someone potentially in need of care and support, a qualified practitioner will need to review, validate, and take responsibility for any decisions based on that assessment. The practitioner will need to understand and check the reasoning used by the AI tool, consider factors the AI might have missed, and apply their professional judgment to the unique factors and circumstances concerned.

This is vital to consider because, while technology can significantly reduce administrative burden and help with consistency, it also requires careful monitoring to ensure accuracy and appropriateness, especially when working with real people in complex situations.

The third and most advanced way AI can be used is as an agent. Agentic AI systems can act with significant autonomy to achieve complex goals, make multi-step decisions, and interact with other systems simultaneously, without requiring human approval at each step.

Some examples that you may have heard of include:
Advanced automated customer service systems that can handle complex queries by checking multiple databases, escalating issues, and following through on resolutions.

Automated trading systems in financial services that make split-second decisions based on market conditions.

Some healthcare co-ordination systems being piloted that can schedule appointments across multiple departments, arrange transport, and send reminders - all triggered by a single referral.

While this approach is still largely in development for public services, agentic AI might eventually co-ordinate services across multiple departments, agencies, or organisations, manage workflows from start to finish, or automatically adjust service delivery based on changing circumstances. For organisations looking to offer seamless end-to-end services with integrated pathways bringing different specialisms together, this kind of AI may hold some answers.

However, true agentic AI is not yet commonly deployed in public services. Most systems currently encountered in work are assistants or generators. Agentic AI is still emerging, and its use in public services will require careful consideration.

As this technology develops, there are profound questions about ethics, accountability, professional responsibility, consent, and the role of human judgment in the context of complex needs - especially where public services are concerned and people's rights must be protected.

As AI becomes more sophisticated and autonomous, it will become even more critical to recognise and account for the complexity of human situations, the importance of human contact and relationships, relationship-practice in health and social care, and the need for ethical judgment that understands context, nuance, and individual circumstances

that algorithms can’t fully capture.

Having an understanding of these different forms of AI helps people to work with AI tools more effectively and safely.

Regardless of which approach is used, AI can enhance efficiency and consistency, but it cannot replace human insight, empathy, relationship-building, or professional judgment. These remain the heart of good practice.

In our next videos we will continue to look at AI in more depth.