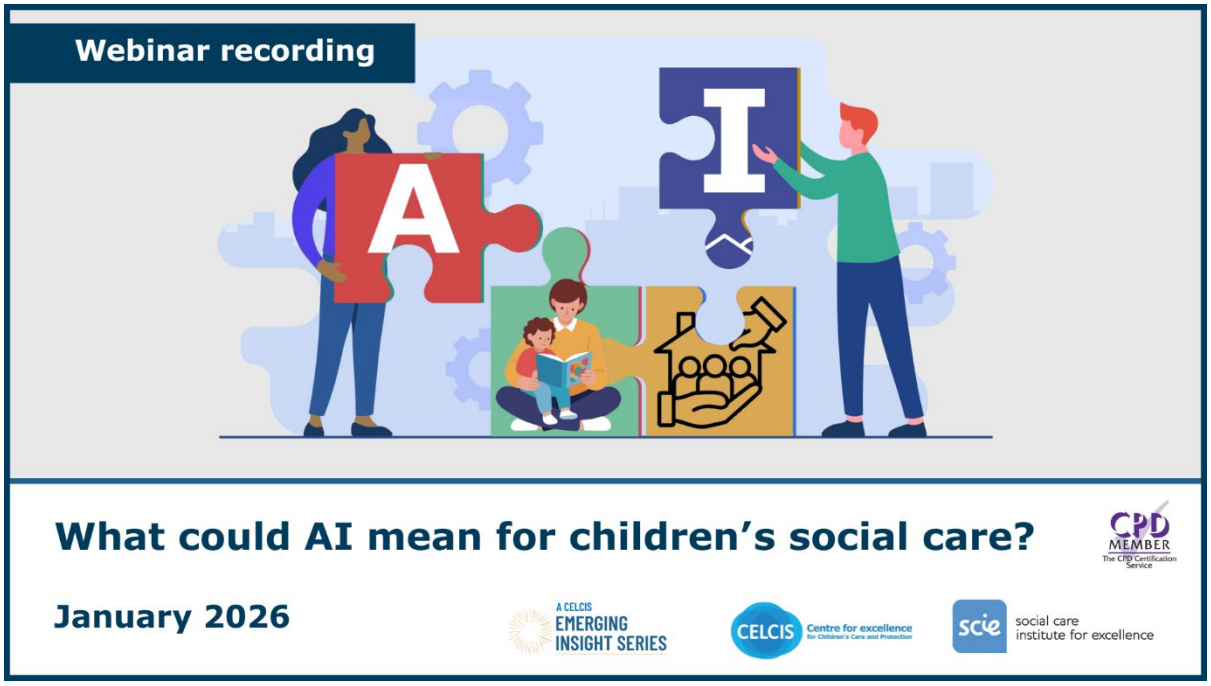


What could AI mean for children's social care?

Transcript

Featuring:

Chair:

Claire Burns, Director, CELCIS

Speakers

Professor Donald Forrester, Professor of Child and Family Social Work, Director of the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE) and Deputy Director, of the Centre for Social Care and AI Learning (SCALE), based at Cardiff University

Andrew Morley, Senior Practice Development Consultant with the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)

Claire Burns

Good morning, everybody, and a very warm welcome to today's seminar. I'm Claire Burns, the director of CELCIS, and I really appreciate everyone giving up the time to step into this joint learning space with us. We are

kicking off a new instalment of our Emerging Insights series of webinars, this time with a focus on AI and children's social care. In our previous series, we've explored emerging issues and child protection and also the findings of our Children's Services Reform Research study. This particular series will explore what AI might mean for children's social care, including what we might all need to learn about the impact AI is having in the lives of children, young people and their families, and what it might mean for the way that services respond to the care and protection needs of children.

Today's webinar is what could AI mean for children's social care, and is very much a scene setter, a real kick off of this series. It'll be looking at a couple of things - just following on from what I've already said, looking at what is beginning to be understood about the influences and impacts of AI in children and young people's lives, and exploring some of the potential opportunities and challenges of how AI is being used in practice and how it might be used in the future.

To help us do this, we're delighted today to be joined by two great contributors who are well placed to share their insights and perspectives on this question. Professor Donald Forrester is professor of Child and Family Social Work, a director of the Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre known as CASCADE, and Deputy Director of the Social of the Centre for Social Care and AI learning, SCALE, based at Cardiff University.

And also Andrew Morley, senior practice development consultant with the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE). I am absolutely delighted that they're both with us today and for the work that they've put into a contribution. After you've heard from Donald and Andrew, we'll have time for discussion. I'll put some questions to Donald and Andrew from themes and issues that have come up, and they'll also be a chance for all of you to contribute as well. So that's all from me for the moment. So, without further ado, I'd like to welcome Professor Donald Forrester, to present the first contribution. Thank you, Donald.

Donald Forrester

Thanks very much Claire. Okay, I was saying - we had a sort of pre-meet, as you do, to set things up. And I was saying to people, I sometimes feel a bit of a - not a charlatan - but like I'm pretending to know more than I might about AI. Because I don't really know a huge amount about AI, but I've become interested in how it could improve social work practice, and as a result, have got a number of projects in our centre where we're trying to think about uses of AI and how research can make a contribution to develop better uses of AI.

So, I'm not an expert on AI, but I guess I work in an interdisciplinary centre, interdisciplinary team, where we are trying to think about how to develop AI for children's social care. And what I'm going to do in this talk is kind of give a broad, high-level introduction to some of the potential, but also some of the challenges in relation to AI, to set the tone or set the scene for what looks like a really interesting series of sessions that are planned.

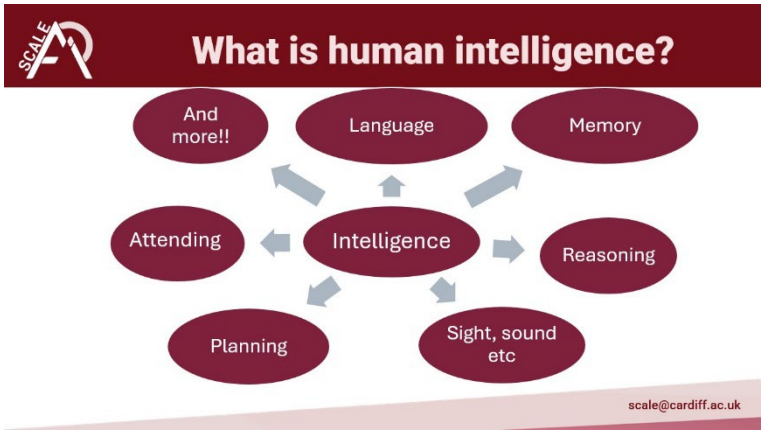
It's been said, for instance, by Sundar Pichai (the CEO of Google) that AI has the potential to be more transformative than electricity or fire as a technology. It's worth stopping and thinking about that for a moment, because even if that's an exaggeration, even if it's half as transformative as fire, that's pretty incredibly transformative. And you might say this is just your words or hype, but it's been backed up by enormous investment. So last year, there was $1.5 trillion spent on AI development, and it's likely to be substantially higher than that this year. So, from my point of view, there's absolutely no doubt that it's going to change society. It's going to change human beings, or at least the way we behave. If you think of the transformative power of the internet and mobile phones, the way they've changed how we interact and many, many different things we

do, AI is going to be at least as transformative as that, and probably substantially more.

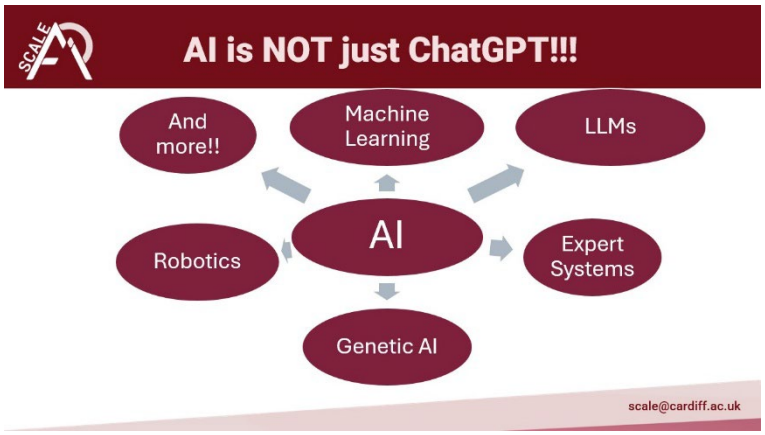
In that context, there's no doubt at all that it's going to have an impact on children's social care. And the focus of my talk today really is, what sort of impact do we want that to be, and how can we ensure that it's a positive impact, or how we can ensure we maximise the positive and minimise the negative?

I'm not going to talk too much about that broader social impact. I'm going to focus more on children's social care. This is the only slide, really, where I look more broadly, but I suppose partly because I've got children who are going to university, leaving university, thinking about university, so sort of launching into adult life. I'm acutely aware that there's an awful lot of professions that are going to be massively changed, and some that will become, perhaps even redundant. So, there are some pretty alarming estimations of the number of jobs that are going to be able to be done by AI in the next 5, 10, 20 years. But there's some good news, because I think social work, social care jobs are probably the safest I can think of, because they combine relationship-based working with human beings, with traveling, going places, visiting homes, sometimes physical elements, holding people, touching people, and also, crucially, they are also value-based. So, we're making decisions about people's lives that are not just something that an algorithm could or should do. There's something where a human has to be involved. So, I keep telling my kids social work is perhaps the safest job around and yet none of them seem interested yet in social work. But I think we're already seeing loads of articles about AI, I'd say, almost every day, you can find in the news and article about AI that is going to go on and on and on as we experience a period of unprecedented change, really.

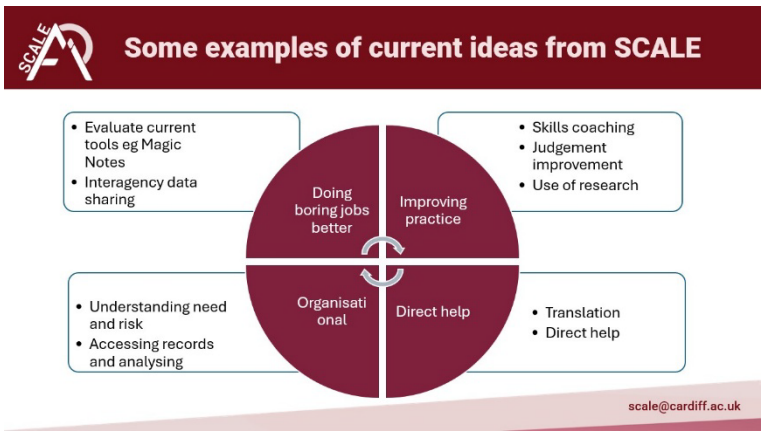
But what I'm going to cover today is a bit about what is artificial intelligence, and it's the simple version, the version I can understand, not a technical kind of definition of what it is. Then I'm going to look at ways it can change, particularly children's social care, children services. And then the focus is really trying to think about what we need to do as a sector to ensure it has a positive impact in our sector.



So, what is AI? I guess, a question to ask first is, what is human intelligence? We think of it as a single thing, but actually there's a whole load of different elements to human intelligence. For you to be able to listen to this webinar, you're having to take differences in air pressure in your ear, interpret them as sounds, then interpret them as language, then relate that language to all sorts of things you've learned and experienced, and make sense of that while you were simultaneously doing something similar with your eyes as you look at the screen, and at the same time, different parts of your body are perhaps remembering something you said to someone this morning, or planning what you might have for dinner, or being aware of your surroundings, or seeing out of the corner of your eye that your partner is waving at you and you might want a cup of tea, and then another part of you is attending to which of these you should pay attention to and which you should ignore. And hopefully the bit you're paying attention to is me talking. But there may be other things grabbing your attention. What that illustrates is that human intelligence is a complicated agglomeration of loads and loads of different systems which allow us to do things, which then interact, which collectively we call intelligence.

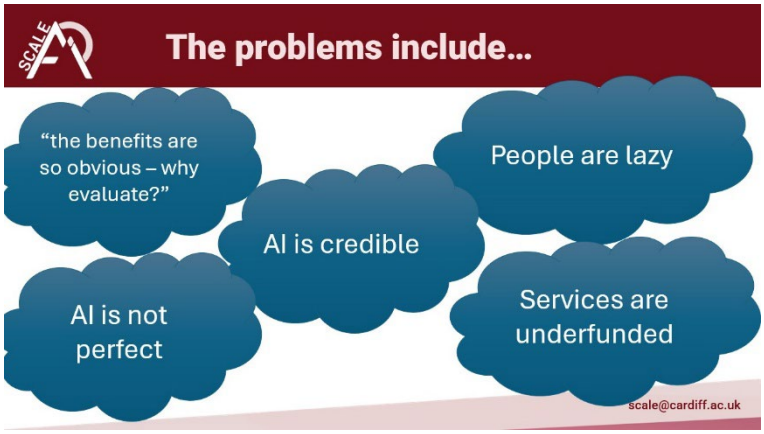


So, in that context, what is AI? Well, AI is similarly not just chat GPT or large language models. What it actually is is because of the massive continual advances in relation to computing power, which doubles every two years and has been doubling every two years since we discovered computers, we now are able just to do so many new things that mimic, to some degree, attributes of human intelligence. So we have things like machine learning, where we can create algorithms, where machines will learn from trying out and therefore will come to novel ways of understanding things, large language models, where computers can use machine learning and other elements to access more or less everything that human beings have ever written, expert systems where we teach them to perform like a radiologist or perhaps a social worker. Genetic AI, which is a current one that is about AI systems that can evolve by competing against one another, robotics, where sensory information, like video recordings, has to interact with these and include large language models and Many others. My point being, these are not just one system. There are a whole array of innovations that are being driven by massive increases in computing power, and increasingly are driven by the fact that the AI systems we create are going to be helping generate the next generations of AI systems, so that we will see accelerating growth across many of these areas and they're now getting to the stage where, for some tasks, they're already significantly outperforming human beings. For some general tasks, they are incredibly good. So large language models like Claude.ai or ChatGPT are incredibly good at answering lots of questions, not every question, and they're moving towards becoming even more intelligent or more able to combine different systems. So, it's a sort of revolutionary family of innovations that are going to change society as we essentially create computer power that can mimic, equal, and probably almost certainly, in many areas, overtake human intelligence.



So, the centre I'm in is called SCALE, and I'll come back to us at the end of the talk, but we're a centre that are funded to go and develop research ideas. So, I just wanted to give a flavour of some of the things we're looking at in turn, to just give a sense of what might be going on in AI now and in the future. And I find it useful to think about sort of four kind of broad groups of uses of AI at the moment, the first is to do boring jobs better. And I've got to say, AI is really good at doing boring jobs better, because they can deal with very large quantities of data pretty well. So, we already have current tools to summarise and sometimes to make recommendations, such as Magic Notes, but there are many others where people are using things like Gemini AI to help them write emails There's a whole load of tools that are being and will be used to do admin type jobs better, but more than admin because some of what they're doing is making recommendations or suggestions at least about what should happen. There's also issues about interagency data sharing and how we've always had a problem with this. AI, again, because it's very good at dealing with very large amounts of data, may be really useful at doing that. There's a second load of things about how AI can help us improve practice. So, could it help us to improve our judgment? Could improve our assessments? Could it help us access and use research accurately and usefully? Could it help us to develop our skills? We're developing an app to listen to practice and give social workers feedback to improve their practice. What are the ways in which it could do that?

There's then the area of direct help. So, there's a lot of work in this area, in Adult Social Care, and less in children's social care, but there's certainly applications such as translation and some direct help that could be provided to families potentially. And then there's organisational issues, and some of the big ones are about really understanding our data, being able to make better sense of it, being able to make much quicker sense of data. For instance, accessing records and analysing them in huge quantities of records in real time, is definitely something AI would be good at. This is just to give a flavour of some of the types of things, and there are many others, that AI could be and will be doing in the future.



But there are all sorts of problems. These are just a few of them. There are some that are very well rehearsed. So, I've said AI is not perfect. Large language models can tend to hallucinate. They can often reproduce human errors. So, if we are, for instance, racist in the way we talk about families, then AI will replicate that.

We were involved with a Director of Social Services who said, the benefits are so obvious, why evaluate and I think that is a danger that if you can see such enormous benefits, I'll talk about this later, we may not sufficiently look at the potential downsides of using it. A third thing is, AI is very credible. So, whether it's accurate or not, it always presents very authoritatively. But also, and people are lazy, that's not to have a go at human beings, but, but we are pretty essentially lazy, and if AI is consistently producing something, we may not check whether it's accurate, as has just been seen in the news with this chief constable who didn't check an AI product, and also services are underfunded and under pressure. What will AI be used for in that context?

So, I just want to very briefly give the example of Magic Notes, which is a summarising approach based on large language models, as I understand it. There was a recent BASW article talking about AI note taking, and the headline was, if you're not already using it, you should be, because it saves so much time. People love it, and therefore they have more time to do a person-centred practice. And I'm not questioning that, but I want to ask some questions.

Well, I'm not questioning that, but I want to ask some other questions. Because I think it's crucial when we look at AI, that we think about not just the AI itself, but the AI, the humans who use it (so it's people plus AI), and then the context, the broader context in which they are using

that. And if we think about that in relation to Magic Notes, what we find is a series of questions for the AI itself.

Do we know that Magic Notes is the best way of doing this, or indeed, when people are using it, do they know enough about how it works?

Have we tested for accuracy hallucinations, etc? Do we know what type of hallucinations? And that's when it will give spurious or incorrect findings but often give them with great confidence.

And also, a general thing in this area is, could we provide a free version that is just as good? A lot of these apps are being made by companies. Maybe we could make ones that are just as good for free? Let's save money for the for the sector.

But there are also questions about people. It sounds great having summaries of meetings, and I would have loved it as a social worker, but how will it affect social workers knowledge of families and they're thinking about families, to have that done for them?

Do we actually check outputs? So, all AI large language models say you should check. Sure, but it's a bit like when you get the terms and conditions on every single website. You should read the terms and conditions, but I don't believe any of us actually does.

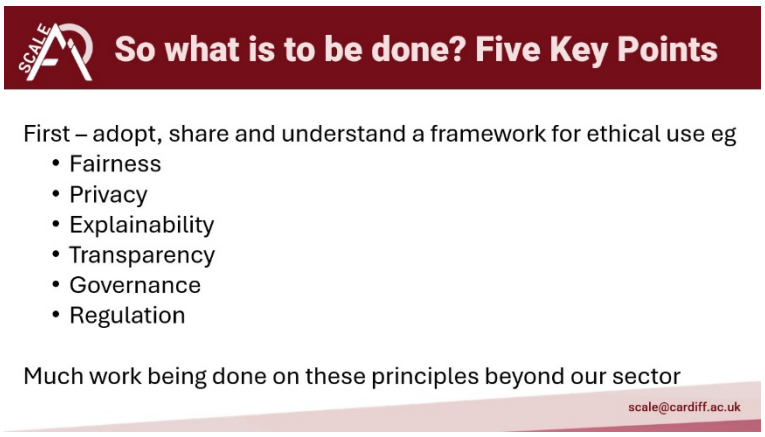
And also, in practice, does that mean people are outsourcing decision making to AI?

And then also, there's questions about the organisational context.

So, it sounds like it's saving social workers seven or eight hours a week - fantastic. But in very busy, underfunded local authorities, will that translate to less busy social workers? I hope so. But there is an alternative option - they could cut the number of social workers. So I think we need to think carefully about the context and the expected and unexpected effects of what appears to be a benevolent technology.

And a particular challenge, really, is the timescales. I've never, ever been involved in an area that moves so fast what you're talking about can be out of date very, very quickly. There could be a new news item today about a new app that changes what I'm saying in profound ways, and I've never experienced that before. As a result, leaders and workers will be offered what appear to be answers to pressing problems and the

temptation then is just to take them and I suppose what I'm going to say in this talk is we need to take a step back and think carefully about that.



So, I'm going to say there are five key things that we need to be doing. The first is we need to adopt share and understand a framework for ethical use. And I think there's a broad set of agreement around some rather similar principles. They tend to be about fairness, ensuring that no group are disadvantaged through the use of AI. Privacy and how data is used. Explainability, so that if you are using AI, for instance, to support decision making, can the AI explain why it's made a recommendation. Transparency, so that we know how the AI is working. A lot of them are very mysterious, and if we're involving them in crucial decision-making work, we need to have some transparency how that's done. And then the last two are kind of interrelated. We need ways of governing what's happening. We need, I think, at a sector level, some sort of overview of what is and isn't acceptable in relation to the use of AI and related to that regulation. What worries me a bit is I'm not really clear what we should not be doing with AI, and I think that's almost a starting point.

So, the first point is, I think we need as a sector to be embracing, universally - agreeing and embracing some key principles. But I want to go beyond that to make some suggestions about what we should be doing.

The second and third points are because it's about AI and human beings and contexts - or as they sometimes say, we need to keep the humans in the loop - we therefore need to ensure that we have professional and political power over what's going on in relation to AI, and specifically that means we need to develop organisational and professional readiness for working with it. Organisational means, local authorities, charities, NHS, organisations need to have enough understanding of AI to be able to use

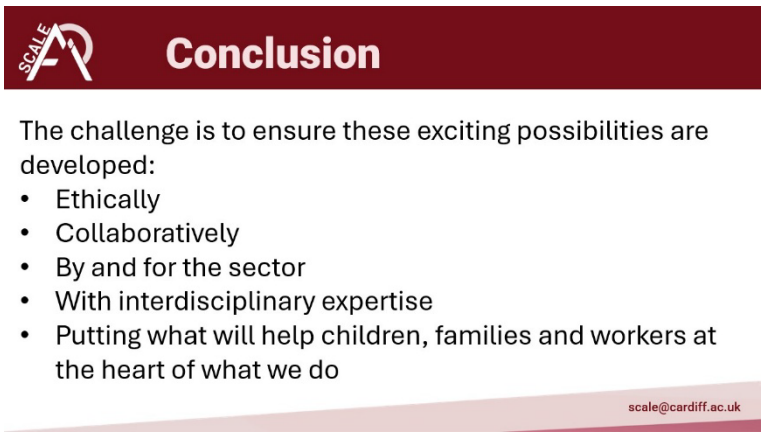
it in an informed way and also decide not to use it. So, we need organisational readiness, but we also need professional readiness. Social Work and other professions need to be training social workers who understand the ethical and practical issues in using AI. So, it's about the human in the context. Other people are investing billions in developing these technologies. We need to be developing the people in the organisations that can get the best out of them.

Related to that, I think it's really important that we try to lead, rather than follow the use of AI. And in particular, one of the crucial things is we need to work out what we want from AI. What are the problems that we have that we think AI could help fix, rather than new companies, new developers coming up with, oh, here's a fantastic thing, and then are starting to use it without really understanding it.

Much better to say, well, let's say the problem is we are working with too many families who we shouldn't be working with. If that is the problem, how could AI help with that problem? So, I think we need to develop an agenda of the sorts of questions – not just question, challenges - that AI could help us with.

And then finally, I think we need a truly interdisciplinary approach. So, I mentioned that I'm the Deputy Director of SCALE, The Centre for Social Care and Artificial Intelligence Learning. We love an acronym when we set up a centre. It's based at Cardiff University. But the crucial thing is, I'm a child and social care person. We have people from adult social care in care. We have people from the trials unit who do evaluations. We have the SAIL data set to look at large data. And then we have lots of people from the School of Computing and Informatics, and having worked in that context for a year, I'm utterly convinced that the only way we can build really good AI for children's social care and for adult social care is by

creating interdisciplinary forums and organisations to take forward this work.



So just in summary, I think AI has enormous challenge and will transform things in ways we can and can't imagine at the moment. I think what we need to be doing to make the best of that is make sure that as we develop it, we do so ethically, thinking carefully about the work we do, which is full of values; collaboratively with practitioners, researchers, AI, developers, but also children and families whenever possible; that we do it by and with the sector, not just for the sector; that we have an interdisciplinary focus and that we put at the heart of it how it can actually be used to help children, families and workers, so that we're constantly coming back to how is this going to be useful? What might be the harms? And developing an agenda for embracing, but embracing with some degree of scepticism, a transformative new technology.

Thank you very much.

Claire Burns

Thanks very much, Donald, you were right on the money timing wise, which makes me think you might have used AI for your timing…

Donald Forrester

Never.

Claire Burns

I find that really interesting, just before we move to Andrew, I think some of the key things I got out of that is around how as a sector, we need to be more proactive and intentional and not letting it happen to us. I think that's come over really strongly.

So, you're indicating the need for the ethical frameworks and child centred standards and safeguards. Where is the sector with that at the moment? Is there anybody developing that at the moment? Is that something you're looking at, or is there anything you'd want to just share with us around that?

Donald Forrester

Yeah, so beyond children's social care, there's a lot of discussion in not just health, many areas of public services about ethical frameworks. And having looked at a few of them, I tried to summarise some very common elements that you find in them. So, I think there's a general consensus around those five or six key issues I don't know. I'm not I'm not terribly good at policy stuff. I don't get a strong sense that we're on top of that yet. I certainly don't get the sense when talking to social workers that they know are these the key ethical issues. So, I think there's a lot of learning in that area that we could take from other places. And really, I think we need to move swiftly, because it's such a rapidly developing area, to embrace and go to scale on those ethical issues.

Claire Burns

Thanks for that, and we'll get a chance to ask more questions of Donald and hear a bit more from him after Andrew. So I'll bring you in now, Andrew. Thank you.

Andrew Morley

Good morning, everybody. My name is Andrew Morley. I'm from the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), where I head up much of our development and consultancy work around digital technology and AI in adult social care with councils, but also on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), where I've been leading a couple of projects for the last two years, gathering system wide learning and

developing system wide guidance around practice, ethical governance and the technical aspects of integrating AI tools into assessment and care pathways for adults. However, I would like to thank CELCIS for inviting me to join you today to share some thoughts on AI in children's social care, and to ask what might be a deceptively simple question: do we let AI into children's social care, and if so on, whose terms?

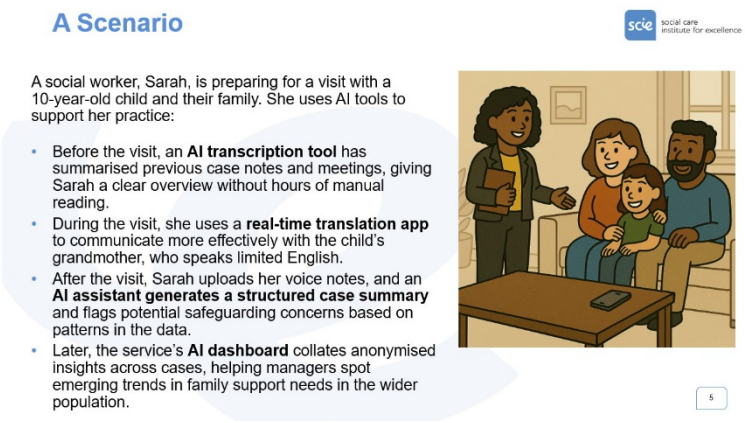
AI is being talked about in children's social care, probably with equal parts excitement and anxiety, and I think that's only natural. Some see this as a way to ease pressure, to improve communication, both internally with partner agencies, with people and families, the young people we're supporting, and also to surface insights we might otherwise miss, whether that's due to time pressures or some of the technical difficulties involved in analysing large volumes of information around individuals. But I think it's only fair to recognise that other people see this potentially as a threat to the values that define our practice, which is largely built on or focus on relationships trust and human judgment, and it was interesting to see Donald's view in terms of, those are probably one of the key areas which is going to keep the social work jobs safe in the future, whereas other professions might find themselves a little more at risk to the impact of AI on the general economy. My aim today isn't really to give a definitive answer. I'm not qualified to do that. I'm not sure anybody is qualified to do that. It's to explore the opportunities, the risks and the choices ahead of us, because the meaning of AI for children's lives is really going to depend on how we choose to use it.

I feel like I'm teaching people to suck eggs here, but you know, we're operating in the context of rising demand, earlier, more complex needs, a workforce and real strain and pressure, recruitment, retention, burnout, are all real issues in adult social care. They're not abstract challenges. They shape the daily reality of our practice, and yet our aspirations

remain clear, relational practice, co-production, safeguarding, inclusion. Those are all values that anchor us and our work. So, the question becomes, can AI help us protect these values, or does it risk pulling us away from them with a focus more on transactional decision making and suggestions of that nature?

So really, I've got a provocation I'd like us to sit with here, if AI is already shaping children's lives outside of social care. Can we ignore it? Just pause there for a second to let that one mull around. Children are growing up with AI embedded in their daily world, whether that's from the apps they may use as part of their schooling or education, to online social media platforms, how they access information around the world, their families are interacting with AI tools, often without realising it. I think it's very hard in any work we do to say there's not some trace of AI involvement in there. I often compare this to the warning that you get on food products which say there may be nuts contained within this. I think it's really hard to guarantee that there's no AI involvement in any work that we carry out, as the Chief Constable of the West Midlands area found out to his embarrassment recently. Other public services are already using AI extensively - health care, education, other areas of local government. So, the question, I think, isn't whether AI will enter social care, it's how, on whose terms, who gets to decide the extent to which we use it and the role. And I think this again, touches on some of the points that Donald made earlier, about the importance here being about who's behind the driving wheel.

A lot of AI is being developed by companies whose main focus is their technical prowess and development, and sometimes it feels like what we've been presented with is, “well, we've got a tool which can do something” rather than “what do you need this tool to actually do to help in your practice?” And it's recognising which goes first, the cart or the horse.



So I'd like to ground this in a real-world scenario. So, in this particular simple story I popped up there. Sarah is a social worker. She's preparing for a visit. She makes use of AI tools to help her summarise some of her previous case notes, so she doesn't need to spend hours reading back through information from her case management system.

During the visit, when she's in the family's house, she uses a translation app to help communicate with a grandmother, who speaks limited English. Afterwards, she uploads the voice notes from her mobile device into an AI and gets a structured summary of their meeting, which takes the verbatim recording, looks at the requirements of whatever form she may be filling in, whatever activities she's taking place in, and helps match the key elements to that, so that produces a structured summary with potential safeguarding flags for her to review and check, and at a service level, it can also produce some anonymised insights to help senior managers spot any emerging trends in terms of that particular community, but also in terms of how the service is responding to those questions. It's not science fiction. Every one of those tools exists today, and I've worked with around four local authorities quite closely in terms of helping them develop this within their adult services, and again, through the work with a wider group via the DHSC, I'm aware that this is common practice, probably now across over 80% of adult social care services, to some extent or another, maybe not rolled out across the entire service. So that leads on to a really key question, which is, what does that mean for our practice, our values based practice?

On the one hand, it does appear that the benefits are quite clear. For children, the benefits might be clearer communication, more accurate recording of our engagement with them, potentially, than relying on handwritten notes. The ability to use those tools to support an interrogation of the recorded notes to maybe bring out the child's voice

directly - include some direct quotes which better represent their perspective what it is they want, what it is they value, what it is they need in their own words. Using modelling to provide earlier support and to make sure that our services are better planned. For the practitioner, the benefits are that a significant reduction in admin tasks which take away from the quality time they spend with people or developing creative ideas to support young people and families, a reduced cognitive load, more time for that direct work and possibly more confidence in decision making. I might say the jury's out on that one, but I think we'll throw that in as definitely one of the benefits which are sold to us, if you like, by the providers of some of this technology.

However, the risks are equally we equally real. Donald mentioned, bias in data. Obviously, this is one of the areas in terms of where machine learning takes place. What are the information resources which have been picked up on there? If that is an open tool, open to include learning from the whole web, effectively what you're likely to see is the tool replicate biases which exist within the general discussion on that. If you're looking at a closed loop system, again, do you miss out on maybe some of the latest research? So, another risk might be around over reliance on automated suggestions, particularly in teams filled with busy professionals who've got other demands on their time. Families may feel judged by a machine, may feel the reduction, if you like, of the human touch in their dealings with local authorities. Privacy concerns, again, another area where is this information being stored? Is this all sat in the cloud? Could somebody hack my information? You know, is this being used to train other AIs elsewhere? And what are the ethical implications of that? And again, maybe the most subtle risk is the loss of nuance. The flattening of complex family dynamics into neat summaries. One of the criticisms I have heard of some of the AI transcription notes which have been produced is that they tend to be a bit vanilla. And I'm aware of some research which was carried out by the University of York, where a complex safeguarding scenario was fed into the system and the natural reaction of the ChatGPT, Gemini - they tested across a whole range of AI models - tended to soften the impact, tended to try to please the reader, and as such, with the summary that came back, it actually would have been easy to overlook the safeguarding implications of the original text. So, there is a concern about the potential loss of the full range of implications of what information is being looked at. So, the challenge is balance really - using AI to strengthen practice and not replace it.

In terms of opportunities, there are a number. AI can definitely help with operational pressures that we all feel. Transcription tools that turn voice notes into structured records, smart scheduling, triage systems that can flag urgent referrals and help prioritise duty workloads. These aren't about replacing practitioners. They're about giving them time back in their diary, really. And then there's insights, predictive analytic tools that highlight early risks, maybe through spotting patterns across data sets collected from assistive technology, which may be in somebody's household or from other health and other information that kind of forecasting can help managers plan capacity at a system level, in terms of looking at what types of service may need to be commissioned to support the changing needs locally, nationally, but also in terms of individual preventative approaches, which can support people to be more independent, to avoid tipping over into that crisis situation where we need to act rather differently.

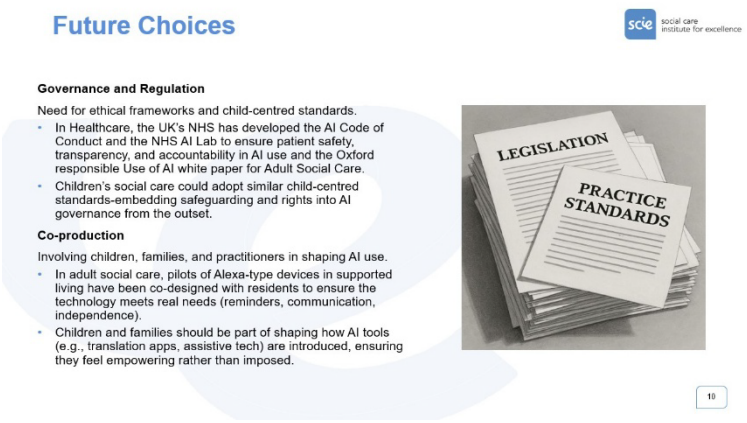
It also opens up opportunities for better, inclusion. Real-time translation tools have come on in leaps and bounds in the last 18 months alone, and can help families participate much more fully. Speech to text tools can support children with hearing or literacy challenges. Assistive technology can adapt to children's individual needs. And at a sector level, AI can synthesise learning from valuations and pilots and case studies, helping us better understand what's working where and for whom. It can support that peer learning across teams, but also across local authorities. So, we make the best of the learning within the sector, helping policymakers see and respond to and plan for emerging trends.

But we can't talk about opportunities without talking about the ethical challenges as well. Bias and fairness I mentioned just now - if AI learns from yesterday's injustices, how do we prevent it from repeating them Tomorrow?

Transparency and accountability - when an algorithm influences a decision around a child's life, who's responsible, the practitioner that used that, the programmer that wrote the system in the first place?

Trust is another issue. If families feel judged by a machine, what's the impact of that on our ability to build meaningful relationships and establish rapport with families, which is crucial to any work we then look to do with them.

Data privacy - do children actually have a voice in how their data is used? And the biggest question of all is AI being introduced for efficiency or to genuinely strengthen safeguarding, inclusion and child-centre practice? What's our motivation for taking this forward?

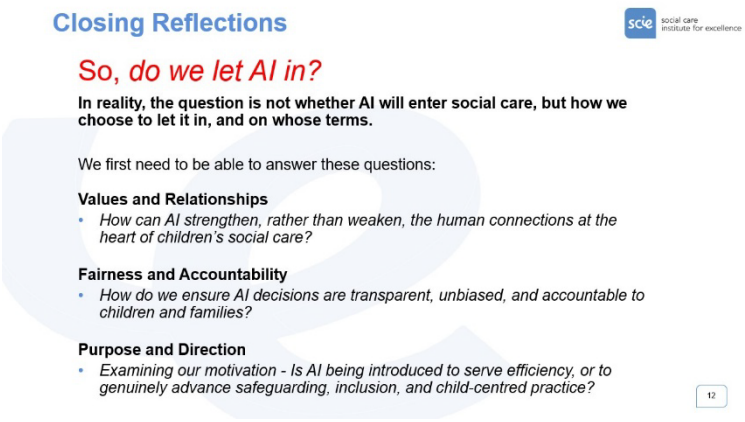


So what do we do with all of this? We need governance and regulation that are child-centred from the outset, just as healthcare has done with the NHS AI code of conduct. I'm not so knowledgeable about where that kind of governance and regulation is in children's services, but I can say in adult social care, it is definitely lagging behind the real world. I think there's a certain amount of regulators watching and waiting and learning from the pilots and projects in local authorities before developing their guidance, which requires quite a degree of courage from those services in terms of managing the risks around that in an environment where they are subject to assessment themselves and publicly published findings around the quality of their service.

We need co-production in in adult social care. AI pilots have been co-designed with residents. I won't say, every single one of them, but the ones I've seen where they have led to better results. Children and families should have the same voice. We need practical pilots controlled by transparent, evaluated and evidenced, starting in low-risk areas like admin support or communication aids are often a good way of getting a foot in the door. And actually, it's potentially an area where you can realise some quick wins if you're looking to build some capacity back into your system. If you're looking to free up some of the time which is lost to administrative or back-office functions. And we also need sector leadership - councils and practitioners and national bodies deciding not just if AI is used, but where does it add the most value? And where does it do so without undermining that relational practice that we've talked about?

So, looking ahead, there are two areas where children's social care needs to make deliberate choices around AI. I think these are around sector leadership and also practical pilots. Looking at practical pilots first other sectors show that the safest way to introduce AI is through small, controlled tests. Some councils have already trialled predictive analytics with mixed results, which tell us these tools have potential, but also flag some of the ethical risks and some of the practice and governance risks involved there. Healthcare does this really well. I've got to say. AI diagnostic tools are piloted in limited settings with clear evaluation criteria before anything is scaled. For children's social care, I think the lesson is fairly simple. Again, it's to start in low-risk areas like admin support or communication aids to learn from those early tests, and only then consider anything which touches assessment, or what we might call decision support, type of functionality. I separate that from decision making for reasons which maybe we'll get into when we have a conversation later.

In terms of sector leadership, we also need leadership across councils, practitioners, national bodies, to decide where AI genuinely adds value. adult social care has shown what this can look like through digital innovation programs, where councils shape the direction of pilots. National bodies like NICE are already developing some guidance for AI in clinical settings and children's social care needs its own equivalent to move forward. Ultimately, leaders in the sector must decide if AI is used and where it strengthens those practice actions, without undermining those relationships, as I mentioned previously.



I'm going to end with a question, which is, okay, well, based on what I've said, do we let AI in? And I think we've got a bit of an answer, though. The reality is, you know what, AI is already here. The real question is,

how we choose to let it in and on whose terms. I think there are some questions we need to ask ourselves for three key areas.

One is around values and relationships. Can AI really strengthen the human connections at the heart of practice?

In terms of fairness and accountability, can we ensure transparency and equity when making use of AI tools?

And lastly, purpose and direction. Why are we introducing AI? Are we doing so just to save time? Or actually, do we really believe this can improve the lives of children and their families?

If we can answer those honestly, we can shape an approach to AI that's ethical, relational and child-centred.

As I said at the beginning, my final acknowledgement there is in preparing those slides. I did actually use AI to do the images. I don't know what you think of those images, how relevant they were. I also used it to help me plan the runtime. So I'm going to ask Claire now I'm not sure how long I've been talking for. Was that 20 minutes?

Claire Burns

Yeah, just on 20 minutes again. So yeah, one of the benefits of AI.

Andrew Morley

That is one aspect of AI that works for us. Thank you.

Claire Burns

Thanks so much, Andrew. That was really interesting. And in actual fact, I think that the questions you posed us at the end are ones that are coming up a lot from the audience. And I think those are the ones that people, I think, those ethical and around bias and things. Those are the ones that I think people are really wanting to engage in. So, we've got about 35 minutes now for some for some questions and more discussion. Some of these are questions that we had prepared, and some of them are questions that are coming from the audience as well. So, you've covered some of this, but just to focus our attention back on the kind of really, real issues… Donald will start with you, What do you think is the greatest opportunity for children's social care, and where have you got most concerns about how it will be used? Donald, could we start with you?

Donald Forrester

Well, in some ways it's some of the points that Andrew finished with that I think are the greatest opportunities and threats. I mean, we operate in a sector where many workers are on their knees with the amount of admin and paperwork that they have to do. We're struggling to keep workers in the job. All of us came into the sector because we want to work with children, families, help people, and yet many people are being kept from doing that by stuff they don't want to do. AI is probably very good at a lot of that stuff. So if we can use it to allow workers to be genuinely relational, but also to have time to think, to reflect on how they're going to do the work, to, as Andrew said, to support relationship-based practice, rather than replace it. Then, then that's where the exciting, positive stuff is, in my opinion. But I think there are all sorts of risks that it's used to replace human beings, that it's used as a shortcut, that it's used to cut costs or resources. I suppose what's interesting about both the risks and the opportunities is, I don't know if they are really in the AI. I think they're in the human beings and the organisations, and that's why I think we should realise that we have more agency here than perhaps appears to be the case, because most people in this call won't really understand AI. That doesn't matter. We can talk to people who understand AI. You do understand your practice, and you do understand your organisation, and we need to fight for what we think is important in those contexts. So, I suppose the risks and the opportunities are similar, but the take home is that we as a sector, need to be taking responsibility for how we use AI and trying to use it constructively to support good practice.

Claire Burns

Thanks, Donald. And just before Andrew comes in, and I suppose this will echo some of the reflections and concerns in the chat function. We can totally accept that we need to be more proactive, and we need to get in front, and we need to show leadership. But how do we do that with a sector that's already on its knees, really struggling, got so many demands, where do we build in the capacity to do this alongside everything else? I suppose that's one of the questions that's coming up for me. Donald, I wonder, just before we go, Andrew, I noticed you used the term, I think you both used it hallucinations a couple of times. Could you just explain to people what that is and what you mean by that? Who's best placed to answer?

Donald Forrester

Well, it might be that Andrew's best placed, but you said my name, so I'll say what I think about it.

Claire Burns

Well, we can take comments from both you, and then we're going to see if they actually match up.

Donald Forrester

I think one of the weird things for me about particularly large language models or many elements of AI is it produces outputs without understanding them. It produces it by doing really very complicated statistics and then applying additional elements to produce a credible response, a response that it thinks, you, as a reader, will think has authority, but partly for that reason, it will sometimes put in things that are just incorrect. We call them hallucinations. It's not lying, it's not deliberate. That would be the wrong concept. It just makes stuff up. One way of thinking about this is, it's almost like it makes stuff up to keep you happy, and therefore you need to be checking very carefully the accuracy. So, it always seems credible, but it isn't always accurate. That's my understanding. I don't know if you can add to that, Andrew.

Andrew Morley

Yeah, I think that's a good way of describing I think the classic example out there, actually people may be aware of this, was in the US, where the National Eating Disorder service developed an AI to provide advice to young people and adults with eating disorders. And initially, the system was providing fairly useful, fairly sensible suggestions for people when they sort of engage with it, asking questions. It was an AI agent. However, the system had been developed to learn as it went on and was connected to the wider internet and a wider variety of sources, and within a period of, I think, about a month, it learned bad habits. You know, they can learn good habits, and they can learn wrong information, which kind of then feeds into those hallucinations. And some of the advice that the system was then giving individuals was completely contrary to accepted standards and it was quickly turned off.

So again, this, this can come back to, well, you know, the systems are making, I suppose, a synthesis of all the information they can find on a particular topic. They don't understand it, but they're looking for statistical models in terms of, well, most of the comments are saying this.

There then becomes a question of, well, okay, does that mean that's right, or does that mean there's just a lot of disinformation, or, actually, there are very diametrically opposed polar views on the internet on those particular subjects. I think it comes back to what Donald was saying about the human in loop earlier as well. And I'd agree totally. I think the thing we've got to recognise, if we are making use of AI or any digital technology in adult social care - it's not an IT issue. Using those tools is actually a culture and a practice issue. You can buy anything, you can install anything, but in terms of actually it working for you, what you've got to do is address how we're going to use those tools, what our confidence levels are, our understanding levels are, what kind of safeguards we put in place.

One of the things which has concerned me, I'll be honest, around some of the AI transcription tools is that there's an expectation, rightly, that practitioners will review the summarised notes that the system shares back with them after their call, before actually then using those either to send to families or to include in their records. Some of these systems are very good. If I'm a busy practitioner and I'm checking these notes, and the first, I don't know, 11 that I check, all look spot on to me. Am I going to bother checking the 12th or the 13th? So, do we run the risk that when we're busy, that we actually trim that involvement of human in the loop there effectively?

So that was kind of picking up on those points, on sort of hallucination there, going back to those kinds of practical areas you were asking about Claire. I mean, yes, I agree with Donald that, again, a great way in, and this is possibly as far as quite a few adult services have actually got, is looking at the practical time saving type functions of AI, whether that's around transcription, whether that's around predictive analytics. But there's some other areas that it's worth kind of thinking about as well, and which we've seen some good results in. We were talking about some of the pressure, some of the turnover pressure. People were not feeling supported in roles. One of the tools I saw this last year, which I was very impressed with, was developed in house by local authority. They didn't actually outsource this to a big IT company. It wasn't something which is available on the market, but this came about as a tool to provide advice. I think it was called Ask Brenda. I may have got the name wrong. Brenda is an OT in a very busy local authority, and Brenda knows everything about the world occupational therapy and as such, all her colleagues in social work, if they want to know anything, they pick up the phone and ask her

that question. Quite understandably, Brenda was getting a bit sick of that, so what she tried to do was develop an AI agent, which she then kind of loaded with information sources, which she created so effectively her colleagues could then ask that tool those questions. This was kind of piloted and developed in that authority, and now human Brenda is no longer the go to option. People are making use of that AI agent to provide that kind of internal support, and that can provide support to colleagues who maybe are working in a hybrid model. It's not so easy to touch a base with their other colleagues these days. And, you know, swivel around in your chair and ask the person who sat behind you if you want to sort of pick up on a specialism that might exist somewhere else in your team. So again, I think there's some inward support there, whether that's for social workers or whether that's for care workers as well. And we did some work developing a tool to try and reduce turnover in care workers by providing people with access to simple, but good quality, specific information, where they could ask a question on their mobile phone while they're actually in somebody's home, supporting them. So again, I think we've got to look at some of the practitioner support functions there. And I think the same can then be turned to be outward facing as well, to support families in terms of asking questions, particularly as we're not a 24-hour service. And you know, problems don't just happen between nine and five on a Monday to Friday. So again, what can we do there at that kind of low-level prevention, that low level information, advice and support to children and families.

Claire Burns

Thanks very much, Andrew. And just to again, some of the questions I've given it's an amalgamation of two or three comments that have been made, a lot of stuff around risk and bias, which I'll come to but just on that note, around workforces, we know from our Children's Services Reform Research, we know anecdotally that social work and social care is a professional under crisis. We've got recruitment and retention issues, and it feels like it feels like an easy fix, in some ways, to say AI can support that. But I think there's some comments in and around about saying, do you actually shift investment away from people to AI, and does it also mean that you've got workers who are spending more time on the screen, rather than actually with families? And there's, there's all of those kinds of risks. So, I suppose, to you Donald and then to Andrew, while this may seem like a fix for workforces, for our workforce retention and

recruitment issues. What do we need to be really careful of or really mindful of in that context?

Donald Forrester

Well, exactly the sort of things you've said. I think at the moment it is not seen as a simple fix. I think at the moment we are much of the focus is reducing admin workloads, and I think Andrew's laid out many of the potential, but also the challenges around that. The next generation, if you like, is going to be more about how different types of AI can actually support, relationship-based practice, support wise judgment, etc. So there's already at least one paper out showing that AI can make better - more accurate - forecasts of what's likely to happen in a family than a social worker. Now I don't think that means we should get AI to make decisions about what should happen with families, but I also think when we know that there's a lot of a huge amount of variability in Social Work decisions about families, I don't think we can then ignore the possibility of having support to make better decisions. So, the question then is, how can we develop forms of AI that help workers to do their job better, help them to make better judgments about families. And for better I mean ethical, I mean informed by research, I mean accurate. I mean some simple things like, when I was a social worker, we used to have case files, and you'd be given like a complex family with nine case files that went this big. And your first task was to read them, but of course, you didn't. You sort of skimmed through and tried to make sense of them. AI is very good at that sort of thing. So it could also find patterns that perhaps the worker had missed, understand members of the wider family, that perhaps the worker wasn't aware of all sorts of stuff. So how could we develop AI to support practice is where we're beginning to move towards. So that would be my response.

Claire Burns

Really helpful, Donald, Thank you. Andrew, I think that's similar some of the things you said, I was really struck by you saying we need to use it to strengthen practice rather than replace practice. So what would you like to see around that area?

Andrew Morley

I would agree it's not a magic wand, but I think this is where there's potential to use AI as part of learning, training and ongoing professional

development. Quite frankly, one of the issues which often gets raised around AI, and I'd say some of the more general tools are getting better at this. But we're talking about a wide range of applications here, is there's not always immediate transparency about why it said something, why it's given you a suggestion, or why it's showing you some particular numbers. And I think one of the things that we can make use of AI to do is to help by asking us some challenging questions or surfacing some evidence to look at alongside of things.

I mean, I hate to say it, but you know, from my own personal experience, when you're sort of heavily involved with working with an individual or a family, you know you may have a lot of knowledge about that particular person. You've got all the information on your system going back however long that may go for that particular individual, sometimes that can actually point you in certain directions and restrict that view effectively. And I think, you know, if you've got AI tools which are sort of looking at sort of broader trends, they can ask you some questions, some professional, challenging questions, I suppose, just to remind you of that. And again, I think there's a lot of scope, and I've seen this particularly with the transcription tools, there's a lot of scope for managers and seniors to use those in supervision sessions with staff to raise the general standard of recording, particularly about making sure that that recording is really person-centred, and sort of focuses on what most matters to the child and to the family, rather than a sort of a transactional model. And I think the tool itself can help with that. But then looking at how we build that into that supervision model, how we build that into case quality audit approaches, how that might then shape training and development within teams or across teams in particular authorities as well. I think those are all opportunities where collecting that knowledge, seeing those patterns, can help inform where an investment of time is going to have the most impact in bringing practice forward.

Claire Burns

Thanks, Andrew. And again, some of the other questions are connected to what you've already said, so you might want to develop it further. But I think the biggest concern that people have got is around repeating risks and biases in the use of this terminology, particularly towards women, issues around racism, and towards young people. So what is it we need to do to safeguard against those things?

But actually, I think that's quite a challenging thing that you said to us. I feel quite challenged about how it can also challenge our biases, like yes, technology has biases, but so do we. And it's interesting, Donald, I was thinking about things that care experience people have told us, and The Promise about you didn't think about my previous relationships. You didn't think about my relationships with my siblings. So actually, I think what you're bringing up is, are there areas where it can strengthen our decision making and everything as well. So, Donald, will come back to you as well. So I think again, just really around people's concerns about a bias and risk and anything else you want to say about how it can challenge our own ways of thinking as well. And then I'll come to you, Andrew.

Donald Forrester

So Predictive analytics is using sort of large data sets to predict things like levels of need or whether particular families may be at risk. I'm not a huge fan, and I'm not doing any research in this area. And it comes back to something I was saying in my presentation, which is, I'm not sure what question it's trying to answer. So, we can do lots of predictive analytics. We've got lots of advanced statistical approaches using AI. I'm less sure what the sector is asking for. But in relation to this issue of bias, the technology is not biased, and therefore the issues that people are raising are not I think the problem, the problem is the technology is trained on what humans have done. So, when predictive analytics are discriminating against black and minority groups, it's because it's been trained on us humans who have been doing that, and what's actually good is that you can then actually see the biases that we have produced and actually address them - it makes it makes more transparent what's happening. But transparency is key. We can't be just assuming that we're not biased and train AI, it will just reproduce or even sometimes exacerbate somewhat our biases, depending what type of programming you're using. There have been early attempts to use predictive analytics. I'm not aware of any that have been particularly useful, but perhaps there are some. Some have had this level of bias, but it is because it's trained on human beings, so it allows us to address bias. But I don't know, Andrew, if this is an area that you've come across?

Andrew Morley

Yeah, absolutely. I don't know if anybody's aware of the work that University of York did on bias. A colleague there, Jed Meers did some work where, effectively, he designed a number of case scenarios which he

entered into various AI tools using a male name once and a female name the second time, and the responses which came back were very different. The system tended to flag the males as being at high risk with exactly the same information, effectively, with comments like ‘is unable to cope’ and various things that nature, whereas when it responded to the same word, but with it, with a female name, it was saying ‘requires help with’ so there was a gender difference in terms of that perception which was quite interesting there. And I did a workshop recently with some colleagues and adults around bias in design. And I think one of the things we, kind of picked up on there is that actually we've got to recognise that that large language model out there doesn't include everybody. Effectively, it captures information about those people who we do have contact with, who we have the most contact with, and it leaves out any learning directly around those people who we struggle to contact, so effectively creating the systemic blind spots, particularly when this is kind of building on legacy data that we actually have within our systems. I mean, Donald, you mentioned there about predictive analytics, I'm aware of a couple of projects with adults. I've got to say they do tend to be more around a sort of a health focus. But again, these are models which have been used, I'm thinking, for example, in Sheffield and also in Norfolk, where people have got assistive technology and sensors in their home and monitoring patterns in terms of bathroom use and change of bathroom use, to identify people who might be at higher risk of having recently developed UTI again, to try and then focus on bringing a review of that person's needs or situation forward, rather than wait for them to have a hospital admission. And then deal with trying to support that person to transition back home after they've had that treatment and that whole disruption. And again, one of the authorities used a similar approach, looking at information around movement against some data which have been sort of analysed nationally in terms of predicting people who are a greater risk of falls as well. It's hard to say, isn't it, when you're looking at a sort of a preventative model, actually, you know, would that situation have gone on to be a fall or something else if you hadn't intervened? But what they have seen is a slight reduction, if you like, in terms of medical treatment for those two conditions amongst the group they're working with. So it would suggest that that, you know, there is some degree of prevention actually happening from that particular tool. But again, you know the tool is all it's doing is raising the red flag and saying, now we need human eyes on the situation to understand what's going on and decide what should happen now.

Claire Burns

That is so helpful. One of the questions that's coming through is around multi-agency working and again, our Children's Services Reform Research really highlighted that. One of the things that's a big challenge in the sector is just multi-agency working, but also data sharing, and how complicated that would be, I suppose. Have you got any views around I think how AI can support multi-agency work and data sharing?

But I've also had a question around what happens when we've got sectors who are still using files and still using paper files, and we've got agencies, which might be further ahead in the use of digital records. So, I suppose there's a couple of things to that, in what we can support better, multi-agency working, decision-making, and again, what might we need to be aware of as well? So, Donald will come back to you.

Donald Forrester

I have got something to say, but I wondered whether Andrew, with his knowledge of adult social care, may I don't know if multidisciplinary working is more something that you've come across, but we are developing a couple of projects in this area.

Andrew Morley

I mean, it is, it is one of those areas where actually AI ought to have the best potential. You know, really, one of the biggest benefits we ought to be getting from AI is pulling together information from different sources to give us a much more rounded view of what's going on in an individual's life. So that absolutely is, you know, that's the golden unicorn that we're all kind of looking for. But all those practical situations you mentioned there, Claire, in terms of different IT systems, paper records, whatever else, you know, those continue to be a problem and have been for the last 20 something years since I've been involved in adult social care. I don't see any quick wins there. I think there is a ray of light there, but I'm afraid I'm going to throw another problem in the mix here as well, which is when you've got multi-agency working, of course, you've got different perspectives and views around information governance and data security and matters of that kind. So, I've been working with a London borough recently where actually their local police authority has highlighted some real concerns about the use of AI transcription tools, leading to records which potentially might be presented as evidence in future. Now, looking at that, I think they were able to kind of answer those issues. And for me, I think those questions raised came from a lack of understanding about

how the authority was using that tool, and again, the extent of the responsibility of human agency in the loop. So again, it was a question of tying that back to practice standards. But it does suggest that there is maybe a disconnect between agencies. And again, one of the things we talked about earlier in terms of developing these tools and approaches properly was about co-production. And when I say co-production. I don't just mean working with young people and families. I mean working with all our partners that are actually out there on that journey. Otherwise, you know, we run the same risk we do with any project in terms of developing along parallel lines, all those kind of fundamental misunderstandings and the missed opportunities, where you know this really has the opportunity to save time for a number of agencies provide a much better response to young people and families, which has a clearer understanding of what their true situation is.

Claire Burns

Thanks, Andrew, it's really helpful. Donald?

Donald Forrester

I agree with Andrew once again. So we are in the early stages of developing some projects in this area, and there's a lot of interest. And as Andrew says, because AI is good at dealing with large amounts of data, it has the potential to go into different systems and perhaps share them and address some ethical issues. But exactly as Andrew says, we sometimes talk about interagency information sharing as if it was just a technical problem, and it is not just a technical problem, it's about different professional framings, different bits of legislation, different values, and different human beings who are trying to interpret these different things. So, I think my sense is AI - it's a more complicated problem than it seems, but it will eventually help us to be able to share information. But sharing information is only really the first step in improving shared understanding and decision making. So, I think it'll have some part to play, though. I love the example of someone saying their records are still on paper files, because AI can read paper files. But that will be a different program that would need to be involved. But it can just illustrate we're dealing with different systems that store data in different ways. It is very complicated.

Claire Burns

Yeah, really helpful. And again, I'm just reflecting on some of the questions as well about some of the feedback we've had from care

experience, you know, from care leavers, care experienced people about what's been in their files, how things have been articulated in the files, and how difficult to find that. So I think, you know, there's, there's two sides to this as well about what the existing experiences are for children and families. I know somebody put that in the chat function as well, that as we're thinking about all the risks of this, we also need to be cognisant of all of the existing risks and stigma and prejudices that are around as well.

Donald Forrester

And so it would be possible to develop an AI app, or part of another app, that young people trained it in how they want their records to look and key elements of good practice. And it could then be checking records. It could be producing them. But also, if a social worker writes something, it could be saying, Do you think a child would be able to understand this? Would there be a different way? Or, you know, is this stigmatising towards the parents and the social worker still has to make a decision, but it could prompt them towards better practice, I think. So, again, I think that's a really good example of we should come up with the questions that we think are important. So you the one you raised is, how can we make sure our records are clear and could be read by young people themselves make sense to the people who they are about. Then how can AI support us to do that? Is the next question. Rather than, 'Oh, here's a new app that's shiny, how can we apply it into that sector?'

Claire Burns

Yeah, and trauma informed. Because, again, that's the that's the feedback we've had from children, young people to adults as well. You know about what it's been like to sit and read their file and what's been written about them. Andrew, is there anything quickly you want to say about that?

Suddenly there is only 10 minutes before we finish, because I've got another question each that I want to ask you. So, Andrew, is there anything?

Because I think that's such an important point, Donald, about the co-production with young people about how they would like reports done and files kept about them. Andrew, anything on that?

Andrew Morley

No, just to just that at SCIE that we feel that co-production, is absolutely critical as well.

Claire Burns

Thanks very much. So slightly different questions for you, given that we've got no time left, so just to take it to another kind of level, Donald. What is your advice to us as a sector and the leaders of in our sector, to say what do we need to do first, to really step in and grasp this? Because I think the thing that we've heard more than anything from you is that this is coming, and the sector needs to be much more proactive and much more intentional. In some ways, that starts with their leaders. Are we even thinking about links with universities as well? Because that's where some of the other skills that are needed for this are. But in terms of our sector leadership, what is the advice that you would be giving them, in amongst the 20 million other things that they've got to concern themselves with at the moment?

Donald Forrester

So I think there needs to be national leadership on what the core ethical principles are for using AI, and how we do it well. That needs to be really clear. I think that's a governmental priority. And the government needs to involve the relevant professions - social work, professions, other professions. I think each local authority and agency also needs to think about how they're going to work with AI, how they're going to apply those national principles in practice. I think there's a huge workforce issue, which, as you say, involves the universities as well in preparing individual professionals who realise enough about AI to understand the importance of their own agency and professional responsibilities. And then the fourth thing is it's a very new technology, and we need to be willing to responsibly experiment with it. The experimentation is going to happen it is the responsible bit we need to add in so that we're really thinking about how to do it well. So I think those are some of the things I would be suggesting.

Claire Burns

Brilliant. And that Donald is an excellent link to what I was going to ask Andrew. So thank you for that, which is, Andrew, you talked a bit about how we manage the implementation of this and the scale up of this. And I think you've got important things in there, around we can't just decide on something and then just scale it up. How are we doing this in a safe and, as Donald is saying, responsible way. So what advice would you give us, where we do find things that work about how we manage the implementation and scale up of that?

Andrew Morley

Yeah, and I think this does build on Donald's point there. I like the phrase used there ‘responsible experimentation’. I think it's all too easy to look at this and say, well, okay, you know that there are two challenges, there's the practice and theory. Quite frankly, you can't evolve one without the other. My concern is that if we wait to actually put any of this into practice until we've got some really great guidance, some standards, the regulation in place around that, what's that going to actually have been informed by? What is its relation to the real world? So I think the two need to evolve side by side, effectively there. And again, for me, that's around making sure that there are pilots going on from which we can actually learn. And again, maybe looking and making sure that we're not all learning the same lesson.

I've got to say, in adult social care, what we saw was a massive proliferation of everybody targeting transcription tools and saying, right, we've now done AI. It was a toe in the water, quite frankly. it was a needed toe in the water. What you need to do is, is really across the sector, whether it's through government funding opportunities to do so, target the use of AI in different areas, use the learning from that to evolve that governance, the ethical answers, the standards, effectively. But again, for me, in terms of that responsible experimentation, I think this is a learning journey. The one thing you can't do with any of this technology is design something, even through coproduction, train people and say, away you go. For me, this is kind of an action learning approach where people need support, practitioners need support, managers need support on a journey. And that's not just the people who pilot it and then everyone else runs with it, you're looking at making fundamental changes, potentially to how people actually practice. Everybody has got to go for a supported journey on that. And I'll suggest working through and each team has got to have the same opportunity to do that learning, say, within a single authority, and again, for there to be any value in the reflections that come from that, I'm thinking you need at least three months. This is not something which can be rushed, but it needs to be built into our workforce development in that respect, to actually have the positive impact it really can.

Claire Burns

Just got five minutes left, believe it or not, so I'm just going to ask you to make some final comments from both, either things that you've not felt

you've had a chance to say that you wanted to say. But I noticed in the chat function that our colleague in CYCJ, Ross, who I think he's still here. As Ross said, he's found this really interesting but also terrifying. So, suppose I want to give you just some final comments to say how do we send Ross and other people off feeling more reassured that there's a balance here? So, Donald, you to start.

Donald Forrester

Well, I alternate between being excited and terrified. I've got to say that's mostly in the world beyond children's social care. So, as I'm doing this, I'm reading loads of more general stuff. There was a book I read last year called The Coming Wave by one of the creators of open AI, and his argument was just that competition between companies and countries and individuals means AI is going to progress at an increasingly rapid and uncontrollable speed. It was quite apocalyptic, really. But the conclusion of that, I suppose, is it has informed some of what I'm saying, which is his conclusion was, ultimately, we need to start regulating this. And I guess that being terrified isn't a very helpful response unless you do something with the fear. So, I think we need to need to feel the fear and do it anyway, but we need to use the fear to think about how we can control and make the best of some of these applications and technologies. So, I think it's exciting, and a bit of fear may actually be appropriate, because it is a truly transformative set of technologies.

Claire Burns

And also, this is just a comment for me as well. None of us would want to underplay the very real issues this now brings around child protection as well. And we have to be so aware of all of that, which we've not had a chance to talk about today, and we will in the rest of the series. But I don’t want to underplay that either. But Andrew, I'll come to you,

Andrew Morley

Well, as a personal reaction to Ross, I can understand where you're coming from. When I mentioned earlier that I take a lead on AI and digital in SCIE, actually, it was only two years ago I was working with a local authority in the Northeast, and at that point in time, AI wasn't on my agenda at all. It wasn't on the horizon. It was mentioned to me by the Director of Adult Social Services there they were looking at AI, and my immediate gut reaction was, well, that'll never work. We're focused on people. How on earth is AI going to work there? But my response has always been, I suppose when I come across something which worries me

or raises those concerns, is just getting more heavily involved, partly to learn more about it, and see the broader nuances, but also to have a hand in shaping where that actually goes. And I've got to say, since I've gotten much more involved in that, yes, I've probably learned more areas that raise worries to me, but also seen much more in the way of opportunities, and seen some really practical responses in terms of how people deal with some of those ethical questions which I think work well. And again, I felt reassured that, you know, we're not the only people asking ourselves these questions. There's a lot of work going on. There's a lot of thought going into this at the moment. I think the important thing is to make those connections, and maybe to keep it on our radar. Maybe increasing the amount of time we spend, you know, connecting that through to our actual work and what our key concerns are.

Andrew Morley

Thanks very much, Andrew that was great. So just about a few minutes to go, I'm just going to thank everybody who turned up to the webinar today, because I know how busy everybody is, just for the amount of engagement we've had from everybody in the chat function and the Q&A has been really significant to the extent I've just said on the text, I really feel like I've earned my salary over the last two hours as Donald and Andrew, have managed all the different questions that were coming in. Apologies to people if I didn't get to your questions. There was quite a lot around the tools that are used, and how good they are, and some of the challenges around them, just to say we will be covering some of this in the follow up webinars. So you might want to sign up for those. Andrew, you mentioned University York. That's Jed Meers at the University York is one of the people who's going to be presenting on the tools, so you'll definitely get a chance to talk about them. And finally, just to Donald and Andrew, thanks so much. That was, I think an excellent introduction for people. I think it's really raised for us, some of the challenges, but some of the opportunities, and you've talked about what we need to do next. So, thank you so much for the effort you put in your presentations. Much appreciated. Thank you.