

**Webinar recording**



**Is AI your new critical friend in social work?**

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# Is AI your new critical friend in social work practice?

## Transcript

March 31, 2026

### Chair:

**Claire Burns**, Director, CELCIS

### Speakers:

**Professor Beth Weaver**, Professor of Criminal and Social Work Justice  
University of Strathclyde,

**Professor Tarsem Singh Cooner**, Professor of Social Work and Digital  
Media, University of Birmingham, and co-chair of the West Midlands Social  
Work Teaching Partnership AI Interest Group,

**Dr Caroline Webb**, Research Fellow, AI and Digital Health Research and  
Policy Group, University of Birmingham, and co-chair of the West  
Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership AI Interest Group (as above,  
with Tarsem).

**CB** **Claire Burns**

Good morning, everybody, welcome to today's webinar, the 4th in the current series of the CELCIS's Emerging Insights webinars, this time with a focus on AI and children's social care. And I'm Claire Burns, the director of CELCIS, and really appreciate everybody who's turning up today and giving us their time. We appreciate how busy, how challenging it is for people across the sector.

In our previous Emerging Insights series, we've explored emerging issues in [child protection](#) and also shared key learning and themes underpinned by findings from our own [Children's Services Reform Research study](#). This particular series is exploring what AI might mean for children's social care, the services developed and practices used to respond to the care and protection needs of children, and what we all might need to think about is the impact of AI and the impact it's having on the lives of children, young people and their families - things I'm sure you've already given some thought to. Today's webinar, is entitled: "Is AI your new critical friend and social work practice?", and we'll explore the ethical dimensions of using AI in social care. Our speakers will share their perspective on what the use of AI means for work grounded and responding to human need and where ethical practice is essential. And those are many of the questions that have been raised by participants in our previous webinars on that - particularly around the ethical issues and around human need.

We're joined this morning by three contributors who will reflect on how the following questions are being navigated and experienced in practice. So those are, "Can the use of AI co-exist with ways of working and social care that requires critical thinking?", "How does relationship based practice remain the central tenet of a practice where AI is used?", and "What are the implications, challenges and opportunities for improving both the quality of social work practice and the quality of social work supervision?"

We are absolutely delighted to be joined this morning by our three speakers: [Professor Beth Weaver](#), who's a colleague of ours here at the University of Strathclyde, she's Professor of Criminal and Social Justice in the Department of Social Work and Social Policy. She'll then be followed by [Professor Tarsem Singh Cooner](#), Professor of Social Work and Digital Media, and [Dr Caroline Webb](#), Research Fellow, AI and Digital Health

Research and Policy Group at the University of Birmingham. That's all for me, so I'm delighted to welcome Beth to do the first input. Thanks very much, Beth.

**BW** **Beth Weaver**

Thank you. So, questions we've been grappling with is what does the use of AI mean for professional practice that is founded on responding to human need, where freedoms and rights, risk and protections are paramount concerns, and ethical practice is essential? Can the use of AI co-exist with ways of working in social work and social care that require critical thinking? How does relationship-based practice remain the central tenet of a practice where AI is used? What are the implications, challenges and opportunities for improving both the quality of social work practice and the quality of social work and social care support? How do social workers, social care practitioners and service users use AI and to what effect?

So, we've produced a number of papers from this and I think you've been supplied with a couple of those. We've also recently done a skills session with Iriss (<https://www.iriss.org.uk>) and I'm going to draw on some of the learning from these activities as well as our systematic review of research which is currently under review. So, AI tools are already being used in social work and social care to support various tasks like transcribing and summarising assessments or meetings, generating follow-up actions and retrieving information from case management systems. There's Magic Notes - I presume you've all heard of that, or maybe even use them. It's an AI web-based platform and it's designed specifically to help practitioners record conversations and instantly generate detailed case notes and assessments by recording and transcribing those conversations. Then the summaries are then provided in custom formats, including action points, and the notes can be easily copied into any case management system. This means that AI literacy is now essential. Knowing how to get the best out of these tools and knowing the limitations that they have is key. And I feel as if there's a strong appetite for this across our profession. We in our skill session, for example, shared techniques for prompt engineering for the effective use of AI - the quality of response will be related to the quality of the question or the instruction given to the tool. But AI literacy goes beyond simply knowing how to operate a platform to understanding their strengths,

limitations and ethical implications.

If social work and social care is to make the most of new technologies while protecting the values and standards that guide the profession, these are essential skills for the future. The rapid development of AI means that research, policy and guidance are really struggling to keep pace. Sir Keir Starmer, for example, announced an AI opportunities action plan last year, and that was framed around increasing productivity and growth with ambitions for the public sector to spend less time doing administration and more time delivering the services working people rely on. I think that kind of rhetoric really reflects some optimism about it, but it also sits uneasily alongside concerns raised in the [2022 House of Lords, Justice and Home Affairs Committee report on AI in the criminal justice system](#), and that reflects my background. That report recognised potential benefits and efficiency and problem solving, but warned that the lack of minimum standards, transparency, evaluation and training could compromise human rights and civil liberties. Translated into a social work and social care context, I feel as if that relates to the decisions we make and how we process critically, think about the information we're receiving and a kind of professional curiosity we apply. In the UK, the [British Association of Social Work](#) Code of Ethics has provided guidance on aligning new technologies with social work commitment to care, dignity and social justice.

For practitioners, this context underscores the importance of organisational governance and regulation. Agencies need to develop clear policies and practitioners should consult these alongside professional codes before adopting any AI tools in practice. But it also really begs the question, what might be the impacts and implications of the rise of AI on practitioners, on services, and on practice? AI is already being used and developed to automate or augment a range of tasks in various settings and sectors across social work and social care.

Particularly in criminal justice, this is about predictive analytic policing systems. It's about synthesising data to inform judicial and legal decision making. But more widely, I suppose, it's for operational and administrative support. Internationally, empirical evidence on the impact of AI on critical thinking and practitioner decision making remains limited. Rather than attending to impacts on discretionary reasoning or decision making, existing studies primarily examine the efficacy of existing off-the-shelf administrative or assistive technologies. Examples of that include

voice transcription to produce case notes or recordings. So that could be Magic Notes, just to transcribe, or it could be Co-pilot.

Most of these have been implemented ahead of evidence of impact. While the [Ada Lovelace Institute](#) focused on the impact in social care and the profession, [Nesta's Centre for Collective Intelligence](#) analysed the views of 101 members of the public in 13 small group deliberations on Magic Notes and they also spoke to 36 people in receipt of social care. They said that public and service user participants did recognise how AI could reduce administrative burdens and inefficiencies. Though some concerns were expressed about the potential inaccuracies and lack of oversight if staff neglected to review outputs. And they also talked about issues relating to data privacy and consent. (Dr Paul Michael) Garrett is a social work academic in Galway and he takes this further by pointing out that the professional task of analysing interactions, writing case notes, and evaluating data is vital and integral to reflective sense making in social work. That risks, he says, dilution, if not forfeiture, if delegated to AI.

Others have raised similar points. Most research on AI and social work is normative or theoretical, and empirical research tends to juxtapose sometimes presumed efficiency gains with critical ethical concerns surrounding the risks of perpetuating or amplifying existing biases or generating new biases based on the algorithmic data that is inputted into them. There's also concerns that this will reproduce inequities in social work and social care contexts. There are concerns surrounding data protection risks, informed consent, right through to environmental concerns.

Obviously, these concerns surrounding bias translate into calls for increased transparency and accountability into the quality of data that's inputted into AI models, as well as in the process of adoption, development, and implementation of AI tools. And there's calls for ethically informed evaluations. There are also strong differences of opinion as to the extent to which the biases or errors could be mediated by professional values or mitigated by safeguards and commitments to responsible development and deployment. Critically, both the evolution and implementation of innovations are gathering pace ahead of the evidence of impact, whether that's about ethical impact, whether it's about administrative impact. But beyond evaluating contemporary off-the-shelf tools or generic systems, so whether that's Magic Notes or Co-

pilot, we need to better understand how practitioners engage with and utilise AI. And that means we need to understand the impacts and effects on reasoning, critical thinking and decision making and ultimately practice. So that we can then understand the tasks and context within which the use of AI might be appropriate or not appropriate. So, when can it augment and how, and what its limitations are, both in terms of efficiencies, but I think more critically, ethically? For example, the appeal to AI's capacity to generate efficiencies implicitly highlights the very complex working environments that AI promises to offset. But in doing so, it rather clouds the risk of the erosion or erasure of nuance in critical thinking that has also been identified.

So there are fundamental criticisms that warrant attention when using AI for professional practice, and these include problems with contextual understanding, the tendency to replicate bias, and the tendency to generate misinformation. And these aren't minor issues in a context where practitioners deal with complex and nuanced issues that inform decision making and judgements about risk in real life and in real time and in sometimes rapidly changing situations. However, the conversational approach of some forms of AI, like ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, aligns well with evidence and social work research that shows that peer questioning and conversations play an important role in generating critical thinking.

At the moment, the way that these tools influence the critical thinking abilities of practitioners in the workplace is really understudied. The extent to which workers are equipped to engage critically with AI also is less than obvious. There are concerns that, for example, AI in its various forms might create uncritical passive users and undermine human autonomy or encourage dependency to a level that marginalises the need for critical thinking, which could be counterproductive to what we're trying to achieve in terms of over-reliance on these systems, which could result in impaired critical thinking and memory retention. There's also an element of AI that is rather affirmatory. It's got a sycophantic tendency. So that it can tell you what you want to hear, if you like, and it can influence users' decision-making and increases perceptions of the model's trustworthiness even as that validation risks eroding your judgement, altering your thinking and influencing your decision making.

So for me, this underlines the importance of approaching these tools really critically, reflexively and in conjunction with other resources and

sources of information. It also points to ensuring our service users understand these limitations and risks. We've all seen the alarming headlines of ChatGPT providing harmful advice to troubled people. Moreover, recently, the Guardian reported on a study which found that a quarter of teenagers turn to AI chatbots as if it's a friend. This can be empowering, but it can also be harmful, and we need to be alert to the impacts and effects that this may engender.

In terms of practitioners, one of the most cited benefits of AI is its potential to increase efficiency. For example, it can help with initial research on topics if sources are appropriately checked. It can summarise text, help reword or explain something in a different way. It can write emails and create materials. And it can support meeting preparations by generating questions or checklists. So AI could reduce some of the admin load that we're all exposed to and in turn free up valuable time, time that in your case could then be invested in the exercise of professional curiosity by seeking out answers, engaging more meaningfully with other people, and refining critical thinking and decision making.

Our participants valued the capacity of ChatGPT to filter, collate and synthesise large amounts of information and conversely to also convert bullet points into cohesive narratives. Its ability to generate tables and chronologies provide structured, easily digestible information and streamline complex case management activities were particularly valued by our participants. The speed at which it worked, participants said, could allow them to shift their focus towards more analytical and human-centred aspects of the work ultimately, they felt, improving decision making, planning and intervention strategies. But there is some research evidence that questions the extent to which AI increases efficiencies, and that depends on the task and context within which it's applied. People have identified when it came to police report writing speed that despite practitioners thinking that it actually did help them, it actually didn't. What they did find is that it did help enhance consistency, accuracy and quality in the reports that were generated. But that kind of standardisation came with a risk and that was that it wasn't able to offer the kind of nuanced narrative that practitioners generate in their own reports. So, there's a core tension between the potential of AI to augment or enhance critical thinking, to act as a critical friend. There's a risk also that people might use AI to automate or to do their thinking for them. And that can impair their thinking or displace it entirely when people

become too reliant on AI to do that work for them. This is what's termed cognitive offloading, where practitioners lean too heavily on the tool rather than exercising the right professional judgement. Wider research is mixed on the impact of AI tools on the issues of critical thinking.

However, concerns surrounding skill erosion, particularly amongst less experienced practitioners, in terms of cognitive offloading, have been well documented. One of the people that we spoke to in our pilot study of the impacts and effects of AI on critical thinking suggested, a newer worker might use it as a bit more of a crutch. But then you still need a level of supervision and encourage that reflection and depth of understanding. And I think that's really key. This reinforces observations that AI tools cannot replace the personal reflexivity, mentorship and supervision that are integral to continued professional development and reflective practice. And it also implies the need for robust and continuous training, supervision and regulation.

Social work and social care as a profession has to consider how the individual and collective use of AI can be used in an ethical and inclusive and constructive way. So, the way in which professionals engage with AI will greatly determine its value in the workplace. The use of AI platforms in social work or social care practice should only be used if approved by the organisation. They need to be used in ways that are compliant with information governance, confidentiality and data protection. In circumstances where a recognised, protected or secure AI agency approved platform or tool is being used, I think clients should be informed if AI is being used in their case and they should be given the opportunity to opt out where appropriate to do so. There is though, a wider debate about how the introduction of AI sits alongside social work ethics and values. AI cannot and should not replace relationship-based person-centred practice, not least because it can't apply cultural sensitivity or exercise empathy. But perhaps a starting place might be applying the British Association of Social Work code of ethics. They've got an [AI framed guidance document](#) and that can support the use of AI to align with our core commitments to social justice, empowerment and ethical practice. A critical concern relates to the transference of algorithms that perpetuate existing biases that cause disadvantage or cause harm to minorities and vulnerable groups, and against which the tool produces recommendations that can reproduce or reintroduce such biases and influence the generation of those harms. So, in terms of my key

takeaways, and I'm hoping I've kept a time, as with many high-profile technological advancements, it's often difficult to differentiate between the hype and the reality, and AI is literally no different. So, what difference does it make? Well, that depends on the type, form, function and purpose of a given tool. Bespoke tools designed for use in professional context will be more appropriate, I feel, than open, publicly accessible variants. It can enhance decision making and it can validate understanding, but it could equally reduce critical thinking. So all of that needs to inform the way it's designed, developed, and the training offered to practitioners. It can rapidly synthesise information in seconds rather than the days and weeks it might take a person to undertake the same task. But it can't think, feel, or judge, so it can't replace the humans. This is why I keep using the phrase augmentation. We are all being encouraged to embrace and implement AI technologies, but it's unclear if this trend is matched with an effective level of scrutiny over the current and future impact, both on practitioners and service users. So, leaders in the field will have to consider how the individual and collective use of AI can be used in an ethical inclusive and constructive way. That's because the evidence that people intervene, override or resist AI outputs is thin. People may not understand how it works. They might be subconsciously influenced by its perceived objectivity and sycophantic interaction tone. They might not feel they have the authority to challenge recommendations, and they might not know how to raise concerns, or maybe they're under too much pressure to double check validity and veracity. So if we are going to use Gen AI:

- We need to educate practitioners on the importance of the responsible use of AI to mitigate risks and maximise benefits.
- We need to be very clear and transparent about its limitations.
- We need to understand the risks, whether it's about confidentiality, inaccuracies, hallucinations and bias.
- We need to offer training in effective and judicious use of AI and how to engage with it critically.
- We need to develop guidelines and policies around the use of AI in professional contexts.

So when it can and can't be used and so on, because of the potential for the unregulated uptake of open AI in the workplace. So the temptation to

use this technology should not be underestimated.

**CB** **Claire Burns**

Great, thanks very much, Beth. I thought that was an excellent summary of where it can be positive, but also what we should be concerned about and where we should focus our attention. Can I ask Tarsem now and Caroline to give their presentation? Thank you.



**TC** **Tarsem Singh Cooner**

Hello, everyone. My name is Tarsem Singh Cooner. I'm a Professor of Social Work and Digital Media at the University of Birmingham. And I've been exploring the use of technology and social work for a number of years now. And I was just telling Claire, Beth and so on that I started producing CD-ROMs back in the late 90s and my current work is focusing on AI as well as 360 video in terms of delivering research in a meaningful manner to social work practitioners.

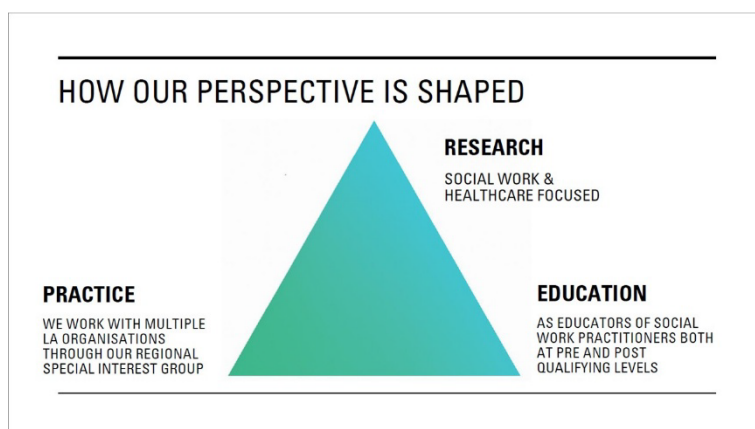
**CW** **Caroline Webb**

Hi, I'm Caroline Webb. I work with Tarsem in the Department of Social Work and Social Care at the University of Birmingham. And I also sit in a different college as well on an AI digital health research and policy group, which is really interesting because it enables me to see how AI is being integrated into a health care setting and what some of the lessons may be for social work practice as well.

**TC** **Tarsem Singh Cooner**

We just wanted to thank CELCIS for inviting us to do this short session on

is AI your new critical friend in social work practice? And we also want to thank Beth Weaver for doing such a fantastic job of summarising the research. We're going to take a little bit of a different approach by reflecting on how AI is having an impact on social work from the perspectives of the social worker, social work service user and the social work researcher. And we hope that by the end of the session, it will trigger reflections, discussion and debate, not only on the specific topics, but also to give you confidence to explore this really fascinating area of emerging practice. I'm just going to pass you on to Caroline, who's just going to show you how our perspective on AI has developed.



### **Caroline Webb**

Thanks, Tarsem. So when we were preparing for this session, we stopped to think about what it was that we as professionals could bring to this group that might be interesting in relation to this question. And we considered the different ways in which our perspective has been shaped, really, and continues to develop and grow in relation to AI and social work practice. And we noted that there were three key aspects or influences that allow us to keep learning from our experience and research. So we produced this triangle to show those different points of perspective, really. So first of all, from a practice point of view, Tarsem and I work with our regional teaching partnership, and we co-chair a special interest group in relation to AI. And that enables us to work with a number of local authority organisations. And it's really helpful for seeing how AI is being used within these organisational contexts. So, we hear that practice voice quite a lot through that. As researchers, we're interested in how AI is coming into social work practice and also through my healthcare role as well, thinking about that specifically in relation to regulation. And that's

another aspect of our perspectives. And also as educators, we're both educators and social work practitioners, both at a pre-qualifying level, but also for post-qualifying training. And that enables us to think about how we may need to adapt our approach as educators to working with qualifying and students, but also what they might need to know when they go into practice as well.

**TC Tarsem Singh Cooner**

So when we looked at developing a presentation for this morning, we decided to work on the four central questions posed for this event. And our presentation uses these questions as a framework to present and explore some of our reflections. And we hope that you find this approach helpful. So, to begin with, let's start by looking at the first question: "What does the use of AI mean for work that is founded on responding to human need, where ethical practice is essential?"



**CW Caroline Webb**

So, we wanted to first of all start by clarifying how AI is being used in practice, and those, I'm aware Beth has covered, you know, a number of those aspects, but what we thought we'd do to consider this is to present the framework really, and we put together this framework based on our knowledge of the research base, but also our work with, as I said, the local authority organisations through the special interest group. And we can see this being integrated into social work in a number of different ways. So firstly, AI is being used to offer business support functions. So, I think of it as a sort of personal office assistant, that kind of back-office work. So, it might be about helping us to manage our diaries. It might be about transcribing professional meetings or telephone calls, or it might be used to support practitioners to compile chronologies. It's also having a

client facing role too, and Beth talked quite a lot about Magic Notes as a transcription tool, and we're definitely seeing a growth of that. It can also be used for translation or to provide chat bots for initial client interface. We're aware of a number of local authorities that are using chat bots now to do the initial sort of screening of questions or requests and then signposting service users on. And also, it's being used in a way that improves or enhances service provision. And so by that, we mean AI tools can be used for prediction and decision making to sort of promote early intervention, or to provide targeted supports for specific issues or conditions. So, for example, the research that we've seen in relation to autism spectrum disorders, we can see that AI tools are being used to develop and deliver personalised therapeutic support to individuals. So, they might provide, for example, role play simulations and enable and provide tailored feedback so that individuals can develop their social skills in a really controlled and supportive environment. So, these are just some of the ways that we're seeing AI integration.

**TC Tarsem Singh Cooner**

And so in relation to question one, which just as a reminder, "What does the use of AI mean for work that's founded on responding to human need or ethical practice is essential?" We think that the key considerations that we should be asking around this question are, where does AI add value and where must humans remain central to practice? And What ethical principles should AI use in social work be based upon? And how do AI-enabled tools impact power, bias and accountability in social work? And so in order to explore these points, we're going to think about this question from the lens of three perspectives, that of the social worker, person using social work services and the social work researcher. And our presentation of these views is based upon our experiences of working with and researching within these groups. So, when looking at the perspective of the social worker, if it was me and I was the social worker in this situation responding to the first question, I would think that as a social worker, AI could help me manage information, potentially spot patterns, and hopefully reduce administrative pressure. But I would still want ethical practice to sit with me. That would mean that I'd have to check the outputs for bias, ensure that the decisions are fair, and make sure that AI doesn't distance me from the lived realities of the people that

I work with. So, AI is useful, but it can't replace my moral responsibility, my professional judgement, or my commitment to human dignity.

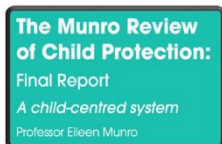
**CW** **Caroline Webb**

And from our work with people who are using social work services or in receipt of care and support, we know, we hear that what they want to know is that AI isn't going to replace that human connection. So, they might feel that they need to know that their story is being heard and that decisions about their life are still being made by people and not machines. And so for these individuals, ethical practice is really important because it's about protecting their rights and making sure that they are treated fairly and with respect.

**TC** **Tarsem Singh Cooner**

And from a researcher's point of view, both Caroline and I have had discussions about this as researchers, while we see that there's a growing body of work on AI and social care, we do have concerns that very little of it is actually based on service users' voices. And so, we lack research on how people feel about AI being used in decisions that affect their lives. Without understanding their perspective, we risk pushing forward technology, and we have seen this in some situations, that may not feel ethical, transparent, or empowering to those who depend upon our services. And so that leads us on to the second question. How does relationship-based practice remain the central tenet of practice when AI is used?

**CONTEXT: PAPERWORK VS CLIENT ENGAGEMENT**



- The system had become too focused on compliance and procedures rather than the quality of help provided to children and families.
- Excessive form-filling and performance targets were diverting social workers' time away from direct work with children.

Department for Education (2011) *Munro review of child protection: final report – a child-centred system*. London: Department for Education. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/munro-review-of-child-protection-final-report-a-child-centred-system> (Accessed: 24 November 2025).



- A systematic review of 39 UK qualitative studies finds managerialism and bureaucracy have intensified since the 1990s, leading to overwhelming paperwork and risk-management demands for frontline social workers.

- Concludes that such administrative overload **forces practitioners to choose between compliance with paperwork and bureaucracy over meaningful client engagement.**

Pascoe, K.M., Waterhouse-Bradley, B., and McGinn, T. (2023) Social Workers' Experiences of Bureaucracy: A Systematic Synthesis of Qualitative Studies, *The British Journal of Social Work*, Volume 53, Issue 1, pp. 513–533, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcac036> (Accessed: 24 November 2025).

**CW** **Caroline Webb**

And we just wanted to highlight really that the concerns about the erosion of client engagement and not new. So these were cited within [Munro's](#)

[report](#) back in 2011, where she concluded that the system had become too focused on compliance and procedures over the quality of help provided to children and families. And she identified the excessive form filling and performance targets for really diverting workers' attention away from the direct work with children. And more recently in 2022, there's some research that I had to look at a review, [a systematic review of a number of qualitative studies](#), and they found that the managerialism and bureaucracy concerns have just been intensifying since the 90s. And they concluded really that this administrative overload is forcing practitioners to choose between compliance with paperwork over meaningful engagement. So, there's a real context that we can see in relation to these sort of tensions.

**TC Tarsem Singh Cooner**

So in relation to question two then, "How does relationship-based practice remain the central tenet of practice when AI is used?" We think that there are some key considerations that we should be asking and these are that what does relational social work look like in an AI supported practice environment? How can AI enhance but not erode the human connection? And where does AI stop and relational practice begin?

**CW Caroline Webb**

And from a social worker perspective, then the conversations that we've been having with practitioners on the ground is really highlighting that AI can help them to prepare or organise or reflect, but the actual relationship, that listening, that being present, that understanding of someone's life story is still happening between that practitioner and the person that they're supporting. So, AI can free up time, but it shouldn't be taking over those conversations. And so, for practitioners who are using AI in the background, what I might notice is that it's allowing me to have that relationship-based practice, and it's really keeping that front and central because I know that AI tool is there.

**TC Tarsem Singh Cooner**

And for a person who's using social work services, I'd want to, my own perspective, and again, having discussions within our networks, as a person using social work services, I know that there's a feeling that the relationship with the social worker should be built on trust. So, service

users may say things like, I want to talk to a real person who understands me, not a system or a tool, and that if AI helps my social worker become more available, prepared, or consistent, then that seems to be fine. But the feedback is that we need to feel seen, heard, and understood, and the relationship in practice is what makes support really meaningful.

**CW** **Caroline Webb**

And from our perspective as a social work researchers then, when we talk about maintaining relationships in an AI supported service or an AI enabled kind of social work world, what we've noticed is that we actually know very little about how service users are experiencing this. So for them, is AI feeling supportive or intrusive? Or are they not noticing it? Is it an irrelevance? And how is it impacting on that trust? And we've identified that there's very little empirical research really on whether AI strengthens or weakens that relational practice from a service user perspective. And so for us, this is a major gap that really needs addressing.

**TC** **Tarsem Singh Cooner**

So, we're going to jump to the third question, which is: "What are the implications, challenges and opportunities for improving both the quality of social work practice and the quality of supervision?"



**CW** **Caroline Webb**

So what we're seeing here is a real tension in the literature and also in the experiences of practitioners in relation to the use of AI tools. So on the one hand, there's a number of challenges that have been identified and Beth spoken to some of those thinking about the concerns that ethical AI tools are raising in relation to accountability or decision making

responsibility, the need to ensure that we preserve those ethical principles and how we can do that and allow AI integration in a way that doesn't compromise our core social work ethics. And also, some of the risks about human engagement. There is a concern that we may over rely on AI tools and that could dehumanise the profession by reducing practitioners to just technology operators. But then the flip side of that is the number of opportunities that we've seen. So, Magic Notes, for example, really highlights the reduced documentation time that enhances that face-to-face engagement, allowing social workers more presence during client interactions. They talk about the benefits through relationship building because it's enabling active listening and meaningful engagement by minimising note taking. And there's also been research both by Social Work England and Magic Notes too, who note that it can actually have accessibility benefits for workers, that it can aid social workers with dyslexia or visual impairments, for example, to carry out the administrative element of their role and to really foster inclusion in that sense.

**TC Tarsem Singh Cooner**

So in relation to these points, what we think is that there are key considerations in relation to question three, which was "What are the implications, challenges and opportunities for improving both the quality of social work practice and quality of supervision?" And we think that these are the key considerations that we need to pose questions around. How do we bring AI literacy into professional development? Where does AI help practice and supervision become richer? And what new risks must practitioners and supervisors navigate in this AI enabled world? So, from a social worker's perspective, what we've heard is that AI can support practice by helping social workers think through complex cases, prepare for supervision, or organise information more clearly. But the worry is about over-reliance or feeling pressured to use tools that they don't actually understand. And so therefore, we think that good supervision will need to include reflective conversations about how and when AI should be used and how social workers can retain their professional judgement in decision making and so on.

**CW Caroline Webb**


And for people using social work services, what we've heard really is that

the most important thing to them is that they continue to receive high quality support. So I might think if AI is helping my social worker to stay organised or think things through more carefully, then that's a real positive. But there's a definite worry amongst this group that decisions might become more standardised and less personal. And there's a need then for reassurance, really, that AI isn't going to reduce individuals to a checklist and that their needs, their specific individual needs, are going to remain the central focus of social work practice.

### TC Tarsem Singh Cooner

And as a social work researcher, we're quite interested in kind of the research gap. So AI is being introduced into practice and supervision, but there seems to be very little evidence about how it affects the quality of support from a service user viewpoint. We don't know yet whether AI influenced supervision leads to better decisions, more ethical practice or improved outcomes for people. And the absence of service user research on this is a critical gap in the literature. And so now we move on to the 4th and final question. This is, "Can the use of AI coexist with ways of working in social care that require critical thinking?"

**CONCERNS: PROFESSIONAL SKILLS & ACCOUNTABILITY**



**Social workers split over impact of AI on professional skills**  
Following social work bodies calls for the regulation of artificial intelligence, an councils split over AI tools - practitioners debate its implications for the profession.  
By Anoushka Koushanian on 25 October 2024 in Workforce

**Readers' Take**

A deep cut of a book  
A generated content may be  
misleading

- **Concerns on AI Reliability** - GenAI outputs might increase risk aversion and undermine strengths-based and human rights approaches in complex cases. A lack of transparency means that we do not know how GenAI makes decisions.
- **Impact on Professional Skills** - GenAI tools may save time but risk diminishing critical social work skills like note summarising and reflection, all important in developing relationship-based practice.
- **Reflection and Decision-Making** - Writing notes encourages deeper thinking and reflection, essential for meaningful relationship-based social work practice.
- **Human Judgment Importance** - Maintaining human judgment and reflection is crucial despite technology streamlining administrative tasks.

Community Care (2024) 'Social workers split over impact of AI on professional skills', 25 October. Available at: <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2024/10/25/social-workers-split-over-impact-of-ai-on-professional-skills/> (Accessed: 18 November 2025).

### CW Caroline Webb

And so we just wanted to recognise really, and as Beth has alluded to before too, there are a number of concerns that are being raised now about the erosion of critical skills and professional judgement. And this is within a social work context, but I'm also seeing it in my experience of the healthcare landscape too, these concerns about the erosion of professional critical professional skills and critical thinking applies outside of social work and social care as well. And we just wanted to highlight a recent study by [Community Care](#) that noted a number of these things.

So, what they talked about concerns about AI reliability, recognising that Gen AI outputs might undermine strength-based practice, your human rights approaches. Because there's a lack of transparency, we don't know how AI tools are necessarily making their decisions. They highlighted the impact on professional skills that gen AI tools are, you know, saving time - that's a big marketing claim about them. But they do risk diminishing some of those critical social work skills, such as note summarising and reflection, which are really important for relationship-based practice. And to someone I was talking to earlier about this and just thinking that it's only now that we're really going to start seeing that first generation of social workers who are qualifying going into practice where they've never known anything other than AI enabled social work world. And so it's going to be really interesting to see how those kind of the increasing use of AI tools are impacting on those critical thinking skills. Within the study, community care sort of considered that, you know, actually writing notes - the act of writing notes - can encourage that deeper thinking and reflection, which is so essential for relationship based practice. And that if we're going to be bringing in technology to streamline some of those administrative tasks, we also need to give due consideration to how we can maintain human judgement and reflection.

TC

### **Tarsem Singh Cooner**

And so, in relation to the key considerations here, what does critical thinking look like with AI in the room? How do practitioners stay reflective, not passive? How do we prevent AI from becoming a cognitive shortcut?

CW

### **Caroline Webb**

So as a social worker then, I might be thinking that AI can support my practice by helping me to think through complex cases or prepare for supervision or organise that information more clearly. And that's certainly something that we are, we're hearing from social workers in relation to sort of organisation. But I think there is a worry about becoming over-reliant or feeling pressured to use AI tools. And one of the things that we noticed through our conversations is that it can be quite a polarity of opinions, really between how people who love AI and people who are much more sceptical about it. And we think that good supervision is going

to be needed to include those reflective conversations and to really ensure that practitioners are maintaining their professional judgement.

**TC Tarsem Singh Cooner**

And from a service user point of view, I'd want my social worker to think carefully about my situation, not rely on something automated to do that thinking for them. And if AI helps them explore options, that's fine. But I expect them to apply their own judgement and understand the full context of my life. So critical thinking is what makes support personalised, fair and compassionate.

**CW Caroline Webb**

And finally, from our perspective as researchers, we're assuming that AI and critical thinking can co-exist, but we see that there's almost no service user research on whether this is happening in practice. So, do service users feel that their situations are being considered thoughtfully when AI is involved? Are they perceiving decisions as more or less just? And we notice a kind of imbalance within the research really, which is very much focusing on professionals and systems, but there's a significant gap in understanding how sort of workers' critical thinking skills are being experienced by those receiving support.

**CB Claire Burns**

Thanks very much. I think what you've contributed has just been so invaluable. So, thanks for that. I will go to Beth first, but a kind of really generic question for you all around what has surprised you most as you've been researching this. And again, I've just been really some of the couple of things that I've been struck by. Caroline, I think that comment you were making about how, if we separate out writing from an assessment: actually the process of writing helps with assessment, it helps with process and what's happening and how can you separate. So I was really struck by that and really struck by you all saying as well that, because I think this is true, we're all thinking about the efficiencies on systems and practitioners, but there's very little that we know about how that impacts on families, you know, our service users and does it actually help with outcomes? So, all of that really interesting. So, Beth, I'm going to come to you first and then maybe to Tarsem and then to Caroline around what is it that surprised you most in your research?

**BW****Beth Weaver**

That's a tricky question, because I genuinely came to it knowing nothing about AI and just realised that this is something I needed to learn and then learn iteratively in collaboration with practitioners, not yet service users, and that's also an issue that I've noticed as being absent.

I think there's an overwhelming emphasis on efficiencies in a race to deploy AI into every aspect of academic and social work and social care life, beyond evidence of impact. And even the efficiencies haven't been actually measured in a very reliable way. Because, okay, yes, somebody's recording your case notes, but you then need to vet those. There's still that work that needs to be done. I think there's a lot of questions out there. By the way, I'm not anti-AI, but I am a critical friend of AI. And this is what this is all about. So can AI be a critical friend to me? Yes, but I need to be a critical friend to it.

**TC****Tarsem Singh Cooner**

So one of the things that struck me is - but this has been a perennial problem, to be honest, in social work, which is that organisations are being reactive as opposed to proactive. And that what happens is that you get these companies coming and showing you these shiny new tools that are going to save you hours of work and so on and so on. But actually, there's very little evidence to suggest that. And they're imposing their design on the organisation. Whereas actually, it should be the other way around, that the social workers, the service users, they should be involved in the design of the AI system, so it meets their needs as opposed to us filling boxes that they create. And so again, where in the West Midlands, we're encouraging organisations to be proactive and say, what do you want from this system? And how is it going to achieve what you want? And what does that look like in practice? And I think that's the conversation. We've got to become more competent. We've got to become more IT aware so that we're not allowing systems to be imposed upon us. And just one point, one thing that we've one thing we've noticed is that the companies are coming in and offering a six-week trial. And this six-week trial absolutely grabs the workers because they think within these six weeks, that they're actually saving a lot of time. But the long-term implications of agreeing to something within six weeks hasn't actually properly been measured out.

**CB Claire Burns**

Yeah, I think that all really landed with me as well. And that some of the some of the themes that we've heard is how do we as a profession get in front of this rather than letting it happen to us. And I'm really struck by that thing you're saying about the six weeks. Because if somebody said to us, you could make an assessment of your family in six weeks, we'd be saying, 'well, I am not quite sure if that's the case', but we've been asked to make those kind of assessments, so really critical points.

**CW Caroline Webb**

One of the things I suppose that has surprised me is by being familiar with what's happening in an AI in the healthcare space as well as social work, I see a number of similarities. So, some of the concerns are, as I said, we're talking through it are very similar. So, things about the worry about the erosion of kind of critical thinking skills, that's a generic concern that I think we're seeing across professions. But then on the flip side of that, we have to recognise that some of the contexts are very different. And so one of the things that I've noticed within a healthcare space, and I wasn't at all familiar with the healthcare work previously until about six months ago, was the level of regulation when it comes to AI. And there is so much more regulation that exists in a healthcare space that organisations have to consider when they're thinking about adopting AI tools that just isn't there in a social work and social care context. And as Tarsem says, what we're then seeing is that, on the one hand, this enables social care organisations perhaps to act more quickly in adopting tools, but on the other, are they acting too quickly on the back of very short pilots without that detailed evaluation?

So I think that's one of the key surprises for me.

**CB Claire Burns**

Great, thanks. You might want to come because actually it's interesting - that fits, really aligns well with one of the questions that we've been asked, which is I'm curious about how the use of AI might be monitored in organisations and local authorities and for supervisors and managers, how do you oversee comments or colleagues use of AI when you might know less about the tools? There's a number of things in there that's really interesting. You're saying different levels of regulation across

different, because again, one of the other questions about is a different nuance across different services. So, there's something in there, I suppose, but just also how can you determine where AI has been used if you're supervising, where can you determine where that's been used or not? So, I don't know if those are comments rather than questions, but anybody that wants to come in around those things.

**TC Tarsem Singh Cooner**

I think one thing is, is that everybody needs to be clear about what their organisation's AI policy is. And so that AI policy should actually outline the monitoring of the use of the AI systems as well. But can I tell you a story? So, Caroline and I, obviously working in the West Midlands - I'm professional standards lead, by the way, for our social work programme. And we got approached and I want to tell you this term, the secret cyborgs. So, what we have is a culture now with students where they are using generative AI, they are quite familiar with it. And if the universities aren't training the students adequately in terms of the ethics, the legal responsibilities, the critical thinking about their AI use, the students, some students, and this is a couple of situations that have actually occurred, where students are using AI on placement without telling their practice teachers, practice educators, and also they're using open access tools like ChatGPT. So, there's no firewall around them. And they're taking service user information, putting it into these systems and getting it to write reports for them. And they're not only doing it for themselves, in this one situation, they're using their skills to help qualified social workers write their reports for them as well. And it was only because the practice educator found a ChatGPT tab open on their system that they were able to find that this had occurred. So think of the breach of ethics, the breach of confidentiality, the illegality of what had taken place as well in terms of the data breach. But this is something that we need to be aware of. So, remember the use of the term secret cyborgs, because if somebody is finding a tool that helps them save some time or helps them with their work, then they may actually think, well, if I can't use it, out in the open, I may use it secretly. And the other anecdotal evidence that we've had is that some students are looking at what AI systems organisations are using before applying for ASYEs or before applying for jobs in those organisations as well.

**CB** **Claire Burns**

Very sobering, I have to say, and also, you've raised so many issues in there. I wonder where we go next for the question. But I suppose one of the things I think what you really helped us to think about as well, though, is we set a tone and a culture when social workers are students, don't we, that they will take into their work. So, what we do with the students either intentionally or unintentionally, because it's so much part of their world. So maybe just ask this question, Beth, I'll come to you first and I'm happy for you to answer this question or say anything else that you want to say on the topic. But to what extent are we seeing a generational divide or difference in terms of practitioners responding to using AI and social work students coming almost with an expectation now that they will use that as part of it. So, you've so you've touched on that, but Beth, I'll come to you.

**BW** **Beth Weaver**

I feel as if that is an under researched issue, I think what we need to do is take some responsibility because the flip side to what Tarsem said was that some of our students are not using AI because I also teach in social work, but they're going out into placements where AI is being used and they're not knowing how to do it. So, I think we need to take responsibility for grounding AI literacy and responsible and ethical use of AI in social education to start off with. Yeah, so I think that was the point I wanted to make is like we can't pretend it's not going to happen. So Let's get ahead of the game and make sure that people know what they can and can't do.

**CB** **Claire Burns**

I suppose what I'm thinking about is, and where do you get the time and capacity to do that with all of the other pressures that are on university staff?

**CW** **Caroline Webb**

I think it's a definite concern and what we're hearing in practice from organisations is that different sort of HEIs are embracing this problem in different ways. So, we would agree with Beth, it's really important that we are teaching this AI literacy to our social work students, not just those

who are kind of pre-qualifying, but also our post-qualifying students. I led our practice education programme at Birmingham for a number of years, and that was thinking about AI and how that was coming into practice education was something that we're really keen to integrate with our sort of post-qualifying social workers as well. But other HEIs are perhaps taking different approaches, maybe if they're less confident in talking about AI skills. And so, some of the feedback that we've had from organisations is that you may have ASYEs who are very AI literate coming out into practice and once they're qualified. But on the other hand, you've got some other ASYEs where this hasn't really been taught or considered at all through their qualifying work. And so, it's a bit of a dilemma, I think, for organisations too, in terms of, well, where do they need to pitch their AI literacy then because there's such a range. I think one of the things that I think might be helpful is to have some, certainly in England, some kind of steer on what the extent of AI literacy that needs to be covered in practice, because then this is going to help to standardise it across really, and potentially then consider if we're delivering that, how can we do that? As you say, if it's a struggle with time, what kind of strategies can we put in?

TC

### **Tarsem Singh Cooner**

Can I rather shamelessly promote my [YouTube channel](#) in the chat?

There's a bunch of resources that I've created that are freely available for anybody who's interested in developing AI literacy, whether at a practice level or within teaching and learning as well, because I think that as a profession, we should be sharing all of our experiences and knowledge. So I hope that some of those YouTube videos are useful to people because why start from scratch? If people are progressing ahead, let's look at where they are, get them to share that knowledge so that we can collectively as a profession move forward.

CB

### **Claire Burns**

Yeah, thanks very much. So, we've talked a bit about teaching and you've all alluded to this a bit, but I suppose I just want to step into it a bit more because I've been asked about it. I think you were saying, and some of the questions are asking, that some of it is an assumption that actually it will create efficiencies and that those efficiencies will give you more time and more time for relationships or better outcomes. But actually, I think

what you're saying to us is that those are still massive assumptions that are not, you know, those are not bearing out in research yet. So, Caroline, do you want to come in around that?

**CW** **Caroline Webb**

Yeah, I was just going to jump in and share something. So I was at a conference a couple of weeks ago, and one local authority who was quite an early adopter of AI transcription tools was reflecting on their experience really as part of a panel discussion. And what they noted was, they had completed the 12-month pilot, the workforce feedback was really, really positive, practitioners loved it, felt that it was saving them a lot of time, but they said we have not yet seen an increase in the amount of assessments that were being carried out. This was an adult social care context. So, they couldn't make a business case really for the continued use of the tool. And I think we're starting to see that increasingly now that once these pilots are over, they're having to put together, organisations are having to put together a business case for the sustained use of these tools and procurement of these tools because they're not cheap. And this one local authority is saying, you know, we just don't really understand what's happening because we haven't seen that translate to assessment. So, we're going to take it for another year. We're going to dig more deeply. But it may be that as they use sort of longer and longer, we start to see this more as a practice issue.

**TC** **Tarsem Singh Cooner**

Caroline, do you think that ultimately, you still have to read what's output and you still have to check to make sure that it's accurate. So ultimately, you spend almost the same amount of time reading the outputs as you would actually constructing it. Do you think that's a fair observation?

**CW** **Caroline Webb**

I think it's definitely a fair observation. I think one of the other observations they made as to why that was happening was that perhaps then it was enabling workers to go over and above in terms of the level of support and that for maybe an organisational perspective, they might be providing a really high quality service then, but it was more than they necessarily needed to deliver and that would be a difficult tension, I suppose, from justifying the cost. So, I think it is definitely about

checking, but also about are they doing more than they could get away with not doing more than they used to do before? And that's why you're not seeing that translate into practice.

**CB** **Claire Burns**

Thanks, Beth. Do you want anything around that that you wanted to come that you wanted to come back on?

**BW** **Beth Weaver**

No, no, I didn't have anything to add to what my colleagues have said.

**CB** **Claire Burns**

Yeah, thanks for much. Really interesting. We were discussing some of the webinar series with our strategic advisory boards and who had made multi-agency representation and I was asking them around, we were asking them what they feel the impact of AI and they were saying one of the things that had been a bit of a surprise to them is the amount of AI generated complaints that they were receiving, complaints that were coming in so quickly from families that had been AI generated. As again, I'm not making any judgement about that. I think, you know, families get support to make complaints, then there's a positive thing in that. But it was just an interesting, I hadn't thought about it from that point of view either.

**BW** **Beth Weaver**

I've heard the same thing. I was presenting to chief social work officers just last week and they were saying exactly the same thing, the amount of complaints that are coming in, they're quite clearly AI generated. And I think, but then there was a point also I'd like to go back to is the harm that can be caused to some of the people, certainly the practitioners that CELCIS engage with in terms of their vulnerability to the sycophancy of AI. And I do feel as if beyond educating the social work and social care profession in AI literacy, we need to think about educating the service user group so that they understand that just because it says one thing doesn't mean it's right. And I do worry about that. We're only just now learning about the impact of social media on young people's brains and minds and thinking. AI, it's been going on for years, but it's only just come to the fore, if you like. In recent years, there is so many

unknown unknowns and I do think there is a safeguarding issue there too. And I think we should need to think about that before and learn the lessons from social media.

**CB Claire Burns**

Yeah. Beth, could you say a wee bit more about, you kind of alluded to that, but what you mean by that issue of sycophantism, could you just say a wee bit more about that?

**BW Beth Weaver**

I want to be careful about what I say because I can't see who's on the call. But there have been examples of young people saying that they felt as if they wanted to complete suicide and then they gave ChatGPT the reasons for doing that. And then the tool came back with, well, you don't need to feel bad about that. And then they said, well, how should I do it? And it gave them suggestions for doing that. And it's like, it's OK to do this. This is your choice. So, it tells you what you want to hear. That's the problem. And young people, as we know, don't have the same level of consequential thinking skills that adults do because your brain doesn't fully develop until you're 25, are at real risk of the impact and influence of things like that. And given that a quarter of young people are talking to ChatGPT as an advice tool, that worries me when you think about your focus care on looked after and accommodated children who have experienced immeasurable trauma. So, I do worry about that and I think that's the message I wanted to get out to the people that might be listening just now.

**CB Claire Burns**

Yeah, thanks very much, I shall bring Tarsem in, but I did see that case. I can't remember if it was Britain, but it was an adult male where the family had taken a case against about what it had done to him, and then you're saying if these are adults, what impact is this having on young people, adolescents, people who are traumatised?

**TC Tarsem Singh Cooner**

So I'm just going to share in the chat a video that I saw a couple of days ago about how, building on what Beth is saying about that sycophancy thing. And it talks about [AI delusion and AI psychosis](#), but it's about a

nine-minute video and it's worth watching. And one of the really concerning things for me, you know, if we think about any area of social work, is the concept of the black box, is that you know what you're putting in and you know what you're getting out, but you have no idea of how the AI is making its decisions in terms of the outputs. And the really worrying thing for me watching this 9,10 minute news clip was the fact that you had programmers from Anthropic who developed Claude, who actually were admitting themselves that we don't know how this works. We don't know how the results are being generated. Now, think about that from a social work perspective. If something is generating decisions for you, but you can't go back and actually work out how it's made those decisions, then at no point should you actually be trusting those decisions.

CW

### **Caroline Webb**

Yeah, I just wanted to respond to Beth's point about thinking about the need for AI literacy with members of the public. And I've popped a couple of links in the chat about a project. I'm not involved in this, but some of my colleagues are at the University of Birmingham. It's based on the recognition that increasingly we as a public are using sort of AI chat bots to talk to and ask questions about health concerns and some of the concerns around that. So, my colleagues are producing a sort of definitive guide really for the public to think about how they can safely navigate health information on these AI chat bots. And we could definitely see the potential really for thinking about what kind of guide could, you know, could be produced from a social worker or social care perspective. So, I just wanted to share that as a piece of work that was going on.

CB

### **Claire Burns**

Thanks very much. And again, I think what you've really highlighted to me is that there's so many layered aspects of this. So how are we supporting social work students, how are we supporting supervisors, academic lecturers, but supervisors who are supervising students, then how are we thinking about people who are supervising staff when they're out working and then actually there's a bit of work to be done with service users as well about them knowing all of that needs regulated. So it does feel quite massive. One of the questions in the chat is about the bit around when people are invested in a tool and actually it might not

actually generate the kind of outcomes that you think it's going to, somebody's asking about, is it also a risk that we get locked into a particular platform or tool really quickly because it's a six month trial and then we decide to invest in it. And once we've put the money in it, the tools become obsolete and then there's newer versions. So, what of those kind of mechanics of it do we might need to think about?

TC

### **Tarsem Singh Cooner**

Personally, I think this is where the proactive bit comes in, that you proactively make sure that the systems are interoperable with any future systems. Because if you're buying into something like Magic Notes, for example, the question to ask is, if we decide not to go forward with you, in a year's time, where is the data being stored? How long is it being stored for? Can it have interoperability and who has access to it? So there's a number of things around the data itself. And if we're proactive about it, then those questions are answered before we actually commit ourselves. The other thing is, is that if we're getting, if we're being charged X amount for every generation, every output, then if we become committed to this system, then what do we do if the costs suddenly spiral?

CW

### **Caroline Webb**

Yeah, thank you. I just want to echo that really. And so, I think for me, this sort of highlights the need for robust governance structures in place really from organisations before they start procuring these AI tools. And what we're seeing both in social care and healthcare too, is that organisations don't necessarily feel confident in adopting AI tools. And a project that I've been working on is an AI readiness checklist that supports organisations to develop those governance structures first so they can consider the what are we going to look for in terms of evaluation, what kind of metrics are we going to collect so that we can determine as an organisation whether or not it's meeting our needs, not are we relying on the vendor's evaluation of whether or not it's met our needs, and also thinking about what controls could be put in place if there are concerns about find that this is going to cost more, they're going to put the price up, or what if this company goes out of business, what are we going to turn to? So hopefully, that will speak to some of those governance issues and the tools that we've produced were initially kind of

conceived in a healthcare setting, but we are really interested in whether or not they are supportive for social work and social care organisations too, what's the applicability. So, there is a bit of a survey that's open as well. So, if anyone from an organisation is here and is interested in thinking about the governance underpinning AI, please do take a look at those and feedback to us. We'd be really grateful.

**TC Tarsem Singh Cooner**

Just a question to ask Caroline, Beth and yourself, Claire. I wonder, what do you think? At the moment, we've got small companies like Magic Notes and so on producing these AI tools. Do you think that larger companies like Google and Microsoft will ultimately just buy those systems out and include them as part of their licenses.

**BW Beth Weaver**

Are they are they not doing that already? I think I'm going to ask a counter question. And I wonder if people like yourself, myself, Caroline and others need to really be focused on really shaping the design of the tools that are going to be used in social work, as well as our practitioners and as well as our service users. And perhaps we need to get ahead of the game in that rather than wait to see what happens. And that's certainly where I'm coming from, from a justice perspective, in terms of the work I'm doing.

**CB Claire Burns**

Beth, I wondered as well if you the question for all three of you, but starting with you as well, was that do you think in terms of our location within the university that that is a is that a benefit? What connections have been made between ourselves who are involved in social work, involved in education and IT, people have got these kind of IT skills? Are there opportunities for us being based in the university to make these kind of connections? So start with you, Beth.

**BW Beth Weaver**

Well, so I can only speak for Strathclyde because, you know, but yeah, there is connections and I can connect CELCIS up to anyone in my role as Vice Dean, but I think, yeah, there's loads of opportunities and what we're trying to do is looking at interdisciplinary innovation and cross-

faculty collaborations in thinking through what is responsible and socially progressive use of AI in its design, development and deployment.

**CW** **Caroline Webb**

I suppose it's something I think we are seeing it definitely in some universities. Cardiff are very good at doing that. I think within their [SCALE centre](#), they work quite closely with computer science and think about apps that can be developed that would support social work education and practice. I know of one local authority in North Yorkshire who actually kind of developed a bottom up AI tool and that was the Policy Buddy tool. I don't know whether or not you're familiar with that, Claire. So it kind of came from a recognised need within children and family social work that, you know, social workers are spending an awful lot of time going through the organisational policies or not going through them. And actually, if we could develop an AI tool that enables social workers to ask those questions, you know, I'm working with a family, what does our policy say on X, Y and Z? it would really speed it up. And so they kind of developed this Policy Buddy tool that really stemmed from a practice need. And I think that's a really interesting example of, as I said, sort of bottom up AI development and not top down. So it doesn't just have to be universities that are making those links and developing these tools that can, and we have seen it within local authorities too.

**TC** **Tarsem Singh Cooner**

Can I just say something that might be a bit controversial? I mean, I'm a coder. I'm also an Apple accredited film editor as well. And I do wonder whether now, particularly, there's a process called Agentic AI. So if you have access to, for example, Co-pilot, you can create agents yourself. Should we actually be becoming more technically literate in developing our own AI so that we understand as far as we can how it works or doesn't work? What creating a design looks like? You know, simple things like prompt engineering and things like that. Should that be part now part of the social work curriculum? Because access to these tools is becoming readily available and who knows what's going to be available next year? And it's about us as educators educating our students with the technical as well as the ethical and the legal.

**CB Claire Burns**

Yeah, I think that's really interesting and I'm going to head on to probably our last question again, just absolutely fascinating discussion. We've got we've got a new [National Social Work Agency](#) in Scotland that was launched, you know, on National Social Work Day, which also happened to be St. Patrick's Day, I think. And you know, some of their aims and objectives is around social work leadership around improving education, pre and post qualifying. I've heard a lot from you around, you know, us getting in front, being proactive to have about making sure it's regulated. What advice would you want to give that National Social Work Agency about what they should be thinking about in terms of AI?

**BW Beth Weaver**

All of the above. I don't think I can isolate any one thing. I think it definitely would be all of the above and I'm sure myself, Caroline, and Tarsem, I'm happy to speak to them on these matters if they felt that that would be useful. But yeah, I think it needs belt and braces. I don't think there's any cutting corners because if they're going to be educating and training the next population and the existing social workers who aren't up to speed, they need to understand the full picture in order to do that effectively.

**CB Claire Burns**

Yeah, I'll provide them with that invitation, Beth. Caroline, do you want to come in and then to them will give you the give you the final comment.

**CW Caroline Webb**

Thanks, Claire. Yeah, I would just add that co-production and collaboration with people receiving services is so important too, and to really engage with those people who are, you know, benefiting from or not benefiting from those AI tools and to get their voice and integrate their voice into these discussions, that would be the area that I think they should be focusing on too.

**CB Claire Burns**

Thanks. Just before I cut, I just think that's such an important point that you've made there that we need to keep in mind. So, it's not just what is

the impact on service users, but actually if we're thinking about how we get in front, as you were saying, Tarsem, and how we get in front and how we are designing them, where is co-production, in amongst that whole process. So really important point, Caroline.

**TC Tarsem Singh Cooner**

For me, it's to build on what's already here, because Social Work England have carried out some research as well, and it's to draw on that research, because I think it covers a lot of the areas that we've covered so far this morning, this afternoon.

**CW Caroline Webb**

They worked with the Open University on the literature review and research and practice on their empirical research.

**CB Claire Burns**

Brilliant. Thanks very much. Just a reminder that we've got other up and coming emerging insights around that and also the previous ones which have covered a number of the topics that our speakers have talked about today are available on the [CELCIS website](#). But just a massive thank you to the three of you. I've just found that so absolutely fascinating and insightful and I think you've given us a great foundation to build on. So thanks for giving us your expertise and your time. And thanks to everybody who's turned up to the webinar as well. Thank you.