

# Connected communities for supporting informatics professionals

## Discovery document A: Executive summary

Report commissioned by the Digital Readiness programme

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## Executive summary

### Background

This project was commissioned as a piece of discovery work to rapidly understand the informatics networks and communities available to our workforce. It has aimed to better understand the needs of health informatics professionals (bodies, groups, and individuals) - and how best to engage with them to improve professional and service development in the future. It was also an opportunity to identify what (if any) additional support was required by networks, their memberships, and our wider informatics workforce.

### Methods

A number of engagement activities were completed which used qualitative and quantitative methods. This included an online survey (receiving 185 responses in total); a series of 1:1 semi-structured interviews; workshop and roundtable sessions for staff working in informatics and representatives from Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs), respectively. A range of activities were included to engage with a variety of individuals from different roles and backgrounds across the informatics profession to gather a cross-section of views representative of our networks and workforce. The potential limitations of this discovery project are recognised as it was not possible to engage directly with every network, nor were there equal sample sizes. Inconsistencies associated with the terminology of 'informatics' may have also influenced this discovery project.

### Key findings

A wealth of diverse informatics networks and communities were identified which were highly valued and well-respected by their members. They were shown to empower individuals to gain as well as share knowledge and experiences. Challenges associated with running and co-ordinating networks highlighted some fragilities, and that more needs to be done to support the long-term sustainability of our networks and communities. Gaps were also highlighted where networks could be used to support groups of individuals, in particular the current lack of an informatics community to support the social care sector.

The opportunity to harness networks to create a meaningful two-way dialogue between informatics leaders across the system and policy makers was also highlighted, as well as increasing equitable opportunities to access formal learning and training to support the professional development of our informatics workforce.

### Recommendations

Five recommendation themes have been created based on the findings from this discovery project, which aim to support current and future networks and communities available across the informatics profession.

**Establishing a national informatics networks support function.** Creating a function whose primary purpose is to act as an enabler and a facilitator to work with and support networks and communities. Outlining a clear point of contact and pathway to access support and resources, this function would be available to help new networks establish themselves as well as support existing networks and communities where required, while respecting the autonomy and independence of networks. Working closely with networks (and the individuals who run them) would allow the function to understand their needs and support them appropriately. An informatics networks support function would also work closely with policy makers to understand the needs from those at the centre, helping to identify and signpost towards relevant networks to engage with particular groups of individuals, enabling meaningful two-way communication.

**Identify and promote existing networks and communities.** This is an opportunity to collate and promote the informatics networks and communities available to our workforce by creating an informatics networks directory. Creating a directory would seek to have an inclusive identity while tailoring to different groups across health and social care, so that it could be identifiable and accessible to individuals working within informatics. A comprehensive and well-promoted directory would allow details of networks and communities to be conveyed to prospective members, supporting them to make an informed decision about what networks might be right for them as an individual.

**Use networks to support our workforce.** Developing a comprehensive resourcing plan to support and further integrate particular groups within the workforce who may benefit from the opportunities available through networks and communities. Developing opportunities does not necessarily mean creating new networks and also includes harnessing existing networks to integrate and better cater for particular groups. Creating new networks may be necessary in some cases where ones do not currently exist, such as a comprehensive informatics community for the social care sector.

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**Build stronger relationships.** There is an opportunity to use networks as part of establishing a meaningful two-way relationship between our networks and policy makers - which includes utilising and investing in networks that support our informatics leaders. Not only would this provide policy makers with access to expertise from across the systems, but it would also provide our networks with a voice to put forward topics wanting to be discussed with policy makers.

**Develop learning and training opportunities.** Access to networks and professional development opportunities should be tailored to support an individual based upon their needs. There is an opportunity to support our workforce at a local organisation level by using regional networks to gain access to formal learning and training opportunities available from national training programmes. Establishing regional networks, which includes the Informatics Skills Development Network (ISDN) model, can allow regional networks to take ownership of helping local organisations to personalise and tailor the opportunities available from national training programmes, delivering them at a local level to meet the needs of the workforce.