Health Education England

Connected communities for supporting informatics professionals

Discovery document B: Main report

Report commissioned by the Digital Readiness programme

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Contents

Introduction

The Digital Readiness programme - previously known as the "Building a Digital Ready Workforce (BDRW) programme" – has a significant role in supporting the development of the profession of informatics in health and social care in England. It is a route through which digital capabilities (skills, knowledge, and attitudinal change) can be developed in the health and social care workforce.

Previous research into health informatics career pathways highlighted there was further need to define the professional body offer and understand health informatics networks, their challenges and opportunities.

This discovery project was commissioned to rapidly understand the needs of health informatics professionals (bodies, groups, and individuals) and how best to engage with them and understand their participation and involvement in networks, in order to improve professional and service development in the future.

During the discovery project we have engaged with a diverse group of individuals from a variety of roles and backgrounds. Whilst no specific definition of a network or community was applied during our engagement process to enable us to remain as inclusive as possible, we believe it is important to provide context around what we mean by a network or a community. Previous studies on networks within health and social care identified that professional and learning networks can be characterised by features which include:

- Championing interconnectivity
- Having elements of spontaneity
- Evolve over time
- Enable the sharing of knowledge and expertise
- Have an inherently inter-disciplinary nature
- Have a people-centric focus

For the purpose of the discovery project, we classed a network or a community as **a collective of individuals that came together to engage in topics of shared interest which contributed to their professional and personal development**.

We recognise the potential limitations associated with this discovery project. It was not possible (nor intended) to engage directly with every informatics network and community. We also recognise the sample sizes from different groups we engaged with varied.

Finally, there is currently a lack of clear terminology when defining ‘informatics’ – it is likely to mean different things to different people and may have influenced who was engaged. For the purposes of this discovery project, we have treated the term of ‘informatics’ with the widest possible interpretation – from those who work in clearly defined informatics roles to those who simply have an interest in digital, data, and technology across the health and social care sector.

What is the problem?

This discovery project demonstrated that, generally, there is a wealth of diverse informatics networks and communities available. The exception for this is within the social care sector, which is bigger in workforce terms than the NHS but currently has no informatics community which covers the whole sector. However, we heard how current networks and communities supporting the informatics workforce in health are extremely valued and meet a genuine need - in many cases empowering individuals to gain as well as share knowledge and experiences on any number of topics. The importance of autonomy and independence of individual networks and communities is also highly appreciated.

However, it was also highlighted that more could be done to support networks and communities to in turn support our workforce.

We heard on many occasions how networks and communities tended to be almost exclusively run by enthusiastic volunteers willing to give their own time to support them. Not only has this input often been overlooked, but the reliance on goodwill from volunteers highlights how fragile the long-term sustainability of many networks and communities are likely to be without further support.

We want to take this opportunity to celebrate and recognise the tremendous efforts of those who help manage and run our networks and communities, and to acknowledge that we want to support them to run as successfully and sustainably as possible.

We also heard that there were a number of opportunities to use networks and communities to address identified gaps. For example, the current lack of a comprehensive network for those working in the social care sector.

Utilising the knowledge and experience of informatics networks and establishing a stronger two-way relationship between policy makers and networks, particularly for those within informatics leadership positions across our system, was also identified as a potential opportunity to enable greater collaborative working and provide our networks with a voice to input and influence national policy. Finally, providing inclusive opportunities for our workforce to access formal learning and training to support individuals professional development was also identified.

Therefore, our ambition is to begin to address the challenges and opportunities identified with the current landscape to support informatics networks and communities through a series of evidence-based recommendations.

The underpinning element of these recommendations is the need to establish an infrastructure for informatics networks and communities in which they can thrive and develop. Establishing this infrastructure will need to take place at two levels.

- **National level** - creating an infrastructure which supports individual networks and communities to develop and thrive. This would include creating the conditions for new networks where there are currently gaps, for instance, with social care.

- **Regional level** - specifically addressing how to personalise and target communities and individuals at a local organisation level to ensure their needs are met - again, especially where gaps exist.

It is important to re-state that this discovery project was undertaken to better understand how we could support the informatics workforce through networks and communities. The scope of this work has not been to formulate a strategy to develop a profession of informaticians - this is being addressed through wider activities within Health Education England's Digital Readiness programme.

To support networks and communities that exist right now or may exist in the future, establishing a clear way forward and creating an infrastructure will be vital in ensuring consistent support is available to networks, communities and their members to help them to continue to grow and thrive.

Theme 1 – Establish a national informatics networks support function

The recommendations that follow, outlining the establishment of a network infrastructure at both a national and regional level, will take time. It will be important to make sure there is clear ownership of each recommendation to drive them forward and ensure our informatics networks and communities are well supported.
We therefore see an opportunity to establish a long-term and sustainable mechanism of achieving this by recommending the creation of a national informatics networks support function.

What benefit will be created by doing this?

Forming a dedicated national informatics networks support function would help to ensure accountability of delivering the outlined recommendations.

This discovery project identified how many networks and communities have formed and grown over time, reflecting the organic nature of how our informatics workspace is constantly evolving based on individuals or group's needs. This is something which we want to protect. Creating a national informatics networks support function would aim to support both existing and future networks and communities, by clearly outlining a pathway to resources that could be accessed by individuals to support them to create effective and lasting networks and communities.

It is important to be clear from the beginning on what the intended purpose of a national informatics networks support function would and would not be. The primary purpose of this function would be to act as an enabler, first and foremost working in partnership with networks to support them and help where required. This function would absolutely not be intended to control or interfere with the autonomy or independence of any network or community.

Creating a national informatics networks support function would include supporting cross-network collaboration - helping networks to help themselves. For example, if there were particular topics of interest that had been identified across multiple networks, a national informatics networks support function would be able to signpost and empower these networks to come together and collaborate (an example could be running a jointly hosted webinar session).

We recognise that many established networks and communities which exist both now and in the future may neither need nor want support - a national informatics networks support function would acknowledge and respect this to ensure the highly-valued organic aspect of our networks and communities is retained. It is also important to clarify that any function created would not be exclusive to national informatics networks - but rather available to support both national and regional networks.

Later recommendations in this report outline steps towards building a stronger relationship between informatics networks and policy makers, establishing two-way meaningful engagement between networks and 'the centre'. A national informatics networks support function would aim to be a facilitator in this relationship - working with both parties to understand their needs and support co-ordinated responses. When deciding the host organisation of any function created, we strongly recommend that any host considered would need to be able to retain an element of independence and impartiality to both networks and policy makers.

During this discovery project we heard about the invaluable contributions made by many individuals that manage and run informatics networks and communities. As many do so on a voluntary basis this is creating challenges and fragilities for those managers and their teams, with volunteers regularly facing capacity, time, and resource challenges to support their network or community.

These challenges and fragilities are amplified where it is necessary to create new networks. For example, in social care, creating a return on the investment of establishing a new network would be extremely difficult for volunteers to achieve alone. To reach a potential audience of 1.7 million people would require dedicated (and funded) capacity.

Establishing a national informatics networks support function would support these individuals and help to sustain existing networks allowing them to flourish, as well as support the successful establishment of future networks.

How will this be achieved?

Our first recommended step to creating a national informatics networks support function would be to clearly design what this function would look like. This includes establishing overall ownership and ensuring a sustainable operating model is developed.

Action 1.1 – Design and develop a sustainable operating model for a national informatics networks support function.

It would be important to clearly define and establish the roles and responsibilities of any created function. We would expect designing the full specification for a national informatics networks support function to be led by the appointing organisation once decided. This should however be done collaboratively with other relevant organisations to ensure it fully captures the needs identified.

It should be noted that any function created should not be limited to one person, since this could create problems in the event of absence. In addition, it would be difficult for a single person to be able to exercise this responsibility effectively and equitably across the whole of the social care and health system.

Creating a sustainable life for our networks and communities will not be achieved through a single source but rather through a range of resources.

To support this exercise, a number of examples are outlined below that could be expected to be included as part of the remit for a national informatics networks support function.

- Working closely with networks and policy makers to identify their needs – including identifying 'hot topics' and signposting to the right target audience.
- Acting as a clear point of contact for networks and communities to provide support and assurance (where requested).
- Available to provide advice to existing networks, newly forming networks and for those wanting to engage with networks.
- Supporting new networks/ communities in the early stages of establishing themselves to offer advice and guidance (policies and processes, funding applications etc.)
- Facilitating network-network engagement to maximise collaborative working e.g. webinars, training opportunities, network tools, administrative processes etc.
- Signposting and facilitating engagement between policy makers and networks – this could be on general topics in the early stages of development, or on urgent or sensitive issues.

Any resources provided by a national informatics networks support function would need to be managed clearly, fairly, and transparently. Doing so would help to ensure requests were handled in a controlled and equitable manner to provide networks the opportunity to establish routes to improved sustainability.

We recognise the need to ensure that funding opportunities are available to allow new networks to establish themselves. It is important to acknowledge that any funding made available through a national informatics networks support function would need to be allocated and used responsibly.

To help ensure those in receipt of funding were creating successful and sustainable networks, we recommend establishing a broad set of overarching network principles.

Action 1.2 – Establish a broad set of principles for networks in receipt of funding.

Introducing a broad set of principles is not intended to compromise the autonomy or independence of existing or future networks. Networks that wish to form or continue to exist outside of access to these resources from a national informatics networks support function are respected and important to retaining the organic value of our networks.

Establishing a shared set of principles would help to ensure that networks and communities are making best use of any funding provided and are committed to providing the best possible networks for our workforce and is an exercise that should be included as part of developing an operating model for a national informatics networks support function.

Whilst we recognise there is absolutely a need to deliver financial support to networks and communities, we believe there are also other resource opportunites which could be provided through a national informatics networks support function to help networks to form, grow, and sustain themselves.

Our next recommended step is to develop training materials and resources which could be made available to those wanting access who are managing or running existing and future networks and communities.

Action 1.3 – Develop training materials and resources that could be accessed by those managing or running networks and communities.

We recognise there are many experienced individuals running our networks and communities. We see an opportunity to learn from and share this experience and ‘best practice’, empowering individuals who would want access to materials to help them to create and run the most effective and lasting networks possible.

Recommendation theme	Actions to achieve recommendation
1. Establish a national informatics networks support function.	**Action 1.1** – Design and develop a sustainable operating model for a national informatics networks support function.
	Action 1.2 – Establish a broad set of principles for networks in receipt of funding.
	Action 1.3 – Develop training materials and resources that could be accessed by those managing or running networks and communities.

Table 1. Summary of recommendation theme 1.

Theme 2 – Identify and promote existing networks and communities

It was apparent from this discovery project that there are many existing networks and communities available within the informatics workspace (see Appendix 1 for a list of networks and communities identified during the project). However, our findings indicated there may be many within the informatics workforce who are not aware of the networks and communities available, as well as individuals being unsure which networks and communities are right for them (see Appendix 2 for a summary of captured themes on why an individual may not be currently part of a network or community).

Therefore, we recommend that a directory is created by collating information about the informatics networks and communities currently available, grouping them, and establishing a prospective audience. We would also recommend developing and delivering a communications plan to promote and signpost the opportunities available, to drive up levels of awareness, participation, and engagement.

When considering social care, in conjunction with other work to establish a network for the sector, this theme will focus on promoting the new network.

What benefit will be created by doing this?

Creating a comprehensive directory of networks and communities will help to inform individuals within the informatics workforce exactly what is available to them. Producing and publishing this directory in a single, easy to access location - will help address the identified challenge of knowing how to find the networks and communities that are available.

Including a short description of the network/ community could also help individuals to make an informed decision about which networks are right for them and which, if any, they would want to participate in.

How will this be achieved?

Before any directory of informatics networks and communities is created, we believe it will be necessary to carefully consider how it is positioned. Creating a directory will need to be an inclusive process to ensure that it is identifiable and relatable to a wide audience that encompasses both health and social care.

We therefore recommend completing an initial discovery exercise to gather information that would help to inform the identity and functionality of any directory created.

Actions 2.1 – Complete a discovery exercise to inform the identity and functionality of an inclusive informatics networks directory.

Considering the identity of the directory, from the language used to practically where and how it should be hosted and accessed, will be extremely important to ensure it is inclusive and accessible to our workforce.

Additionally, we recommend completing a discovery exercise to compile details of the informatics networks and communities currently available.

Action 2.2 – Complete a discovery exercise to compile a comprehensive list of existing informatics networks and communities.

While compiling this list it makes sense to capture additional key details about individual networks and communities to help inform prospective members. Information compiled could include (and not be limited to):

- Network/ community purpose
- Benefits/ opportunities available
- Intended target audience
- Membership costs/ prerequisites (if applicable)

Once launched, the directory should be clearly signposted from key websites and promoted via a comprehensive communications plan to ensure its purpose is articulated to a wide target audience across different roles, experience levels and sectors.

When considering the creation of a new social care network, promotion will require using a variety of different channels and approaches for the various different cohorts of the social care sector. Collateral will need to be tailored specifically for the sector and its reach and impact evaluated.

Action 2.3 – Develop and deliver a communications plan to promote an informatics networks directory.

Recommendation theme	Actions to achieve recommendation
2. Identify and promote existing networks and communities.	**Actions 2.1** – Complete a discovery exercise to inform the identity of an inclusive informatics networks directory.
	Action 2.2 – Complete a discovery exercise to compile a comprehensive list of existing informatics networks and communities.
	Action 2.3 – Develop and deliver a communications plan to promote an informatics networks directory.

Table 2. Summary of recommendation theme 2.

Theme 3 – Use networks to support our workforce

This discovery project has highlighted there may be certain gaps within our networks and communities, which if addressed could potentially benefit particular groups of individuals within our workforce. In particular, the large, complex and (generally) digitally immature social care sector. An overview of the different organisation types of participants from an online survey created for this discovery project can be found in Appendix 3. It is important to re-state the limitations of this research and that we were unable to engage with all sections of our communities and that these results are unlikely to be fully indicative and reflect the opportunities that may be available.

Being part of a network or community should be a choice; there is not a "one size fits all" approach and choosing a network will be dependent upon a combination of individual factors which will be different for every person.

We recognise it will take time and effort to address the network and community gaps identified. However, our recommendation is to take a staged approach and begin addressing those potential gaps which we believe will have the greatest impact to support our workforce.

What benefit will be created by this?

Addressing gaps which have been identified hopes to achieve creating the space and opportunity for those who are not currently part of an informatics network or community to be able to do so if they wished.

How will this be achieved?

To address identified gaps, we believe it will be necessary to tailor our approach. This can be broadly grouped into two main areas.

1) **Harness existing networks and communities**

There are many networks and communities which already exist that are well-used and highly valued. Firstly, we believe it would be important to ask what existing networks could do to better cater for particular groups identified to help integrate them further into our existing communities.

2) Create new networks and communities

Only in certain cases do we believe it would be justified to address identified gaps by recommending new networks or communities to be created. It would not be appropriate (or efficient) to adopt a 'blanket approach' by simply recommending that any gaps identified are addressed by creating new networks, nor would it be helpful (or necessary) to encroach on the efforts of existing networks.

Based on this discovery project, we believe networks could be further used to support the following distinct groups. We recognise these are unlikely to be the only groups requiring support, so it would be important to regularly monitor and identify what other groups there may be.

i. **Social care** – this discovery project indicated there is a significant lack of informatics/ digital network and community opportunities for those across the social care workforce, with no comprehensive network currently available. When considering there is an estimated 1.52 million individuals working in adult social care in 2019/20 (which does not include local authority social care staff) - we believe this demonstrates a significant opportunity to support creating a comprehensive network for the social care workforce.

Action 3.1 - Create an action plan which includes the investment available to support emerging digital/ informatics social care communities.

ii. **Nursing** - we are aware of on-going work to ensure that a set of joined up networks and communities are available to support the nursing profession. During this discovery project we heard from members of the Chief Nursing Information Officer (CNIO) community, many of whom are advocating for informatics to become an integrated part of the wider nursing profession, as well as the benefits that being part of a network or community have brought to them as individuals. We see this as a timely opportunity to support the development of informatics networks and communities available to the nursing profession.

iii. **Networks supporting diversity** - we want to ensure that our informatics networks and communities are inclusive and celebrate the diversity of our workforce. This discovery project indicated that individuals from many different roles want to use networks to support under-represented groups and improve the diversity within the informatics profession (see Appendix 4). There are fantastic examples of networks which champion diversity (such as the Shuri network). This is something that we want to protect and ensure that resources and support are available to both existing and future networks which support and champion the diversity within our informatics world.

iv. **Junior professionals** – this discovery project also identified potential variation in how individuals interact with and perceive networks based on their job role type (see Appendix 5 for description of role type categories). Individuals in junior and/ or entry level roles (classified here as junior professionals) - were shown to generally participate less regularly and be less satisfied with their informatics networks and communities, compared to those within leadership and management roles (see Appendices 6 and 7, respectively). We therefore believe this presents an opportunity for existing networks and communities to consider how they could further accommodate junior professionals.

There are already some networks and communities that are specifically targeted towards junior professionals. However, we believe there is a wider opportunity for existing networks and communities to consider how to better cater for this group and further integrate junior professionals within our networks. Lower paid members of the social care workforce, such as care assistants, for example, may need additional support to participate in digital networks.

To support the above groups, our key recommendation would be to develop a comprehensive resourcing plan which would clearly set out the steps needed to successfully support identified groups within our workforce.

Action 3.2 – Develop a resourcing plan to clearly outline how informatics networks can be used to support groups within our workforce.

Recommendation theme	Actions to achieve recommendation
3. Using networks to support our workforce.	**Action 3.1** - Create an action plan which includes the investment available to support emerging digital/ informatics social care communities.
	Action 3.2 – Develop a resourcing plan to clearly outline how informatics networks can be used to support groups within our workforce.

Table 3. Summary of recommendation theme 3.

Theme 4 - Build stronger relationships

An enormous wealth of knowledge, skills, and expertise exists within our system, particularly at a regional and local level.

The discovery project indicated there were opportunities to support networks to collaborate between themselves to better share this knowledge, expertise, as well as resources. We also heard about a desire, particularly from those within informatics leadership positions, to better utilise the knowledge held in networks and communities to influence and support policy making decisions (see Appendix 8).

Therefore, we recommend harnessing networks and communities to build a stronger relationship between policy makers and local expertise, as well as building stronger relationships between networks themselves.

What benefit will be created by this?

Building a stronger relationship between informatics networks and policy makers is a mutually beneficial aim. By engaging as a default with networks, policy makers would have the opportunity to undertake meaningful professional engagement with informatics networks and communities and benefit from the expertise available.

We believe that it should become the standard method of approach for policy makers to use networks and communities as a way of road testing ideas, which would allow local teams to proactively offer up views on whether initiatives were fit for purpose. This could include engaging during the early stages of developing policy, as well as during times of crisis where rapid engagement is sometimes required e.g. during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, building a stronger two-way relationship would also benefit our informatics networks and communities by providing them with a voice and the opportunity to put forward topics wanting to be discussed with policy makers. Finally, we also believe it is an opportunity to build stronger relationships between networks themselves, as improved communication and collaboration is likely to provide greater shared opportunities.

How will this be achieved?

We appreciate that building these stronger relationships is likely to be a complex process and will require national, regional, and local teams to work closely together to achieve change and to create and maintain two-way dialogue.

The findings from this discovery project indicated there are a range of well-used and well-respected networks that support communities of our informatics leaders (see Appendix 9). This includes roles such as CNIOs, Chief Clinical Information Officers (CCIOs), and Chief Information Officers (CIOs). Currently in social care, no clinician-equivalent roles or networks exists.

In social care, there is a Digital Social Care website, which currently focuses only on social care providers (residential, nursing and domiciliary care) - but which could provide a model to build an interactive community for the rest of the social care sector. A number of networks exist (see Soctim as an example) - for local authority CIOs, some members of which may have social care related roles.

To build stronger relationships between networks and policy makers, we believe our networks which target informatics leaders should be utilised and invested in to create several things. This includes newly established networks in social care.

1) **Regular routes** - to enable two-way communication between our networks and communities with all Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs), relevant government departments and representative bodies such as the Local Government Association (LGA) – with all groups being able to communicate, discuss and explore plans for informatics change. This will require coordination on behalf of these groups and will also require a governance process to ensure ideas and changes are communicated at the earliest possible moment.

2) **Sensitive issues** – for issues which the stakeholders listed above can use smaller groups of experts or councils of representatives to have closed discussions in confidence.

3) **Expert groups** – that can be convened, and quality assured to ensure that central (or indeed any) teams can get rapid feedback from expertise held within the system on specific issues.

Action 4.1 – Develop a sustainable investment plan to utilise existing informatics leadership networks and communities.

Establishing an agreed governance structure will be important to building a stronger relationship between policy makers and networks and communities. This should include establishing a meaningful two-way feedback mechanism.

Therefore, our final recommended step to building stronger relationships would be to develop an engagement approach which includes a mechanism to ensure networks and communities are provided with meaningful and transparent feedback from policy makers, and vice versa.

Action 4.2 – Establish an engagement approach which allows networks and communities to engage in meaningful and transparent two-way dialogue with policy makers.

Recommendation theme	Actions to achieve recommendation
4. Build stronger relationships.	**Action 4.1** – Develop a sustainable investment plan to utilise existing informatics leadership networks and communities.
	Action 4.2 – Establish an engagement approach which allows networks and communities to engage in meaningful and transparent two-way dialogue with policy makers.

Table 4. Summary of recommendation theme 4.

Theme 5 - Develop learning and training opportunities

It is important to recognise the need to support informatics networks and communities from not only a national perspective, but also regionally. Individual regions are most likely to know their informatics workforce and are best placed to understand local needs and requirements.

There has already been significant work and investment into developing several regional Informatics Skills Development Networks (ISDNs). We see the ISDN model as an opportunity to capitalise on this investment using them as a vehicle, with other regional networks, to further support and develop regional informatics networks and communities.

During this discovery project we heard that individual use and need of informatics networks and communities depends on many different factors. This could be anything from being part of a large formal network to a small informal Whatsapp group. This should be respected, and where possible access to networks should be individualised to support a person to access the opportunities they want, with who they want, when they want.

We also heard there are likely to be individuals within the informatics workforce who do not currently identify or recognise themselves as an informatics practitioner (someone working within informatics). This is especially true in social care, where there are currently no equivalents to the CCIO/ CNIO roles in the NHS, so a first step would be to support clinical staff in informatics roles to recognise these as such.

Recent digital and informatics workforce planning and modelling estimated the size of the NHS informatics workforce in 2019 was in the region of 40,640 FTEs to 53,936 FTEs – and is projected to grow to between 48,199 FTEs to 63,968 FTEs by 2024. It is possible to assume that unless something changes, the number of individuals who do not recognise themselves as an informatician will rise along with this workforce number.

Without a sense of belonging to the informatics workforce, it is also likely that these individuals might not have a recognisable career pathway, a route to access training opportunities and be unlikely to explore the existing networks and communities available.

This discovery project highlighted how individuals are likely to have benefited in their own roles from engaging in informatics networks and communities (see Appendix 10 for a summary).

Using networks and communities to support individual's professional developments through learning and training were identified as particular areas of value, and potentially in higher demand than is currently available (see Appendices 11 and 12, respectively).

We intend to support regions to help their organisations to identify their informatics workforce and support them to develop, as they know their areas and will be able to support local spread and adoption.

We therefore recommended using ISDNs to build and establish regional infrastructures to help enable informatics networks and communities to manage opportunities and develop stronger links for individuals to be able to locally access knowledge from formal learning and training opportunities within their own regions.

What benefit will be created by this?

This recommendation should first and foremost be to help an individual to identify themselves as an informatics practitioner, providing clear career pathways and access to development opportunities. Enabling individual regions through local networks to tailor the learning and training opportunities available based on local needs will also support regional succession planning and talent management, helping regions to attract and retain the best talent available.

We heard how invaluable networks and communities were in allowing individuals to engage in peer support and share learning from their experiences. By providing clear training and development opportunities for individuals working within the informatics profession, it is hoped that individuals can continue to use their networks and communities as a space to share learning from experience, but also to access formal learning and training opportunities to support their professional development.

How will this be achieved?

To develop learning and training opportunities we believe that regional networks will need to take ownership of assisting local organisations to grapple with and personalise the opportunities available.

Before any mechanisms to deliver learning and training opportunities are considered, we believe that all individuals from across our workforce should be treated fairly and have equal access to opportunities to be supported to reach their full potential. It would therefore be important to consider how learning and training opportunities can be inclusive to our regional and local workforce.

There are a number of ISDNs which already exist across the country - some have existed for many years while others have emerged more recently, with more planned to be rolled out. Having an established ISDN network will help to provide the infrastructure necessary to support individual regions to personalise and integrate training opportunities for their informatics workforce. The ISDNs will also be able to help identify the audience for these.

It is also important to consider what each ISDN needs to do to ensure it is fully inclusive in the local health and social care system. For example, this may require focused engagement with both local authorities and social care providers (residential, nursing homes, and domiciliary care organisations).

A range of national informatics training programmes are available, with some currently working to expand the opportunities available (an example being the NHS Digital Academy). It will be important to consider how they are utilised and incorporated at a regional and even organisational level.

This would allow more learning content to become available to access in different ways, for example the ability to share the content and key learning regardless of whether individuals wish to undertake a full academic qualification.

To ensure that individuals can access the necessary and relevant training, we recommend that regional informatics networks (including ISDNs) - which are fully inclusive of health and social care organisations in their region - support local organisations by working with them to understand the needs of the local informatics workforce. This would support designing the necessary infrastructure to successfully target and deliver the relevant learning and training opportunities identified.

Action 5.1 – Create an action plan to allow regional informatics networks to support designing infrastructure to identify and deliver learning and training opportunities available from national programmes at a local level.

Currently, there are approximately 50,000 informaticians in the NHS workforce – we believe that reaching each one is a responsibility of our organisations. To support comprehensive training there is a need to establish a route enabling us to reach every organisation. There is an opportunity to work with regions through ISDNs and other regional networks to establish local programmes which may use a blend of nationally available learning but tailored with regional or local wraparound support and/ or additional content if required to support local needs.

Recommendation theme	Actions to achieve recommendation
5. Develop learning and training opportunities.	**Action 5.1** – Create an action plan to allow regional informatics networks to support designing infrastructure to identify and deliver learning and training opportunities available from national programmes at a local level.

Table 5. Summary of recommendation theme 5.

Summary

This discovery project has shown that many networks and communities are currently available across our informatics world. They bring great value and benefit to our workforce and are a credit to the profession.

We recognise that certain actions are required to support our networks and communities. Achieving change will not happen overnight, but it is important that we begin this process sooner rather than later. We also believe it would likely be worthwhile to take the opportunity to further test our recommendations from this discovery project.

It is important that we commit to supporting our networks and communities, both current and future, to help them to continue to thrive and develop. Doing so will contribute towards the long-term sustainability and protection of our networks and communities, in turn allowing them to help and support our workforce and the wider informatics profession.

Summary of recommendations

Recommendation theme	Actions to achieve recommendation
1. Establish a national informatics networks support function.	**Action 1.1** – Design and develop a sustainable operating model for a national informatics networks support function.
	Action 1.2 – Establish a broad set of principles for networks in receipt of funding.
	Action 1.3 – Develop training materials and resources that could be accessed by those managing or running networks and communities.
2. Identify and promote existing networks and communities.	**Actions 2.1** – Complete a discovery exercise to inform the identity of an inclusive informatics networks directory.
	Action 2.2 – Complete a discovery exercise to compile a comprehensive list of existing informatics networks and communities.
	Action 2.3 – Develop and deliver a communications plan for an informatics networks directory.
3. Use networks to support our workforce.	**Action 3.1** - Create an action plan which includes the investment available to support emerging digital/ informatics social care communities.
	Action 3.2 – Develop a resourcing plan to clearly outline how informatics networks can be used to support groups within our workforce.
4. Build stronger relationships.	**Action 4.1** – Develop an investment plan to utilise existing informatics leadership networks and communities.
	Action 4.2 – Establish an engagement approach which allows networks and communities to engage in meaningful and transparent two-way dialogue with policy makers.
5. Develop learning and training opportunities.	**Action 5.1** – Create an action plan to allow regional informatics networks to support designing infrastructure to identify and deliver learning and training opportunities available from national programmes at a local level.

Table 6. Summary of recommendation themes and recommendation details.