

The Jisc logo is an orange square with the word "Jisc" in white, sans-serif font.

Jisc

Digital wellbeing for you, your colleagues and students

Briefing paper for
practitioners



What is digital wellbeing?

Digital wellbeing:
The impact of technologies and digital services on people's mental, physical and emotional health.

Digital wellbeing is one of the elements in our **digital capabilities framework**¹. It is a term used to describe the impact of technologies and digital services on people's mental, physical, social and emotional health. It is a complex concept that can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and across different contexts and situations.



Individual perspective – personal, learning and work contexts:

this involves identifying and understanding the positive benefits and any potential negative aspects of engaging with digital activities and being aware of ways to manage and control these to improve wellbeing.



Societal or organisational perspective:

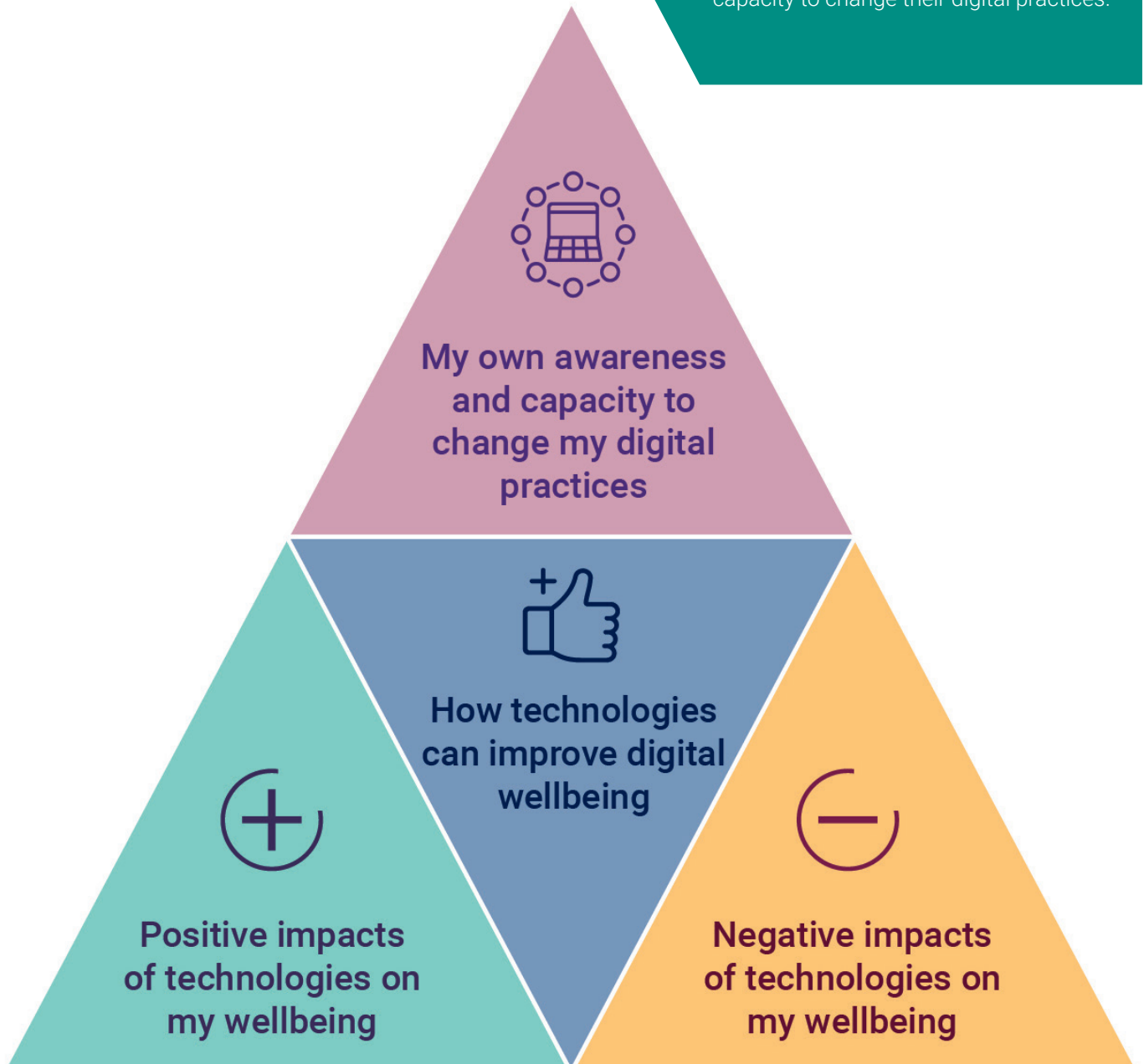
providers of digital systems, services and content have a responsibility for ensuring that these are well managed, supported, accessible and equitable. They also need to empower and build capability in users so that all who engage with them are equipped to do so in a way that supports and/or improves their wellbeing.

Although it is important for individuals to take control of their digital wellbeing, they may not always have the opportunity or the ability to manage the impact of technologies or digital services on their lives. For example, in employment contexts where staff may not be able to make changes or in personal contexts where individuals may not have access to, or be included in, digital opportunities that could have a positive effect on their lives. It is also important to remember that individuals may not have the support or capacity to counteract negative effects of technologies.

¹Jisc digital capabilities framework. Available online at digitalcapability.jisc.ac.uk/what-is-digital-capability

Our model shows four aspects of individual digital wellbeing for individuals.

At the bottom of the model there are two triangles that represent the potential positive and negative impacts of technology on wellbeing. The middle triangle focuses on the potential for technologies to improve wellbeing and top triangle emphasises that individuals need both awareness and capacity to change their digital practices.



Different aspects of digital wellbeing

Technologies and digital activities can impact on physical, mental, social and emotional wellbeing in both positive and negative ways. How far these might affect an individual depends on their personal context, circumstances and capacity to deal with – or take advantage of these impacts. Digital wellbeing can be considered in these four contexts: social, personal, learning and work.

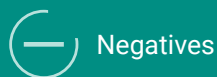


Digital social wellbeing



Positives

- Preventing isolation
- Building and maintaining relationships
- Reducing loneliness
- Full participation and connection with family, friends and wider communities
- Increased opportunities for inclusion (eg disabled people)



Negatives

- Cyberbullying
- Online grooming (eg sex, radicalisation)
- Exclusion and/or accessibility (eg gender, age, poverty)



Digital personal wellbeing



Positives

- Creating a positive identity
- Building self worth
- Enjoyment (eg games, fun interactions, music)
- Convenience/time saving (eg shopping)
- Access to new ideas/inspiration
- Tools for physical health



Negatives


- Negative comparison with others
- Addictive online behaviours (eg gambling, porn, checking devices)
- Passive consumption
- Access to illegal activities/materials
- Personal data breaches
- Lack of access and/or being left behind
- Lack of sleep
- Impact on physical health (eg eye strain, posture, lack of exercise)

Overlapping contexts



While it can be helpful to focus on digital wellbeing within specific contexts, it is important to consider the ways in which these overlap. Colleges and universities are increasingly focusing on student personal and mental wellbeing which does include elements of digital wellbeing, such as the potential negative impacts of social media. People may have more control over their digital wellbeing in personal and social contexts than they do in a learning or a work context, but only if they have the knowledge, capacity and appropriate support to do so.

Potential impacts of digital tools and practices/activities

In all contexts there are positive and negative potential impacts of interacting with digital tools, services, content and activities:



Digital learning wellbeing

 Positives	 Negatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alternative ways to learn• Online collaborative learning opportunities• Engaging learning activities• Practice digital skills for employment• Learn digital skills for new careers/career change• Increased access to learning• More engaging assessment and feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of digital skills• Digital overload• Negative impact of compulsory online collaboration• Time learning new technologies not the subject• Inappropriate use of technologies• Lack of choice (eg told which technologies to use)



Digital work wellbeing

 Positives	 Negatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved communication• Global collaboration• Flexible working• Tools to manage workload• Tools to make things easier• Creating positive online professional identity• Links to other professionals/subject networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital overload• Always on (24 hour access)• Changes to job roles/activities• Automation of tasks (eg redundancy)• Poor ergonomics

Managing your own digital wellbeing

- positive actions for individuals

Although education organisations have a duty of care to make sure their employees and students have a safe, legally compliant and supportive digital environment to work and learn in, individuals have responsibility for aspects within their control and should take appropriate steps to ensure they achieve and maintain a positive approach to digital wellbeing.



Access and use appropriate training and guidance for digital systems and tools relevant to your learning and role. Ask for training and support if there are gaps in the support that your organisation provides



Take time to explore and understand your own digital preferences and needs, including permanent disabilities, temporary impairments and any mental or physical health challenges that can affect technology use. Take advantage of adjustable features such as screen contrast, text size, colour adjustments, and use of assistive technologies



Consider the impact of digital activities on your own and others' health. Take steps to avoid bad practices. For example, reduce negative impact by:

- Observing good posture, taking regular screen breaks, adjusting monitor brightness, making sure you get enough sleep, avoiding addictive behaviours
- Challenge and avoid the negative online behaviour of others – know the appropriate channels to report this (likely to be referenced in your IT and acceptable use policy)
- Use security features like passwords and two-step authentication processes
- Report any environmental problems back through appropriate channels (eg managers, IT services, learning resource staff and student welfare services)
- Take a proactive role in identifying potential challenges and sharing good practice if you can



Manage digital workload: this can be a significant problem. Although technology can help to improve efficiency it can create unrealistic expectations that support will be available 24:7 and cause stress. Learn how to use digital tools more effectively and familiarise yourself with techniques and approaches that can help you to manage emails and avoid distractions.

Note: while individuals can attempt to manage their digital workload, it is not solely within their control. Managers should consider the impact of digital workload within staff appraisals, performance management and continuing professional development (CPD) activities



Make sure you know how to use digital equipment, tools, services and content safely. This will help to maintain your physical and mental health. This could include making sure that your work and study environments are ergonomically designed and comply with health and safety requirements. Safe use also includes making sure that digital interactions don't have a negative impact on mental health. Students and staff should be aware of organisational guidelines about safe use and practices



Create and manage a positive digital identity (professional and personal). It is up to individuals how visible they would like to be online and in digital communities, but all students and staff need to be aware of their digital footprint and how their online activities, and those of others, can affect this. Always focus on making a positive contribution



Ensure that any services, content and systems that you provide or produce are accessible and inclusive. Your college or university will be working towards compliance with EU and UK government regulations for the accessibility of online content. There are also broader considerations in relation to accessibility and inclusion that can impact significantly on individual digital wellbeing. Staff should be aware of these and be working towards improving accessibility

Good practice principles to support the digital wellbeing of others

Some staff have a direct responsibility for aspects of student and staff digital wellbeing but it may not always be obvious to others when and how they too could provide support. Some students may also have a formal or informal role to play here (eg digital ambassadorial roles, digipals or champions). These good practice principles highlight areas when staff could help learners to:



Know how to effectively access and use the digital content, systems and tools that your organisation provides



Safely use digital equipment, tools, services and content to maintain physical and mental health (eg observe good posture, follow guidelines and safety regulations, take screen breaks, adjust monitor brightness, get enough sleep and avoid addictive behaviours)



Be able to choose the most appropriate technologies for learning or for specific tasks



Use security features like passwords and two-step authentication processes



Access and use appropriate technological support and guidance



Develop digital capabilities to support their digital wellbeing (eg information, media, financial, data literacies)



Understand their own digital learning preferences and needs (eg assistive technologies, personal learning environments)



Create and manage positive digital identities personally and in preparation for work



Manage digital workload and learning (eg planning and preparation, avoiding distraction)



Take opportunities to positively participate in appropriate communities (eg personal, political, social, educational, professional networks)

There are many things that individuals can do to improve their digital wellbeing. The challenges lie in being aware of how much the digital tools, services, content and systems are impacting on our wellbeing and, more importantly, in understanding how we can manage or control this.

Students and staff need mechanisms to give feedback about things that affect digital wellbeing that are outside their individual control.

See also our briefing paper for **senior leaders** at digitalcapability.jisc.ac.uk and look out for a series of **case studies** to be published in 2020

Jisc
One Castlepark
Tower Hill
Bristol, BS2 0JA
0203 697 5800
info@jisc.ac.uk