

# DIGITAL BOARDS one year on

The NHS response to COVID-19 has accelerated digital transformation across the provider sector

- 1m** NHS trust staff now have access to MS Teams
- 185** trusts now provide virtual outpatient appointments
- 19,000** video consultations carried out by the sector in a single day during the pandemic peak



And crucially, these changes continue to be championed by NHS trust leaders



The NHS Providers' Digital Boards programme is designed to support boards to build on this momentum over the longer term



Join the Digital Boards leadership network to stay updated

# WHAT have we delivered?

The Digital Boards programme aims to build board understanding of the potential and implications of the digital agenda and increase the confidence and capability of boards to harness the opportunities it provides.

The programme has delivered...

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**Free bespoke board development sessions** tailored to reflect the development needs of trust boards. Based on conversations with key leaders, the Digital Boards team design agendas that enable board members to reflect on their current level of digital maturity. Discussions focus on how digital can support the delivery of the trust's strategic priorities.

Across 30 board sessions, our survey of trust leaders found that:

**87%** said it had increased their understanding of the conditions for successful digital transformation

**92%** felt it had increased confidence in the board's ability to assure the delivery of digital programmes



*My board found it incredibly inspiring to take part. We recognised a number of fundamental issues that have the potential to drive us forward as a result of the session which will help us to frame our future strategies.*

Hattie Llewelyn-Davies, chair, Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust

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**Peer learning events** focused on lessons learned on digital transformation across the NHS and other sectors. Our **digital transformation seminar series** is open to all board leaders and have included Q&As with panels of experienced leaders from within and beyond the NHS. Our **member spotlight** events offer a deep dive into a trust's digital transformation programme and have included reflections from trust leaders on the art of the possible and pitfalls to avoid.



*One of the best sessions I've been in. Was very real and relevant with practical advice and examples.*

Tony Bennett, chief strategy officer  
Wirral Community Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust

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**Board resources** that playback key headlines and good practice on the board's digital leadership role. Our **digital leadership guides** cover hot topics for trusts at different stages in their digital journey. Our **board level briefings** share tips and actionable insights for board leaders. Our **knowledge hub** signposts to other bite-sized board resources from leaders in the NHS and other sectors.



*I found this a really helpful and clear document – a must-have when developing a digital strategy.*

Beth Lawton, chief digital information officer  
Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

# WHAT have we heard?

Through our **board sessions**, interview and events, we have heard a number of common reflections from trust leaders on the changes COVID-19 has brought about, and the implications for the future digital leadership role of their board.

**Digital is more than just the technology.** The pandemic caused profound cultural changes within the NHS enabling many **boards to adopt a new digital mindset**. One chief executive defined this as giving teams "greater clarity of purpose, freedom to act and permission to focus on delivering minimum viable services in weeks not months".

**Boards are building confidence in their assurance role.** Leaders no longer have to fear big IT projects as career limiting. They are **getting to grips with the right questions to ask**. For some this has involved rethinking traditional models of governance. One non-executive director described this as having a firm understanding of digital in order to have an appropriate "light hand on the tiller".

**Digital is no longer the preserve of the IT department.** Boards increasingly recognise that digital can't be delegated to the CIO: it needs to be collectively owned by the board, much like the quality and finance agendas. As an enabler of transformation, safety, productivity and much more, digital should be **mainstreamed across all portfolios**. As one trust leader reflected, the whole board needs to focus on how digital can make things "faster, safer, simpler and cheaper".

**Boards are getting closer to the digital user experience.** By incorporating digital into existing feedback mechanisms and exploring new ones, boards are recognising they need to be **genuinely user-centred** to unlock the potential digital brings to transform the patient and staff experience. There is a growing focus on the importance of involving patients, service-users and staff in the co-design of services from the outset to address the risks of digital exclusion.

**Digital should be a more integrated part of the trust's corporate strategy.** In the past, many boards have only discussed digital when approving business cases. But trust leaders acknowledge the need to set a clear vision for how digital can enable the trust's wider goals as the bedrock of a **successful digital strategy**.

**Boards are recognising the importance of joining up their ambitions across the system.** This involves grappling with difficult challenges around interoperability, supporting system partners with divergent starting points and building transformation capability across the patch.

**Prioritisation is key.** Boards are increasingly recognising that the strategic vision should translate into more **specific and realistic priorities that can be communicated to the rest of the organisation**, rather than a wish list of initiatives. As one board leader put it: "digital is about how we think about what we do rather than a series of IT deliverables".

**Investing in your digital teams is fundamental**, regardless of whether you are buying in large technology or building from scratch. This requires breaking down silos between **IT, clinical and operations staff**. As one trust leader said, "we no longer build for clinical and operational teams, we build with them". Some trusts are revisiting their operating models to join up their digital, quality improvement and transformation capability and embed this within frontline delivery.

# WHERE next?

Over the coming year trusts will look to lock in the gains made during the pandemic and harness the potential of digital transformation to support both staff and service recovery.

The Digital Boards programme aims to support boards to lead their organisation through this next phase. We will...

## Continue to share best practice

We will organise more **peer learning events** that will also include lessons from other sectors. Our member spotlight series will continue with deep dives on key digital transformations. Our new **Digital Boards leadership network** will keep leaders up to date on digital developments with bulletins, events and in time an online community of practice.



## Deliver more bespoke board development sessions

Focusing on the **needs of board leaders**, these will include follow-up sessions for boards looking to take the next steps on their digital journey.

Some of our existing modules include:

- defining digital and taking collective ownership
- good governance for digital delivery
- technology fundamentals for leaders.

We will continue to develop more modules based on trust's needs and member feedback.



## Produce further resources for busy trust leaders

We will publish more **leadership guides** shaped by the sector's strategic priorities over the coming year. We will continue our **Digital Download board briefing** series on top tips and thematic playbacks from our board sessions. And we will generate ideas and learning by growing our existing **knowledge hub** with further board resources and reflection pieces.



Tell us your priorities to help us shape the programme in a way that will be of most use to board leaders. Where do you need support?

Contact [digital.boards@nhsproviders.org](mailto:digital.boards@nhsproviders.org)