

Putting data, digital and tech at the heart of transforming the NHS

The interim chair of NHS Digital (NHSD) and non executive director at NHS England, Laura Wade-Gery, has published her report into national digital leadership, entitled *Putting data, digital and tech at the heart of transforming the NHS*. Amongst other recommendations, the review proposes consolidating some of the NHS arms-length bodies to strengthen national digital transformation efforts. The publication of the report follows the earlier announcement that Health Education England, NHSX and NHSD will be merged with NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE/I).

Below is a summary of the key recommendations highlighted in this independent report, followed by discussion of the implications for trust leaders. For any questions or to offer input regarding any part of this briefing, please contact adam.wright@nhsproviders.org and margaret.steward@nhsproviders.org.

Report recommendations

The report includes nine key recommendations for reshaping national leadership of the digital agenda. These fall within four key themes: shifting mindsets, transforming the NHSE/I operating model, organisational consequences, and enablers for change.

1) Commit to a patient and citizen centred organising principle for future service transformation

The review proposes focusing digital services on the citizen's journey through the health and care system, taking into consideration diverse patient needs and inequalities. It suggests such an approach will lead to better designed services that address the needs of patients and empower citizens to take ownership of their health and wellbeing. It suggests effective implementation depends on "a significant cultural shift away from the current siloed approach in the centre with conscious management to ensure intentions translate to reality."

2) Consider and mitigate digital inequality in all service transformation. Expand the role of the SRO for Health Inequalities to include digital inequality

The report acknowledges that digital exclusion has a compounding negative effect on health when combined with existing health inequalities. It proposes that the Health Inequalities team under NHSE/I expand its responsibility to include mitigation of digital exclusion by developing national guidance for designing and implementing digital solutions that reduce health inequalities.

3) Commit to building patient and citizen trust and acceptance in the use of health data to improve outcomes. Provide more efficient access to data for analytics that ensures privacy and can be used to improve care delivery

There is a recommendation for central NHS leadership to improve awareness around the transformation impact of data, and to build trust with the public by providing assurance that health and care data will be used and managed properly.

4) Reorientate the focus of the centre to make digital integral to transforming care, with NHSE/I overall accountable for executing digitally enabled service transformation. Provide clarity around the role of the centre, underpinned by a clear enterprise architecture and align with the ICS operating model

To address the widespread problem of interoperability within the sector, the report proposes NHSE/I create an “enterprise architecture” that maps the technologies and business capabilities needed to deliver digital integrated across systems. This proposed enterprise architecture should underpin the new NHSE/I operating model and clarify what responsibilities the centre has versus local systems to deliver tech-enabled transformation. It would also create opportunities to leverage purchasing power across the NHS, increase interoperability, and facilitate sharing of expertise and streamline processes.

5) Implement a new operating model across NHSEI, X and D to drive digital and data transformation

The report proposes a ‘modern’ operating model that bridges the organisational gap between data and delivery that resulted from split responsibilities across NHSE/I, NHSX and NHSD. This modern operating model would be formed of four layers:

- ‘System’ leadership for transformation: setting out the business and technology capability requirements of ICSs and the centre, with roadmaps.
- A “transformation factory”: this will “transform the way NHSE/I transforms” and focus on delivering incremental improvements in outcomes.

- Technology strategy, infrastructure, and operations: with overall responsibility for the technology architecture, standards and policies adopted by the central and wider NHS system.
- Data: placing data and analytics at the heart of NHSE/I capability.

6) Re-align organisational responsibilities to ensure delivery of the new operating model

The review proposes that NHSX evolve into the strategy function of the new Transformation Directorate within NHSE/I, with NHSD merging into the tech function. Amongst other changes to join up digital governance, the chief executive of NHSD will be appointed chief information officer for NHSE/I with a Chief Data and Analytics Officer also to be appointed to consolidate data analytics capabilities.

7) Undertake a fundamental organisational capability intervention across NHSEI and NHSD to build and nurture the skill base to support data and digitally enabled transformation and adapt ways of working to support the new operating model

There is recognition that digital and data capability must be improved throughout all levels of the NHS through formal and informal training routes. The intention is for these skillsets to feed into integrated, multidisciplinary teams that include managerial, clinical and operational expertise. Additionally, the review promotes embedding agile and flexible ways of working into the organisation as an enabler of successful digital transformation that meets user needs.

8) Revise financial management arrangements both within NHSEI and between NHSEI and DHSC

To better support funding for digitally enabled transformation, the review suggests aligning funding streams across NHSE/I and DHSC to simplify the funding process, establishing ring-fence funding for digital, creating incentives for digital transformation and leveraging purchasing power with the supplier market. Additionally, the report calls for a more flexible approach to business cases that allows for iterative, multi-year requests to support longer term strategic ambitions.

9) Re-prioritise NHSEI spend to lift the quantum devoted to digitally enabled system transformation. Assess the level of 'technical debt' across the wider NHSEI system and update estimates of technology spend required to enable the delivery of safe technology operations. In conjunction with DHSC, make the case for increased funding to deliver safe technology operations

The report is critical of the mismatch between the rising priority position of the digital agenda and the low total expenditure on IT by trusts. It suggests NHSE/I should assess the levels of digital spend

needed within the wider system to achieve digital transformation and reprioritise spending accordingly.

NHS Providers view

The recommendations outlined in the review will be broadly welcomed by trust leaders, and should be seen in the context of this week's announcement to merge NHSX and NHSD with NHSE/I. This approach will hopefully streamline national decision-making processes on digital and technology and could lead to a more responsive and supportive central transformation function.

The review talks of a new operating model for NHSE/I. It recognises the nuances of successful transformation, which includes changes to ways of working, culture and behaviour, resource allocation, and funding. And it rightly acknowledges the need for investment in skills and capabilities to realise this. This is a positive statement of intent for NHSE/I's "transformation factory", which we hope will in turn lead to greater support for trusts which need to develop similar capabilities.

It is refreshing that the report talks of the need for a change in mindsets, with a patient and citizen-centred approach. This will require "a significant cultural shift away from the current silo'ed approach in the national bodies with conscious management to ensure intentions translate to reality." This is a clear and bold recommendation, and will be welcomed by trust leaders if it becomes a reality within the new NHSE/I.

The aspirations on technology funding are commendable, although this work is already underway as part of NHSX's "who pays for what" proposals, and now needs to become a reality. Trust leaders will be intrigued by the recommendation to strengthen NHSE/I's commercial expertise and influence in its engagement with suppliers. This has huge potential, but again, success will depend on proper implementation.

If you would like to explore digital transformation further within your own trust, please get in touch with louise.stopford@nhsproviders.org to find out more about the NHS Providers bespoke board development session offer.

NHS Providers' press release

New report recommends new approach to national digital leadership

Responding to *Putting data, digital and tech at the heart of transforming the NHS*, published by the government, the chief executive of NHS Providers, Chris Hopson said:

“We welcome this report on digital leadership and its recommendations. Over the course of the pandemic, trusts have accelerated innovations and digital has become a core part of everyday operations, with trusts experiencing significant changes in the ways services have been delivered.

“Earlier this week we welcomed centralising the leadership of NHSX and NHS Digital into NHS England and NHS Improvement, so long as sufficient focus is given to digital transformation and the important, complex and detailed work being done in this space. We are pleased to see the review, published today, echoes this sentiment.

“We also welcome the ambitions to implement a new operating model across the central bodies to help drive digital and data transformation. The report rightly recognises that successful digital transformation not only requires access to new technologies, but also changes to ways of working, culture and behaviour as well as funding.

“Trust leaders themselves are already adopting these changing mindsets outlined in the report. NHS Providers continues to support boards to do this through our [Digital Board programme](#), commissioned by Health Education England and supported by NHSX.

“Trust boards will also be encouraged to see that there is a recommendation to enact some changes in the supplier market and will look forward to seeing the detail on how this would be adopted.

“We look forward to seeing these recommendations being implemented and continuing to support trusts with their digital agendas.”