Related projects are underway to support this agenda, including significant investment by the Technology Strategy Board, the National Institute for Health Research, the Scottish Government, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise in the UK-wide DALLAS programme – Delivering Assisted Living Lifestyles at Scale. A Scottish consortium, ‘Living It Up’, is implementing its programme across Scotland by establishing large communities showing how assisted living technologies and services can be used to promote improvements in wellbeing and lifestyles, and provide top quality health and social care, enabling people to live independently and prevent long term admissions to hospital.

Telehealthcare is particularly relevant to people living in remote areas providing access to specialist services and reducing the need for difficult and uncomfortable trips to hospital. Simple technology can empower people with long term conditions, supporting them to take their own health checks and send their data directly to health centres for monitoring, potentially saving the NHS significant amounts of money as fewer people need to be admitted to hospital or care homes.

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) is responding to the developing world of digital healthcare through actively embedding telehealthcare within the undergraduate curricula across practice fields, developing a research portfolio commensurate with national strategy, and launching a new, unique MSc in Telehealthcare.
The MSc Telehealthcare programme is designed to appeal to a broad spectrum of people working in a diversity of disciplines and settings. It offers students the opportunity to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding of e-health and telehealthcare within their own area of practice. The programme will provide students with a research-based understanding of telehealthcare as a global phenomenon with the potential to transform the delivery of health and social care to meet the socio-demographic challenges of the 21st Century. The programme is highly innovative and offers opportunities to critically examine emerging theories exploring the implementation, embedding and integration of new technologies and practices. It will also provide the advanced knowledge and leadership skills essential to facilitating culture change and service improvements.

Students can opt to combine the specialist telehealthcare modules with modules from their own discipline to ensure flexibility. This will maximise occupational / professional relevance to individuals whilst providing essential staff development outcomes for employers.

The programme has been developed by Ron Johansen. Ron holds a joint appointment with GCU’s Department of Health and Community Sciences and NHS 24, Scotland’s national telehealth and telecare organisation, where he is a nurse consultant. NHS 24 which incorporates the Scottish Centre for Telehealth and Telecare (SCTT) is the first point of contact for people who need urgent medical attention, advice or information outside normal surgery hours. It can be accessed over the telephone, online or through digital television channels.

Health and social care staff are positioned at an axis point between technology, individuals, clinical environments and communities. Ron Johansen is interested in the ways in which education can support staff in taking a primary role in interpreting and influencing the relationships between technology, social and health care praxis and human experience. He says: “Developments in telehealth and telecare are emerging rapidly impacting on people and organisations across every sector and at every level. As a consequence, the phenomena professionals are concerned with investigating are multifaceted and push the boundaries of academic enquiry. Our graduates need to be confident in using mixed methodologies to produce different levels and types of explanations, judging evidence in context from diverse sources without abandoning rigour. My post is about embedding telehealthcare into the curricula and promoting this level of inquiry.”

GCU is also a partner in the Supporting Young Carers Through Technology project, which is managed by the Scottish Centre for Telehealth and Telecare and supported by the Princess Royal Trust for Carers, Carers Scotland and The University of Edinburgh. The project supports action points in the Scottish Government’s Carers Strategy for Scotland 2010-2015 to support young carers with new technologies.

GCU is working with the Scottish Centre for Telehealth and Telecare to identify technology solutions to support young people with caring responsibilities who are disadvantaged due to barriers created by their caring role, through the provision of access to information, advice and peer support. Under the direction of psychologist and usability engineer Dr Jonathan Sykes, the Supporting Young Carers Through Technology project brought together groups of young carers and service providers to explore current technology solutions available and the needs of young carers. The project involved focus group workshops with young carers and representatives from Carers Scotland and Princess Royal Trust for Carers designed to identify the priority areas for carers.