

# Executive Summary: Evaluation of the Pharmacy Integration Fund Learning Pathways (Final Report)

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## Background

- This mixed-methods evaluation was commissioned by NHS England in March 2019 from ICF and the Centre for Pharmacy Workforce Studies (CPWS) at the University of Manchester.
- Four of the learning pathways funded by the Pharmacy Integration Fund (PhIF) were in scope: Medicines Optimisation in Care Homes (MOCH) for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians; Integrated Urgent Care (IUC) for pharmacists; post-registration programmes (PRP) mainly aimed at community pharmacists; and Accuracy Checking for Pharmacy Technicians (ACPT).
- These learning pathways aimed to support pharmacy professionals to develop enhanced skills, and expand their scope of practice, thus contributing to developing the primary care pharmacy workforce. They were flexible, free to the learner, and combined learning delivered by providers commissioned by Health Education England (HEE) and experiential learning; for the MOCH and IUC pathways, new roles and access to independent prescribing (IP) were also funded.
- By examining learners' experiences and outcomes (and those of supervisors and employers), the findings aim to inform funding decisions and plans for workforce development after registration.
- The delivery of the learning pathways and learners' experiences were further shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21, about which the evaluation provides additional insights.

## Methodology

- This was a mixed methods evaluation, with four principal work packages: A) analysis of learner data shared by HEE; B) a cross-sectional survey of learners (385 respondents) with longitudinal follow-up; C) in-depth telephone interviews with learners, supervisors and stakeholders (81 interviews across all four pathways, including 51 learners); and D) stakeholder engagement including a workshop at the start of the evaluation, and key informant interviews.
- The Theoretical Domains Framework (TDF) model of behaviour change was used as the basis for integrating the findings and understanding how learning and policy interventions have led to changes in practice, informing the evaluation framework and approach to analysis and synthesis.

## Key findings

- Analysis of learner data to March 2021 showed that 2,923 pharmacy professionals had engaged with the in-scope pathways; post-registration learners in community pharmacy accounted for more than half of the learners. Pathways were largely taken up by early and mid-career professionals, with 79% of learners aged between 25 and 44. Their gender and ethnicity profile was broadly reflective of the wider pharmacy workforce and take-up was spread across England.
- Learners' main motivations for taking part were to enhance their practice in their current job, working in a new sector of practice, and improving career prospects. Gaining a transferable, recognised qualification was also valued, and for pharmacists, so was the potential to gain an IP qualification and the opportunity to practise clinically in more patient-facing roles.
- Learners valued the approach to online and remote learning that was a key part of pathways even before the pandemic, although face-to-face contact and peer support networks were also considered important. During the COVID-19 pandemic, learners reported several challenges

including less time for learning due to exhaustion, increased workload, and fewer opportunities to apply skills; learning providers responded by reducing assessment load and by extending deadlines.

- Both educational and clinical supervision supporting experiential learning were a key resource for learners.
- A majority of pharmacists and pharmacy technician respondents on all pathways reported feeling either fairly or extremely confident in many of the target behaviours related to enhanced clinical practice as a result of their learning. Most learners also agreed that they had sufficient knowledge to apply learning in practice, although not all learners felt supported or able to do so in their workplace, particularly community pharmacists.
- The in-depth interviews revealed the importance of applying skills in practice for gaining confidence and self-awareness, and becoming a more reflective and holistic practitioner.
- The development of leadership, clinical reasoning, and communication through practice made a significant contribution to changes in learners' own behaviour, and the practice of other health professionals. Learners and employers also highlighted organisational benefits and improvements to patient care.
- Overall, PhIF funding and learning pathways appear to have acted as a catalyst for the advancement of roles and opportunities available to the pharmacy workforce (both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians), pushing the boundaries of what the workforce can and is expected to do.

## Key policy implications and recommendations

- Learning enhanced skills such as communication, clinical decision making, using evidence in practice, and interprofessional collaboration enabled practitioners to be more reflective, lifelong learners and were closely linked to better patient care and being an effective, more autonomous practitioner. The combination of clinical skills relevant to primary care and community pharmacy with wider applied skills (including leadership skills among pharmacy technicians as well as pharmacists) should therefore continue to be a focus of future learning pathways for the pharmacy workforce.
- There is strong demand from many pharmacy professionals to develop enhanced skills and prepare for more clinical roles in primary care. Opportunities for learners to apply new skills in their roles, supported by high quality educational and clinical supervision, should be the focus of a proactive and strategic national approach to the development of pharmacy professionals in the future.
- By developing a framework for learning a consistent set of skills at each level from foundation, through to enhanced, advanced and consultant levels, policy makers will be able to support a progressive post-registration pathway for recent registrants as well as the existing pharmacy workforce.
- Future learning pathways should take account of widespread portfolio working in primary care and prioritise the acquisition of the transferable skills that are relevant across multiple settings. Ensuring that the different supervisory roles can provide a consistent offer of high quality support, based on the learning from this evaluation, coupled with consideration of how credentialing can be used to support transferability, will also be important for enabling joined-up career pathways in primary care and community pharmacy.