

# Pharmacy Quality Scheme – Qualitative interviews

This topic guide provides the key themes and sub-themes to be explored in discussions with a wide range of stakeholders across the heterogeneous community pharmacy sector involved in PQS implementation.

The interviews will enable us to understand the views and experiences of stakeholders, and their perceptions of impact on patients and contractors.

The phrasing, pacing and ordering of questions will be tailored to reflect the individual respondent and the flow of the discussion in each conversation.

There are three groups of stakeholders:

- Community pharmacists
- Varied employers and representative bodies (e.g. CCA, AIM, NPA, PSNC, LPCs)
- System partners (PCNs, ICSs, GPs )

Interviews are expected to last 30-45 minutes.

We will ask interviewees for their verbal consent to record the interview (recordings will be stored securely).

## Introduction (all groups)

### **Introduce yourself and the evaluation**

ICF and Centre for Pharmacy Workforce Studies (at the University of Manchester) have been commissioned by NHS England to conduct an evaluation of the Pharmacy Quality Scheme (PQS). Specifically, we want to explore the outcomes across the community pharmacy sector and the extent to which community pharmacies have taken part, the impact on pharmacists' practice, and improvements to which the PQS might have contributed. We sent you a guidance document which summarised the criteria of the PQS year-to-year; it may be helpful to refer to this during our conversation.

The purpose of this interview is to enable us to understand your views and experiences of the PQS, as well as your perceptions of impact on patients, contractors, and other healthcare professionals. There are no right or wrong answers – we are interested in hearing your perspective and opinions. Please note that both positive and negative feedback are useful and informative.

### **Explain confidentiality**

If there are any questions during the interview that you do not want to answer, you do not have to answer them. You can also ask to stop this interview at any time.

Information collected during this interview will be kept confidential and anonymised – your name will not be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study, and any other personal data collected will not be shared outside of the research team.

*Ask them if what you have said is clear, if they have any questions, and then confirm they agree to take part in the interview and be recorded.*

### **Go through consent script and get them to consent to each point**

## Community pharmacists

**Specific purpose of the interview:** to understand the experiences and perspectives of community pharmacists on how the PQS has worked on the ground / their thoughts about what the impact(s) of the PQS has been.

### Involvement with PQS

1. Can you tell me briefly about your job role?
2. What best describes the community pharmacy where you most commonly work?
  - a. Independent pharmacy; Small to medium multiple pharmacy chain; Large multiple pharmacy chain; Supermarket pharmacy; Distance selling pharmacy
3. How long have you been working in that organisation? How long have you been a pharmacist?
4. How long have you been involved in activities related to the PQS?
5. Have you taken part every year?
  - a. What factors help you / your employer decide whether to take part in the scheme each year?
6. What are your **aims for participating**?
7. Do you meet all of the criteria every year?
  - a. If no: why not? How/do you decide not to work towards certain criteria?
8. What do you perceive as being the aims of the scheme?
9. Do you find the **guidance and communications** which accompany the scheme to be useful?
  - a. Who do you get this guidance from? What is your preferred source of guidance? (NHSE; PSNC; LPC; employer; drug tariff; other)
  - b. What, in particular, is useful?
  - c. Is there anything which could be improved about these communications?

### Implementation of the PQS

10. Could you explain a bit about how you / your workplace **prepares for and delivers the requirements of each domain / criterion** each year?
  - a. Thinking about the most recent set of declarations (2022/23), what actions did you take to ensure you meet the gateway criteria?
  - b. Thinking about the most recent set of declarations (2022/23), what actions do you take to ensure you meet the quality criteria?
  - c. Have you noticed that the actions or efforts you make have changed year-to-year? If so, how?
11. What have been the **resource implications** of the scheme?
  - a. How much time does it take staff to meet the gateway and/or quality criteria?
  - b. Are there any additional staffing requirements?
  - c. Does this impact on the day to day running of the pharmacy? If so, how?

12. To what extent does your workplace **support you** in implementing the gateway and quality criteria?
  - a. How effective has this support been?
13. Have there been any key **difficulties in implementing** the PQS quality criteria?
  - a. Role of wider healthcare system
  - b. Impact of Covid-19
14. Have there been particular criteria which are **especially easy to implement**?
15. Have there been particular criteria which are **difficult to implement**?
16. The guidance document sent to you before the interview illustrates the points allocation per domain. Does the allocation of points reflect the most important aspects of quality in community pharmacy?
17. Is there anything you have had to do in the pharmacy or organisation to ensure that you meet all of the criteria each year?
  - a. Have you ever had to do anything that made you feel at all uncomfortable, either in this pharmacy or any you worked in previously?

## Impacts of PQS

**In this section, remind the interviewee to look at the guidance document summary we sent them before the interview**

18. What does **"quality"** in community pharmacy mean to you?
19. To what extent has the PQS led to **improvements in the quality** of community pharmacy?
  - a. What aspects of the PQS have had the most impact on improving quality?
    - What type of impact have they had (for patients, organisation, profession, self)
    - Why do you think these areas had the greatest impact? (prompt: level of integration with healthcare partners locally; one off criteria vs. built over time?)
    - How sustainable are these improvements? Are you still seeing the impact of these criteria?
  - b. What aspects of the PQS have had the least impact on improving quality?
    - What type of impact have they had (for patients, organisation, profession, self)
    - Why do you think these areas had the least impact? (prompt: level of integration with healthcare partners locally; one off criteria vs. built over time?)

**We would like to ask you about a few specific criteria areas which have been included in the PQS.**

20. Dementia friends
  - a. Have you developed any new skills as a result of PQS criteria in this area?
  - b. Have these criteria led to any changes in how you engage with patients?
  - c. If yes: do you expect this has had an impact on patients?
  - d. Do you have any specific examples of how this has impacted patient(s)?
  - e. Have these changes (if any) been sustainable? Are you still seeing the impact of these criteria?

21. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)
  - a. Have you developed any new skills as a result of PQS criteria in this area?
  - b. Have these criteria led to any changes in how you engage with patients?
  - c. If yes: do you expect this has had an impact on patients?
  - d. Do you have any specific examples of how this has impacted patient(s)?
  - e. Have these changes (if any) been sustainable? Are you still seeing the impact of these criteria?
22. Implementation of digital elements, e.g. NHS email
  - a. Have you developed any new skills as a result of PQS criteria in this area?
  - b. Have these criteria led to any changes in how you engage with patients?
  - c. If yes: do you expect this has had an impact on patients?
  - d. Do you have any specific examples of how this has impacted patient(s)?
  - e. Have these changes (if any) been sustainable? Are you still seeing the impact of these criteria?
23. Do you or your workplace **monitor or measure** positive impacts of PQS quality criteria?
24. Have you received any **feedback from NHSE**, and if so how have you used this?
  - a. E.g. have you had money clawed back for not meeting the criteria?
25. Have there been any **unexpected benefits** of filling in the declarations themselves for you or for your pharmacy – e.g. does this provide an opportunity for reflection?
26. What have been the main benefits / value of the PQS – for the **wider healthcare system**?
  - a. Has it had any impact on the integration of community pharmacy with the wider system, for example local GP practices? In what ways?
  - b. Prompt: wider adoption of NHS mail or summary care record?
27. In your view, what have been the main **shortcomings** of the PQS, or areas where it has not had the expected impact?
28. Have there been any **negative impacts** of the scheme? Please elaborate.

## Looking forward

29. Have you noticed any **positive or negative changes** in the PQS year-to-year?
30. The PQS is designed with the expectation that **all criteria can be met fully** by all pharmacies. Is this a strength or weakness of the scheme?
31. What do you think would have happened in relation to community pharmacy quality in the **absence** of PQS?
32. Is there anything which should be done differently in future iterations of this scheme, or **future incentive schemes**?
33. Do you think there are **alternative ways** to improve the quality of community pharmacy provision which could be used in addition to/instead of a financial incentive scheme such as the PQS?
34. Thank you for sharing your views and experiences. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## Varied employers and representative bodies (e.g. CCA, AIM, NPA, LPCs)

**Specific purpose of the interview:** To understand views and impacts of the scheme from the employers' perspective

### Involvement with PQS

1. Can you tell me briefly about your job role?
2. Please could you briefly explain your organisation's experience with the PQS / QPS?
3. What do you perceive as being the **aims of the scheme**?
4. Do you find the **guidance and communications** which accompany the scheme to be useful?
  - a. Who do you get this guidance from? What is your preferred source of guidance? (NHSE; PSNC; LPC; employer; drug tariff; other)
  - b. What, in particular, is useful?
  - c. Is there anything which could be improved about these communications?

#### **Employers only:**

5. What best describes your community pharmacy?
  - a. Independent pharmacy; Small to medium multiple pharmacy chain; Large multiple pharmacy chain; Supermarket pharmacy; Distance selling pharmacy
6. How long have you been involved in activities related to the PQS?
7. Have you taken part every year?
  - a. What factors help you / your employer decide whether to take part in the scheme each year?
8. What are your **aims for participating**?
9. Do you meet all of the criteria every year?
  - a. If no: why not? How/do you decide not to work towards certain criteria?

### Implementation of the PQS

#### **Employers only:**

10. How reliant are you on **locum pharmacists** in your organisation?
11. Do you use the same regular locums, or do you use whoever is available?
12. Are locums expected to have any training provided in relation to PQS?
  - a. If yes: would you support locums getting this training?
  - b. If no: What is the implication of this for PQS?
13. Could you explain a bit about how you / your workplace **prepares for and delivers the requirements of each domain / criterion** each year?
  - a. Thinking about the most recent set of declarations (2022/23), what actions did you take to ensure you meet the gateway criteria?

- b. Thinking about the most recent set of declarations (2022/23), what actions do you take to ensure you meet the quality criteria?
  - c. Have you noticed that the actions or efforts you make have changed year-to-year? If so, how?
14. What have been the **resource implications** of the scheme?
- a. How much time does it take staff to meet the gateway and/or quality criteria?
  - b. Are there any additional staffing requirements?
  - c. Does this impact on the day to day running of the pharmacy? If so, how?
15. What have been the **opportunity costs** of the scheme (if any)?
16. Do you provide any **support to your staff** to help them implement the PQS quality criteria? Please elaborate.

**All respondents:**

17. Have there been any **key difficulties** in implementing the PQS quality criteria?
- a. Role of wider healthcare system
  - b. Prompt: impact of Covid-19?
18. Have there been particular criteria which are **especially easy to implement**?
19. Have there been particular criteria which are **difficult to implement**?
20. The guidance document sent to you before the interview illustrates the points allocation per domain. Does the allocation of points reflect the most important aspects of quality in community pharmacy?
21. Is there anything you have had to do in the pharmacy or organisation to ensure that you meet all of the criteria each year?
- a. Have you ever had to do anything that made you feel at all uncomfortable, either in this pharmacy or any you worked in previously?

**Impacts of PQS**

**In this section, remind the interviewee to look at the guidance document summary we sent them before the interview**

22. What does "**quality**" in community pharmacy mean to you?
23. To what extent has the PQS led to **improvements in the quality** of community pharmacy?
- a. What aspects of the PQS have had the most impact on improving quality?
    - What type of impact have they had (for patients, organisation, profession, self)
    - Why do you think these areas had the greatest impact? (prompt: level of integration with healthcare partners locally; one off criteria vs. built over time?)
    - How sustainable are these improvements? Are you still seeing the impact of these criteria?
  - b. What aspects of the PQS have had the least impact on improving quality?
    - What type of impact have they had (for patients, organisation, profession, self)
    - Why do you think these areas had the least impact? (prompt: level of integration with healthcare partners locally; one off criteria vs. built over time?)

**Employers only:**

**We would like to ask you about a few specific criteria areas which have been included in the PQS.**

24. Dementia friends

- a. Has your staff developed any new skills as a result of PQS criteria in this area?
- b. Have these criteria led to any changes in how your staff engage with patients?
- c. If yes: do you expect this has had an impact on patients?
- d. Do you have any specific examples of how this has impacted patient(s)?
- e. Have these changes (if any) been sustainable? Are you still seeing the impact of these criteria?

25. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

- a. Has your staff developed any new skills as a result of PQS criteria in this area?
- b. Have these criteria led to any changes in how your staff engage with patients?
- c. If yes: do you expect this has had an impact on patients?
- d. Do you have any specific examples of how this has impacted patient(s)?
- e. Have these changes (if any) been sustainable? Are you still seeing the impact of these criteria?

26. Implementation of digital elements, e.g. NHS email

- a. Has your staff developed any new skills as a result of PQS criteria in this area?
- b. Have these criteria led to any changes in how your staff engage with patients?
- c. If yes: do you expect this has had an impact on patients?
- d. Do you have any specific examples of how this has impacted patient(s)?
- e. Have these changes (if any) been sustainable? Are you still seeing the impact of these criteria?

27. Have there been any **unexpected benefits** of filling in the declarations themselves for you or for your pharmacy – e.g. does this provide an opportunity for reflection?

**All respondents:**

28. Do you **monitor or measure** positive impacts of PQS quality criteria?

29. Have you received any **feedback from NHSE**, and if so how have you used this?

- a. E.g. have you had money clawed back for not meeting the criteria?

30. What have been the main benefits / value of the PQS – for the **wider healthcare system**?

- a. Has it had any impact on the integration of community pharmacy with the wider system, for example local GP practices? In what ways?
- b. Prompt: wider adoption of NHS mail or summary care record?

31. In your view, what have been the main **shortcomings** of the PQS, or areas where it has not had the expected impact?

32. Have there been any **negative impacts** of the scheme? Please elaborate.

## Looking forward

33. Have you noticed any **positive or negative changes** in the PQS year-to-year?
34. The PQS is designed with the expectation that **all criteria can be met fully** by all pharmacies. Is this a strength or weakness of the scheme?
35. What do you think would have happened in relation to community pharmacy quality in the **absence** of PQS?
36. Is there anything which should be done differently in future iterations of this scheme, or **future incentive schemes**?
  - a. Change in value of monetary incentive
  - b. Other areas of quality to incentivise
37. Do you think there are **alternative ways** to improve the quality of community pharmacy provision which could be used in addition to/instead of a financial incentive scheme such as the PQS?
38. Thank you for sharing your views and experiences. Is there anything else you would like to add?



## PSNC

**Specific purpose of the interview:** To understand views and impacts of the scheme from the perspective of the PSNC

### Involvement with PQS

1. Can you tell me briefly about your job role?
2. Please could you briefly explain how PSNC has been involved in the PQS year-to-year?
3. What do you perceive as being the **aims of the scheme**?
4. Do you find the **guidance and communications** which accompany the scheme to be useful?
  - a. What, in particular, is useful?
  - b. Is there anything which could be improved about these communications?
5. Do you provide any **additional support or guidance** to pharmacies to help them implement the PQS quality criteria? Please elaborate.

### Implementation of the PQS

6. What is your understanding of how pharmacies **prepare for and deliver the requirements of each domain / criterion** each year?
7. What have been the **resource implications** of the scheme for pharmacies?
  - a. How much time does it take staff to meet the gateway and/or quality criteria?
  - b. Are there any additional staffing requirements?
8. What have been the **opportunity costs** of the scheme for pharmacies (if any)?
9. Have there been any **key difficulties** in implementing the PQS?
  - a. Role of wider healthcare system
  - b. Prompt: impact of Covid-19?
10. Have there been particular criteria which are **especially easy to implement**?
11. Have there been particular criteria which are **difficult to implement**?
12. The guidance document sent to you before the interview illustrates the points allocation per domain. Does the allocation of points reflect the most important aspects of quality in community pharmacy?
13. Is there anything pharmacies have had to do to ensure that they meet all of the criteria each year?

### Impacts of PQS

**In this section, remind the interviewee to look at the guidance document summary we sent them before the interview**

14. What does **"quality"** in community pharmacy mean to you?
15. To what extent has the PQS led to **improvements in the quality** of community pharmacy?
  - a. What aspects of the PQS have had the most impact on improving quality?

- What type of impact have they had (for patients, organisation, profession, self)
  - Why do you think these areas had the greatest impact? (prompt: level of integration with healthcare partners locally; one off criteria vs. built over time?)
  - How sustainable are these improvements? Are you still seeing the impact of these criteria?
- b. What aspects of the PQS have had the least impact on improving quality?
- What type of impact have they had (for patients, organisation, profession, self)
  - Why do you think these areas had the least impact? (prompt: level of integration with healthcare partners locally; one off criteria vs. built over time?)

**We would like to ask you about a few specific criteria areas which have been included in the PQS.**

16. Dementia friends

- a. What have been the impacts of the PQS criteria in this area?
- b. Do you expect this has had an impact on patients?
- c. Have these changes (if any) been sustainable? Are you still seeing the impact of these criteria?

17. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

- a. What have been the impacts of the PQS criteria in this area?
- b. Do you expect this has had an impact on patients?
- c. Have these changes (if any) been sustainable? Are you still seeing the impact of these criteria?

18. Implementation of digital elements, e.g. NHS email

- a. What have been the impacts of the PQS criteria in this area?
- b. Do you expect this has had an impact on patients?
- c. Have these changes (if any) been sustainable? Are you still seeing the impact of these criteria?

19. Do you **monitor or measure** positive impacts of PQS quality criteria?

20. What have been the main benefits / value of the PQS – for the **wider healthcare system**?

- a. Has it had any impact on the integration of community pharmacy with the wider system, for example local GP practices? In what ways?
- b. Prompt: wider adoption of NHS mail or summary care record?

21. In your view, what have been the **main shortcomings** of the PQS, or areas where it has not had the expected impact?

22. Have there been any **negative impacts** of the scheme? Please elaborate.

## Looking forward

23. Have you noticed any **positive or negative changes** in the PQS year-to-year?

24. The PQS is designed with the expectation that **all criteria can be met fully** by all pharmacies. Is this a strength or weakness of the scheme?

25. What do you think would have happened in relation to community pharmacy quality in the **absence** of PQS?

26. Is there anything which should be done differently in future iterations of this scheme, or **future incentive schemes**?
- a. Change in value of monetary incentive
  - b. Other areas of quality to incentivise
27. Do you think there are **alternative ways** to improve the quality of community pharmacy provision which could be used in addition to/instead of a financial incentive scheme such as the PQS?
28. Thank you for sharing your views and experiences. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## System partners (PCN, ICS)

**Specific purpose of the interview:** To understand views and impacts of the scheme from the wider healthcare system perspective

### Involvement with PQS and views on quality in community pharmacy

1. Can you tell me briefly about your job role?
2. What does "**quality**" in community pharmacy mean to you?
3. What are your views on the quality of services provided in community pharmacy in your local area?
4. Is there anything that your PCN / ICS is doing to improve the quality of community pharmacy?
  - a. E.g. access, patient safety, provision of more clinical services in community pharmacy, etc.
5. Are you aware of the Pharmacy Quality Scheme (PQS)?
  - a. If yes, please could you briefly explain your knowledge and understanding of the PQS / QPS?
  - b. If unaware, give them the following description and ask this question again:

*The Pharmacy Quality Scheme (PQS) is a financial incentive scheme which aims to improve the quality of community pharmacy services and move community pharmacy towards a more integrated, service-focussed function within the wider NHS system. It does this by rewarding community pharmacies for meeting annually reviewed criteria across a number of quality dimensions in the areas of: clinical effectiveness, patient safety and patient experience.*

#### **If aware of PQS:**

6. Have you had any direct involvement with the scheme?
  - a. What is your role in relation to the PQS?
  - b. How long have you been involved in activities related to the PQS?
7. What do you perceive as being the **aims of the scheme**?
8. Have you received any **guidance or communication** about the scheme? Do you find the guidance and communications which accompany the scheme to be useful?
  - a. Who do you get this guidance from? What is your preferred source of guidance? (NHSE; PSNC; LPC; employer; drug tariff; other)
  - b. What, in particular, is useful?
  - c. Is there anything which could be improved about these communications?
9. To your knowledge, how does the PQS fit or align with **other incentive schemes** (QoF, IIF, CQUIN, etc)?
  - a. How does the PQS align with local strategies for community pharmacy?

### **Impacts of PQS – tailor this section depending on how familiar interviewee is with the scheme**

#### **If aware of PQS:**

10. To what extent has the PQS led to **improvements in the quality** of community pharmacy?
- a. What aspects of the PQS have had the most impact on improving quality?
    - What type of impact have they had (for patients, pharmacies, wider healthcare system)
    - Why do you think these areas had the greatest impact? (prompt: level of integration with healthcare partners locally; one off criteria vs. built over time?)
    - How sustainable are these improvements? Are you still seeing the impact of these criteria?
  - b. What aspects of the PQS have had the least impact on improving quality?
    - What type of impact have they had (for patients, pharmacies, wider healthcare system)
    - Why do you think these areas had the least impact? (prompt: level of integration with healthcare partners locally; one off criteria vs. built over time?)
11. What have been the main benefits / value of the PQS – for the **wider healthcare system**?
- a. Has it had any impact on the integration of community pharmacy with the wider system, for example local GP practices? In what ways?
  - b. Prompt: wider adoption of NHS mail or summary care record?
12. How has the wider health system **shaped the impact** of PQS?
- a. Is there anything that your PCN or ICS has done to ensure that the PQS has a greater impact?
13. In your view, what have been the main **shortcomings** of the PQS, or areas where it has not had the expected impact?
14. Have there been any **negative impacts** of the scheme? Please elaborate.

## Looking forward

### All respondents:

15. Given what you've already told me about your knowledge of the PQS, do you think this is a good way of improving the quality of community pharmacy provision?
16. Do you think there are **alternative ways** to improve the quality of community pharmacy provision which could be used in addition to/instead of a financial incentive scheme such as the PQS?
17. Is there anything which could be done differently in future iterations of this scheme, or **future incentive schemes**?
- a. The PQS is designed with the expectation that all criteria can be met fully by all pharmacies. Is this a strength or weakness of the scheme?
  - b. Is a national scheme appropriate, or would you prefer more local solutions?
  - c. Change in value of monetary incentive
  - d. Other areas of quality to incentivise

### If aware of PQS:

18. Have you noticed any **positive or negative changes** in the PQS year-to-year?

19. What do you think would have happened in relation to community pharmacy quality in the **absence** of PQS?

20. Thank you for sharing your views and experiences. Is there anything else you would like to add?