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# Pharmacy Technician Workforce Development Programme

**NHS England, Workforce, Training and  
Education Directorate**



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## Contents

1.	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
	The vision	3
	The case for change	3
	Sustaining the workforce, now and in the future	5
2.	INTRODUCTION	7
	Workforce, Training and Education – Pharmacy Context	8
3.	THE CASE FOR CHANGE	9
4.	POLICY DRIVERS	11
5.	SUSTAINING THE WORKFORCE, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE	12
	Key priority areas	12
6.	NEXT STEPS	16
	Delivering and embedding the plan	16
	The role of the Integrated Care System (ICS)	16
	Agile approach to long-term planning	16
7.	RECOMMENDATIONS	16
	Train – Growing the workforce	16
	Retain – Embedding the right culture and improving retention	17
	Reform – Working and training differently	17
	REFERENCES	18
	DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT	19

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pharmacy Technicians work with patients to improve medicines optimisation and promote health and wellbeing. They practice in a wide range of settings across the health service and specialise in supporting people to get the best from investment in, and use of, medicines. Their work covers areas where medicines are selected, procured, delivered, prescribed, administered and reviewed, and increasingly in clinical settings where medicines are supplied or administered. Initial Education and Training (IET) supports pharmacy technicians to work in community pharmacy, general practice, hospitals, health and justice settings, mental health and community health services.

As practice evolves, the WT&E directorate Pharmacy Technician Workforce Development Programme is required to enable the delivery of the NHS England Long Term Workforce Plan (LTWP)<sup>1</sup> recommendations. It will also support delivery of public health initiatives by focusing on workforce development that aligns with local population health needs.

### The vision

To develop pharmacy technicians to practice autonomously as competent and confident healthcare professionals, within a defined scope of practice, working across all sectors of healthcare, to ensure medicines safety and optimisation.

### The case for change

- Pharmacy technicians are a relatively newly registered healthcare profession who are regulated by the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC). Their knowledge, skills and expertise provide the basis for them to be able to deliver a wider range of clinical services, for which they are accountable.
- The demand for healthcare services is growing, exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and there are workforce challenges across all professions, so further skill mix optimisation is required. As pharmacists become independent prescribers at the point of registration, pharmacy technicians will need to undertake new roles and modernise their careers too, to support the infrastructure required to enable healthcare reforms.
- Pharmacy technicians undertake two years of focused initial education and training (IET) in clinical settings and can provide clinical services

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appropriate to their level of training, at the point of registration. This two-year training pathway is an opportunity to grow the number of healthcare professionals, to meet the healthcare needs of our population, relatively quickly. Post-registration pharmacy technicians can build on their IET by undertaking training and development to reach master's level and provide further services dependent on the workforce needs of the future NHS.

- Addressing population health needs requires more healthcare professionals to have generalist skills to meet the increasingly complex health needs that people have in their everyday lives. Pharmacy technicians are accessible practitioners who can support improved patient outcomes through service provision.
- Scaling of NHS care delivered in the community requires rapid workforce expansion and the development of more flexible, integrated teams. The Delivery Plan for Recovering Access to Primary Care<sup>2</sup> specifically refers to expansion of community pharmacy services to free up appointments in general practice, e.g., oral contraception and blood pressure services.
- Current legislative reviews encompass pharmacy technician practice. Any subsequent amendments to legislation are likely to drive change that will transform the pharmacy technician profession.
- Overall, the numbers of pharmacy technicians have increased. However, according to the 2023 data, there has been a decline of approximately 17% in Community Pharmacy, with approximately 0.55 pharmacy technicians per community pharmacy<sup>3</sup>. The ambition is to increase the number of training places (via apprenticeships) over the next five years.
- Advancements in digital technology, automation, genomics and artificial intelligence will support capacity to deliver NHS services, in new and different ways. To maximise the potential benefits, our NHS People, which includes pharmacy technicians, will be required to develop their skills and become more digitally literate.
- Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) data<sup>4</sup> shows that staff from an ethnic minority background have a poorer experience of NHS recruitment processes than their white colleagues. This is also the case for staff with disabilities, as shown in the Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) data<sup>5</sup>. To recruit and retain pharmacy technicians, equality, diversity and

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inclusion work must be embedded into workforce development and transformation initiatives.

## **Sustaining the workforce, now and in the future**

Pharmacy technician recruitment, development and ways of working will continue to evolve to meet the needs of the communities that pharmacy technicians serve. Scenarios suggest a shortfall between supply and demand of pharmacy technicians in all sectors, particularly in community pharmacy, over the next five years.

To meet the demand, the Pharmacy Technician Workforce Development Programme will focus on three key priority areas, with short and long-term goals. Short-term goals are set out under each key priority area below.

### **Key Priority Area 1: Train – Growing the workforce**

- Expand workforce numbers through Pre-registration Trainee Pharmacy Technician (PTPT) apprenticeships, underpinned by a standardised education curriculum framework.
- Promote pharmacy technician careers.

### **Key Priority Area 2: Retain – Embedding the right culture and improving retention**

- Provide leadership, fellowship and management training and development opportunities.
- Commission the creation of funded development pathways from the point of registration to beyond, underpinned by career framework(s).
- Support initiatives to increase diversity within the profession and tackle discrimination.

### **Key Priority Area 3: Reform – Working and training differently**

- Commission training in clinical skills and professional confidence, in readiness for national healthcare reforms.
- Promote the uptake of available mental health and learning disabilities training.

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## Points to note

- This programme is specific to pharmacy technician workforce development.
- Aseptic workforce transformation, including pharmacy technicians, is being reviewed and developed by the NHS England Infusion and Specialist Medicines workstream.
- The Pharmacy Technician Workforce Development Programme will be reviewed and refreshed in line with future iterations of the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan.

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## 2. INTRODUCTION

Pharmacy technicians are a regulated healthcare profession whose contribution is vital to successfully achieving new pharmaceutical care delivery models and national healthcare policy ambitions. Pharmacy technicians undertake a variety of roles to improve patient outcomes through medicines optimisation and provision of other pharmacy services. They are core members of pharmacy and multi-professional teams, across all sectors of practice.

The wider health and care landscape is changing at pace, and this requires sufficient numbers of people to be trained with the right skills, values and behaviours, at the right time and in the right place. This is our challenge, and with it comes opportunities. There are several enablers that will facilitate change within the profession and provide the opportunity to maximise what pharmacy technicians can offer to patients and the public who use pharmacy services. These range from legislative reform and professional leadership at a national level, to local development opportunities that create job satisfaction.

The pharmacy technician workforce can offer significant value to the NHS, in all settings, so recruitment and retention are important factors to consider when growing the workforce. This was identified as a need in the NHS England Long Term Workforce Plan (LTWP)<sup>1</sup>.

Pharmacy Technicians work with patients to improve medicines optimisation and promote health and wellbeing. They practice in a wide range of settings across the health service and specialise in supporting people to get the best from investment in, and use of, medicines. Their work covers areas where medicines are selected, procured, delivered, prescribed, administered and reviewed, and increasingly in clinical settings where medicines are supplied or administered. Initial Education and Training (IET) supports pharmacy technicians to work in community pharmacy, general practice, hospitals, health and justice settings, mental health and community health services.

As practice evolves, the WT&E directorate Pharmacy Technician Workforce Development Programme is required to enable the delivery of the NHS LTWP recommendations. It will also support delivery of public health initiatives by focusing on workforce development that aligns with local population health needs.

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## Workforce, Training and Education – Pharmacy Context

The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan outlines an ambitious plan to train, retain and reform the NHS workforce both now, and into the future. Aligned to this, Pharmacy workforce, training and education is going through a period of significant reform, encompassing reforms to the initial education and training of pharmacists, supporting the development of more pharmacist independent prescribers and a focus of growing the number of pharmacy technicians training and working across all sectors of Pharmacy.

The NHS England WT&E Pharmacy programme covers elements of pharmacy technician workforce, training and education through its regional and national pharmacy technician workstreams, pharmacy integration programme (PhIP), pharmacy careers work and through its data workstreams, including the community pharmacy workforce survey. Moving forward, the pharmacy technician workforce development programme will need to ensure each of these strands comes together cohesively and provide a structure through which their delivery can be assured.

### Points to note

- Pharmacy technicians are a distinct professional group, and this programme is specific to pharmacy technicians. To deliver on policy ambition, there is a need for wider workforce development and separate plans will be created to upskill other members of the team.
- Aseptic workforce transformation is being reviewed and developed holistically by the Infusion and Specialist Medicines workstream. This work will encompass pharmacy technicians and will dovetail into general workforce development principles set out in this document. For this reason, there will not be references to this sector of the workforce within this programme.
- As acknowledged in the NHS LTWP, planning for the long-term is not an exact science because modelling is based on key assumptions that are true at the time, such as demand, productivity, retention and investment. There are multiple interdependencies that could impact the ability to deliver on key objectives. This programme will be reviewed in line with NHS LTWP reviews and updated where necessary.



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### 3. THE CASE FOR CHANGE

- Pharmacy technicians are a relatively newly registered healthcare profession who are regulated by the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC). They work to the same professional standards as pharmacists and are valuable members of the multi-professional team, yet they are often under-utilised.
- Pharmacy technicians' initial education and training comprises a two-year programme, focused on medicines, in a patient-facing setting. Their knowledge, skills and expertise provide the basis for them to be able to deliver a wider range of clinical services, for which they are accountable.
- The demand for healthcare services is growing, exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and there are workforce challenges across all professions, so further skill mix optimisation is required.
- Initial education and training reforms for pharmacists will lead to them becoming independent prescribers at the point of registration from 2026, and for them to utilise their prescribing skills there will be a need to modernise pharmacy technician careers so that they are upskilled to take on a broader range of tasks.
- There are 21,273 registered pharmacy technicians in England (June 2023), up from 19,281 at the end of June 2016. However, whilst numbers have increased overall, we have seen a decline of nearly 17% in Community Pharmacy (from 7,768 pharmacy technicians in 2021 to 6,544 in 2022)<sup>3</sup>. We now have approximately 0.55 pharmacy technicians per community pharmacy.
- Pharmacy technicians undertake two years of focused initial education and training (IET) in clinical settings and can provide clinical services appropriate to their level of training, at the point of registration. This two-year training pathway is an opportunity to grow the number of healthcare professionals, to meet the healthcare needs of our population, relatively quickly. Post-registration pharmacy technicians can build on their IET by undertaking training and development to reach master's level and provide further services dependent on the workforce needs of the future NHS.
- We recognise that there has been minimal investment in pharmacy technician training in community pharmacy to date, and we are currently

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exploring increasing the number of pharmacy technician training places (via apprenticeships in community pharmacy and primary care) over the next five years.

- The traditional NHS model has focused on responding to episodic health and care needs, rather than prevention and ongoing support. The direction of travel is moving toward addressing population health needs, which requires more healthcare professionals to have generalist skills to meet the increasingly complex health needs that people have in their everyday lives. Pharmacy technicians are accessible practitioners who can support improved patient outcomes through service provision.
- Scaling of NHS care delivered in the community requires rapid workforce expansion and the development of more flexible, integrated teams. The Delivery Plan for Recovering Access to Primary Care<sup>2</sup> specifically refers to expansion of community pharmacy services to free up appointments in general practice, e.g., oral contraception and blood pressure services.
- Current legislative reviews encompass pharmacy technician practice. In September 2023, the Secretary of State for Health has Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) sought views on the proposal for the use of patient group directions (PGDs) by pharmacy technicians via public consultation. Following the consultation amendments to the Human Medicines Regulations 2012 (HMR 2012) took effect 26<sup>th</sup> June 2024 which enables registered pharmacy technicians to legally supply and administer certain medicines under patient group directions (PGDs).
- A consultation on ‘Supervision’ as defined in the Medicines Act has also occurred and the outcome is awaited. Any subsequent amendments to legislation are likely to drive change that will transform the pharmacy technician profession.
- Advancements in digital technology, automation, genomics and artificial intelligence will support capacity to deliver NHS services, in new and different ways. To maximise the potential benefits, pharmacy technicians will be required to develop their skills and become more digitally literate.
- The pharmacy technician workforce in England is comprised predominantly White British females, between the ages of 25 – 55 years. To be effective we should reflect the communities we serve because a workforce that is

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representative of its local population supports better health outcomes and improves patient experience.

- We know from Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) data<sup>4</sup> that staff from an ethnic minority background have a poorer experience of NHS recruitment processes than their white colleagues. This is also the case for staff with disabilities, as shown in the Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES) data<sup>5</sup>.

## 4. POLICY DRIVERS

There are several policies and national initiatives that act as strategic enablers for development of the pharmacy technician workforce. Key drivers are outlined below.

- Delivery plan for recovering access to primary care ambitions to expand the oral contraception and blood pressure services in community pharmacy, coupled with HMRC's confirmation that services provided by pharmacy technicians are exempt from VAT.
- NHS England pathfinder projects: piloting innovative new services and the potential for new roles for the whole pharmacy team.
- Integrated Care Boards as commissioners - future workforce needs will be based on system priorities, according to local population health needs.
- Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and ministerial support to grow the pharmacy technician workforce year-on-year over the next five years in recognition of the benefits that could be realised by this group of registered healthcare professionals.
- Review of legislation
  - A consultation on the proposal for the use of patient group directions (PGDs) by pharmacy technicians was completed in September 2023.
  - A consultation on 'Supervision' as defined in the Medicines Act has also been completed.
- Future reform of the initial education and training requirements for pharmacy technicians by the GPhC.

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- UK Commission on Pharmacy Professional Leadership Report
  - Inclusive Pharmacy Practice work and pharmacy technician demographic data collated by the GPhC indicate that attraction, recruitment and retention require focus to achieve equality, diversity and inclusion within the profession.

## **5.SUSTAINING THE WORKFORCE, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE**

### **Key priority areas**

- An implementation plan will be developed, supported by investment, to realise the ambitions set out in this programme. Pharmacy technician recruitment, development and ways of working will continue to evolve to meet the needs of the communities that pharmacy technicians serve. The speed and scale of action are dependent on infrastructure, education funding, policy drivers and professional leadership.
- Scenarios suggests a shortfall between supply and demand of pharmacy technicians in all sectors, particularly community pharmacy, over the next five years. This is before considering the impact of an aging workforce, the rate of retention within the current workforce and external factors. To meet the demand, we will focus on three, key priority areas, with short and long-term goals.

### **5.1 Train – Growing the workforce (Key priority area 1)**

#### **5.1.1 Apprenticeship expansion**

#### **These are short and long-term objectives.**

- Support systems with workforce demand scoping to ensure that pharmacy technicians are trained in sufficient numbers and in the right place to address healthcare needs of the population, particularly in areas where high social deprivation and health inequalities could be improved through local healthcare provision.
- Ensure that training the workforce in sufficient numbers, is supported by harmonised training contributions across England.

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- Increase use of healthcare apprenticeships by up to 16%, proportionate to needs of the sector, with growth of Pre-registration Trainee Pharmacy Technician (PTPT) placements at scale in community pharmacy and primary care. This is aligned to the ambitions of the LTWP where the aim is to grow healthcare apprenticeships by 16% by 2028/29.
  - Monitor (and mitigate) PTPT attrition from commissioned IET places and registration conversion rates.
  - Support employers to understand the benefits and processes associated with apprenticeships; invest in resources to support smaller employers to work in collaboration with larger organisations that pay the levy.

### 5.1.2 Recruitment and supply - careers

#### These are short to medium-term objectives.

- Public facing career campaigns
  - Build on national pharmacy careers work and the NHS Ambassadors programme
  - Promotion of pharmacy technicians via social media
  - QR codes to resources on posters at careers fayres, NHS Trust Open Days etc
  - Use of virtual reality (VR) and Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) to link to other platforms
- Link into wider NHS workforce plans to attract people across all generations, including those who have yet to join the workforce, to enter the pharmacy profession to train as pharmacy technicians by promoting the NHS brand, its values and unique employee value proposition.
- Support applicants with prior experience to complete PTPT education programmes with an expedient route to register, e.g., international recruitment and return to practice.
- Work with employers and system partners to deliver fair, pragmatic recruitment processes.

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## 5.2 Retain - Embedding the right culture and improving retention (Key priority area 2)

### These are short to medium-term objectives.

- Provide leadership, fellowship and management training and development opportunities.
- Reduce systemic bias and do more to ensure pharmacy technicians and PTPTs are treated fairly within a compassionate and inclusive culture.
- Support initiatives to increase diversity within the profession and tackle discrimination.
- Commission the development of education frameworks and promote practice standards to support transferability between sectors via passporting.
- Procurement of clinical skills training to enable pharmacy technicians to deliver clinical services across all sectors of health and social care.
- Commission the creation of career and funded education pathways for pharmacy technicians delivering generalist and specialist services.
- Support attainment across the four pillars of professional practice by increasing provision of training and supporting uptake of opportunities to gain experience.
- Support future access to level 4 and 5 clinical education to underpin the training required for service delivery and working across systems.

## 5.3 Reform – Working and training differently (Key priority area 3)

### 5.3.1 Professional development

#### This is a short-term objective.

- Commission training in clinical skills and professional confidence, in readiness for national healthcare reforms.

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### 5.3.2 Shift skills capacity into community

**This is a medium-term objective.**

- To enable moving more care out of hospital, more pharmacy technicians need to be trained and work in primary, community and mental health care. To support with this, pharmacy technicians should receive training on how pharmacy can support mental health and learning disability services.

### 5.3.3 Digital and technological innovations

**These are medium to long-term objectives.**

- Commission training in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other technological advances, and support digital literacy of the workforce, in readiness for future service provision models.
- Advances in technology, A.I. and genomics are moving at pace; consider potential impacts (positive and negative) on the workforce of tomorrow. Commission training to support digital literacy and technological capabilities as this will be vital for trainees, supervisors and the legacy workforce.

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## 6. NEXT STEPS

### Delivering and embedding the plan

The Senior Responsible Officer (SRO), in conjunction with Regional Pharmacy Technician Leads within the WT&E Directorate will formulate an implementation and communication plan to achieve the programme objectives.

### The role of the Integrated Care System (ICS)

ICSs have been tasked with bringing together NHS organisations, local authorities and wider system partners to improve population health and healthcare, tackle unequal outcomes and access, enhance productivity and value for money, and help the NHS support broader social and economic development<sup>1</sup>. NHS England will work closely with stakeholders to support implementation of the Pharmacy Technician Workforce Development Programme which should in turn support delivery of the ten outcomes-based functions for 'one workforce'<sup>6</sup>.

### Agile approach to long-term planning

This programme and the subsequent implementation plan will be reviewed in two years' time, in line with NHS LTWP reviews, or sooner if there are material changes to pharmacy technician workforce development due to Initial Education and Training (IET) standards reforms by the regulator.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are short-term and intended to be achieved in the next 1 – 3 years. Long-term objectives are to be achieved in the next 5 – 10 years so will be included as specific recommendations in the next iteration of this programme, after the next review of the NHS LTWP.

The priorities to focus on in the near future are:

### Train – Growing the workforce

- Expand workforce numbers through PTPT apprenticeships, underpinned by a standardised education curriculum framework.
- Promote pharmacy technician careers.



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## **Retain – Embedding the right culture and improving retention**

- Provide leadership, fellowship and management training and development opportunities.
- Commission the creation of funded development pathways from the point of registration to beyond, underpinned by career framework(s).
- Support initiatives to increase diversity within the profession and tackle discrimination.

## **Reform – Working and training differently**

- Commission training in clinical skills and professional confidence, in readiness for national healthcare reforms.
- Promote the uptake of available mental health and learning disabilities training.

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## DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT

### Revision history

Version	Date
1.0	01/04/2024
1.1	31/10/2024

### Document control

The controlled copy of this document is maintained by NHS England. Any copies of this document held outside of that area, in whatever format (e.g. paper, email attachment), are considered to have passed out of control and should be checked for currency and validity.