



Academic Health
Science Network
North East and North Cumbria



Digital Pioneers Impact Report 2022/2023



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Foreword



Dave Belshaw, Digital Transformation Director, AHSN NENC

Welcome to the Digital Pioneers first impact report, from the Academic Health Science Network for the North East and North Cumbria (AHSN NENC)

Since the start of the pandemic, there has been an acceleration in digital health within the NHS at an unprecedented scale and pace, increasing the use of online appointments and consultations; and empowering patients to use online tools to manage their own health. As a result, it is no surprise that primary care services are moving towards a 'digital first' approach.

Digital is revolutionising how we deliver patient care, however it's important that we recognise the scale of these changes without compromising the training and support needs of our primary care workforce, encompassing general practice, pharmacy, optometry and dentistry.

Within the North East and North Cumbria, the Digital Pioneers programme was launched in April 2022 to provide education to the workforce and drive forward digital health ideas and innovations in primary care.

During the first year of the programme, our team have worked collaboratively with partners and invested a significant amount of time building relationships in the region to understand the needs of our local primary care services, and how we can add value in a complex and ever demanding NHS.

I'm really proud of what has been achieved so far by working together. In the first year there has been 71 champions through our Digital Champions education programme; 556 people reached through events and masterclass sessions – which have been driven by primary care requests and needs; and 10 innovative ideas which are currently being supported through our AHSN NENC Innovation Pathway.

We continue to develop the programme and, going into year 2, I'm pleased that we're building on these strengths and achievements. The Digital Champions course has now been CPD accredited, and we're just about to launch a project call to fund six innovative projects up to the value of £20,000.

In June 2023, we also embarked on the launch of a pilot project with five practices to explore and accelerate the use of remote monitoring technology in primary care and develop use cases for the pathways that provide the biggest impact.

The benefits of a digital NHS for patients are huge but we also know that without adequate consideration, digital transformation can exacerbate existing health inequalities. One of the ambitions of the programme is to ensure we don't create further inequalities, and so we are working with stakeholders across health and care to address this at our Digital Inclusion Forum.

Thank you to every individual and organisation we have worked with who have supported and embraced the programme. Our mission is to support the primary care workforce, now and in the future, to embed innovation and foster a digitally skilled workforce to save the NHS money, relieve clinical pressures and improve patient care.

I hope you enjoy reading our impact report which includes more detail on some of the above and looks at how we can further support the primary care workforce to deliver better care for all.

Best regards,

Dave

Background to Digital Pioneers

The North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System (NENC ICS) are seen as leaders in the region in terms of the introduction of digital technology in to primary care. Time and money has been invested in introducing such technologies.

Whilst this is good news for primary care and in particular general practice, the region hasn't heavily invested in the workforce to provide the skills, knowledge and tools to help increase their digital literacy. In addition, there is still work to do to explore the role that innovation has to play in primary care - to think outside the box to support the health of our population whilst maintaining safety.

The digital pioneers programme was established in response to:

- An urgent need to address capability and capacity challenges to build our future primary care workforce
- Covid-19. The pandemic has accelerated the need for use of digital tools such as video consultations in primary care
- Patient demand, which has increased across all services. In the last three years, there has been 15% increase and general practice nationally is delivering more than 1 million appointments every day, and half a million more every week than pre-pandemic
- A decline in the Informatics workforce within the region (those who work in data, digital, technology and knowledge).

The programme supports a vast geographical area and population of over 3 million citizens.

About us...

North East and North Cumbria ICS is the biggest in the country

We serve Circa
3.2m
citizens



We have
64 PCNs and
over
350
practices



We are one of the biggest employers in the region



Digital Services in Primary Care

Over the past few years, and throughout the pandemic, the North East and North Cumbria has seen exponential growth in the number of digital technologies introduced across primary care. Historically, the majority of this was funded through Estates and Technology Transfer Fund (ETTF) in addition to additional funding during the pandemic and funding to support Digital First Primary Care.

A number of those technologies include:

- Online consultations
- Video consultations
- Electronic patient records
- Health apps
- Advanced telephony
- Mjog and Iplato bi-directional messaging
- AccuRx
- NHS App
- Check in screens
- Web cam monitors
- Surgery pods
- Integrated devices

In response to the challenges, in 2022 the AHSN NENC launched the Digital Pioneers programme in partnership and on behalf of the system (see Appendix 7). The aim of the programme is to facilitate collaboration, exchange ideas and support the scale and spread of digital health innovations within primary care, to improve the quality of care to patients and support the workforce to deliver better

healthcare for all. By providing opportunities for digital innovation and using digital technologies where appropriate, the Digital Pioneers programme aims to:

- Provide better access to digital care and services in primary care
- Empower people to be partners in their own health and care
- Improve patient satisfaction
- Reduce inequalities that exist within our population.

In addition to patient benefit, the workforce has had access to training for most of the digital products introduced. This has taken different forms including face to face, eLearning, videos and webex sessions. The programme identified a gap in investment in the wider skills needed for the workforce in order to create a culture of education and learning for all staff to feel empowered by digital technology. This led to the design of a Digital Champions education programme for primary care staff who want to inspire others to embrace digital technology.



The Landscape

In 2019, Eric Topol published a report which outlined recommendations to prepare the healthcare workforce to deliver the digital future (Appendix 1). Topol, a cardiologist and leading commentator on health care and technology, was commissioned to lead an independent review to advise on how technologies are likely to change the role and function of clinical staff and the lifelong learning of current and future NHS staff. The report explores the impact that advances in digital health care technologies, genomics

and artificial intelligence will have on the workforce.

The report offers a number of recommendations, including the early implementation of education to support the workforce to ensure that we gain the benefits that digital healthcare technologies offer. "Successful implementation will require investment in people as well as technology. The panel recommended that NHS organisations should invest in their workforce to develop specialist digital skills."

The top technologies are identified as:



- Telemedicine – video links to professionals
- Smartphone apps – self-care and remote monitoring
- Sensors and wearables for diagnostics and remote monitoring – smart watches, patches, vital signs, diabetes
- The Genome - DNA
- Speech recognition and natural language processing (NLP) – smart speakers e.g. Amazon Echo
- Virtual and augmented reality – VR
- Artificial intelligence and machine learning

Technology and digital developments were also highlighted in the Health Education publication, facing the facts, shaping the future (Appendix 2)

Programme aims

The programme set out with four key primary aims to:

Improve primary care processes



Improve staff and patient experience



Improve staff retention rates and



Improve care



Digital champions

The digital champions programme was launched in April 2022 in partnership with Redmoor Health. Its content is based on best practice and tried and tested approaches, in addition to the feedback from primary care colleagues. The programme was delivered in an action learning style where digital champions come together as a community of practice for a minimum of 12 months to share and learn and apply best practice.

In the first year 79 digital champions were trained. (Appendix 4). Digital champions attend 2 structured sessions, a drop in session and the offer of 1 to 1 support, and have the opportunity to talk to their peers through a closed group. Digital champions have made great use of the closed group to support one another with challenges in their own area. To compliment the programme, masterclasses based on gaps in knowledge are developed and delivered to continuously upskill digital champions. Further, masterclasses are open to a wider audience and recorded to attract future digital champions.

We have produced a number of resources for the programme

including a role descriptor for digital champions, an introductory video from the clinical lead, Dr Gareth Coakley, and a closed web resource to direct digital champions to course content and other useful tools. Finally, digital champions are sent out a thank you box containing treats and branded material to support them in their role. These have been well received by digital champions.



Digital champions are expected to focus on two digital projects to benefit their workplace and were given the freedom to choose these based on organisational priorities. Projects have covered a vast array of subject areas including social media, increasing the use of the NHS app, introducing health apps, prescription ordering, improving websites as well as other ideas.

The digital champions survey included some of the following outcomes:

- Streamlined internal processes
- Website improvements and accessibility
- Reduction in phone calls and increase in self-management
- Meeting QOF targets
- Personal development and leadership skills

From survey responses, 100% of digital champions said they would recommend the course to others and 100% said the correct amount of content was covered. They also noted an increase in confidence levels from 8 to 10.

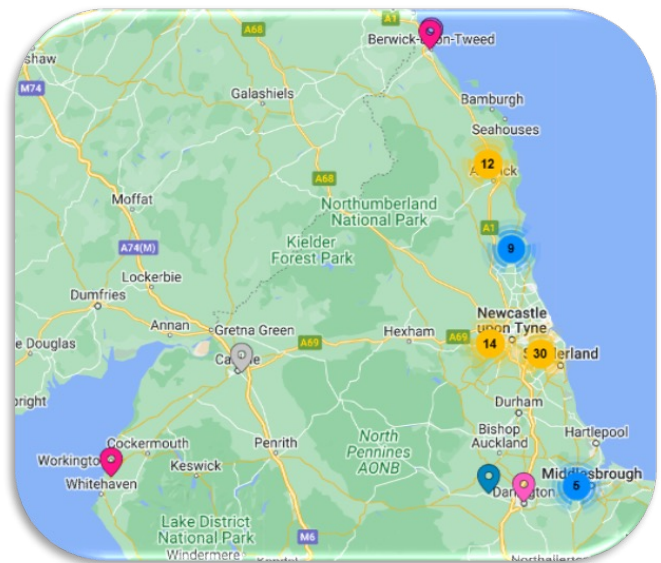
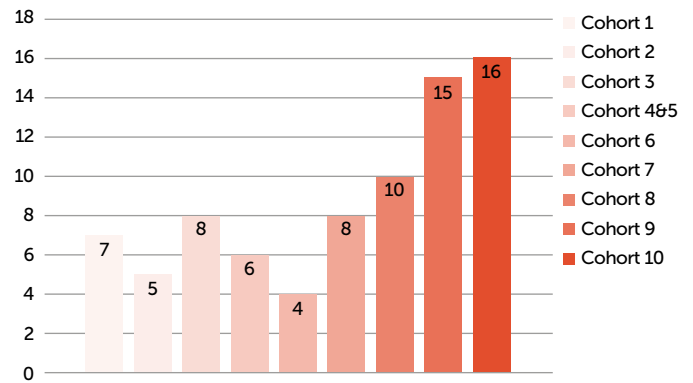
Additional training has been provided in the form of master classes which have been co-designed with digital champions and have focused on:

- Quality and Change management
- Social media
- Microsoft 365
- AccurX

In addition to working alongside colleagues across the system and building strong links to support the future workforce to ensure they have the right skills and knowledge to deliver the digital future of the NHS. This includes work with local universities and PCNs.

The chart above right shows the number of attendees at each session:

And the geographical split of where digital champions are based to help to determine where to promote so that that the programme reaches far and wide:



Primary Care Innovation

The AHSN NENC has successfully designed and developed an innovation pathway that has gained wider adoption within the AHSN Network, a national network comprising 15 AHSNs. Historically, this pathway was primarily utilised in secondary care settings, the pathway has now been integrated into primary care through the efforts of the dedicated Innovation Programme Manager (primary care). (Appendix 3)

The primary goal was to foster an innovation-focused culture across the primary care NHS sector. The AHSN NENC has made significant progress in various projects, including the completion of a Pharmacy project and securing funding for a Digital Primary Care Project Call. Successful Primary Care Digital Innovation Showcase events and Lunch and Learn sessions have also been conducted to support the primary care workforce in the NENC region.

To facilitate the introduction of innovation within Primary Care and foster an evolving culture of innovation, a dedicated primary care Innovation Manager was appointed in January 2022. The Innovation Programme Manager (primary care) has been actively involved in introducing and integrating the pathway within primary care. The primary objective during the first year was to promote an innovation-oriented environment across the primary care landscape of the NHS.

The NHS Innovation Programme Manager (primary care) and Digital Transformation Programme Manager have been actively engaging with key stakeholders in the system, working together to enhance the support offered by AHSN NENC.

In line with our ambitions, the NHS Innovation Programme Manager (primary care) and Digital Transformation Director have agreed to launch a "Digital Primary Care Challenge." During the fourth quarter of 2022/2023, we secured funding from the Digital First Primary Care Innovation Fund, which will support the launch of this challenge.

The Pharmacy project, hosted by AHSN NENC, funded 20 digital screens in Community Pharmacies within the NENC region. The project is currently undergoing an evaluation to assess the impact of the digital screens, and there is interest from Optometry colleagues to expand the project within the sector. The Programme Manager is actively collaborating to explore this potential expansion. To date, the AHSN NENC has provided over 18 hours of support for this project across the Economic Growth, Digital Transformation, and Communications Teams.

Furthermore, the Digital First Primary Care Expert Reference Panel has supported funding for a project aimed at developing use cases for digital stethoscopes in Primary Care. The panel agreed to allocate £10k from the Innovation Fund to support the project management

and delivery, as the devices were gifted to the AHSN. Scoping has already commenced, and two potential use cases/pilots have been identified. The project is scheduled to go live by June 2023.

We are pleased to share that we have successfully hosted three Primary Care Digital Innovation Showcase events, each focusing on a different area: General Practice, Pharmacy, and Optometry. All three events were well-attended and received positive feedback. These showcases serve as valuable tools to assess the innovation journey of Primary Care and identify any knowledge or skill gaps. The final showcase, which will highlight dentistry, will be delivered in the first

quarter of 2023/2024.

In addition, we have developed a series of six Lunch and Learn sessions targeting the Primary Care Workforce in the NENC region, with the wider support of AHSN. The sessions covered topics such as Intellectual Property, Real World Evaluation, Market Research, Patient and Public Involvement, Digital Regulations, and the Innovation Journey. Five out of the six sessions were successfully delivered during the 2022/2023 financial year. Each session was recorded and is now available as a library of resources for future innovators. The remaining session will be delivered in the first quarter of 2023/2024.

Communications Plan

The success of the programme has been supported by a strong communications strategy which has helped to accelerate the programme to its current state and beyond.

The aims of year 1 communications were to:

- Engage with Primary Care colleagues to introduce innovation, and at the same time raise the profile and ambition across NENC ICS communities by showcasing digital innovation.
- Showcase the unique offer to support digital health innovations in Primary Care through the AHSN NENC's innovation process (the Innovation Pathway).
- Highlight the role of the AHSN NENC in facilitating, driving and supporting health and care innovations across the digital transformation agenda.
- Publicise the real life, tangible benefits of the programme, highlighting improved patient care, staff experiences and driving better clinical outcomes, across the region and beyond.

In 2022, we launched an engaging Digital Pioneers blog series which showcases digital innovation across the region and aims to inspire and excite primary care colleagues about the benefits digital can bring. The series included guest bloggers that are influential in each of the sectors. The blog series was highly engaged with on social media (with 12.5k impressions) and there were good click rates through to our website.

There were 8 blogs in 2022 <https://ahsn-nenc.org.uk/what-we-do/driving-digital-transformation/digital-pioneers/digital-pioneers-blogs/>

The most website hits with 212 views was Emma Richardson's first blog post introducing innovation: <https://ahsn-nenc.org.uk/blog/what-is-innovation-spotlight-on-innovation-in-primary-care/>

As outlined in our aims, much of our year 1 communications has been introducing, showcasing and educating. As the programme celebrates a one year milestone, we have begun publishing the real life benefits of the programme.

This included a talking head with Summer, a Digital Champion who signed up last year. Summer highlights the benefits of the programme as: increasing patient engagement through digital health promotion campaigns, savings on staff time and reduced carbon footprint. The video had almost 300 views within the first month and has been shown at ICS webinars to showcase the programme.

[See Appendix 6 for case studies.](#)

During 2022 we had a busy events programme with a number of opportunities for primary care colleagues to engage, inspire, find out about support on offer and learn new skills. This included showcase events, masterclasses and our lunch and learn series. In total, 556 people attended events.



A social media campaign throughout the year for the programme including all highlighted activity and successes mentioned above. Throughout the year we received



Of these



We issued our first programme newsletter at the end of last year and now have an audience of stakeholders who have engaged with the programme and plan to circulate a newsletter with new and opportunities bi-annually.

In year 2, we will be focussing communications on celebrating achievements of our region's workforce and highlighting good news stories with an aim to raise the profile of digital innovation in primary care and inspire more people to innovate.

Participant stories and quotes

The digital champions programme has been a great success with 40 people on the waiting list as we moved in to year 2. We are seeing organic growth through existing champions who are recommending it to their colleagues. The digital leads also encourage all new Digital Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS) roles to complete the course as part of their mandatory training.

The innovation pathway has established processes and delivered a number of education sessions across the year. As well as establishing an expert reference panel and agreeing on 2 challenge calls as we move into year 2.

Andre Yeung, Pharmacist Consultant and Senior Specialist Advisor, said: "Even as an experienced project leader, working with the support of the AHSN NENC has been incredible. Emma and Rachael

have helped me with everything from legal and contracting to communications and market research. They've been a fantastic sounding board for ideas, a critical friend and they've provided access to their excellent network of innovators, collaborators and advisors. It's been an absolute pleasure to work with them on this project."

Victoria Burnip, CEO and Managing Director of Unforgettable Experiences, said: "Working with Emma Richardson and the Academic Health Science Network has been incredibly valuable. Not only has Emma gone above and beyond to continue to send us information relevant to develop our innovation, she has been exceptionally supportive to Unforgettable Experiences, holding our hand and explaining the complex world of the NHS to us so we can do what we set out to - make a difference for those with cognitive impairments"

Below you can see some quotes from champions about the course as well as the impact on the new ways of working.

About the course

"Session 1 is a fantastic overview of the digital landscape in GP Practices. I joined a GP Federation and almost immediately attended session 1. It helped me understand the digital workplace in practices. It helped me open meaningful conversations with practice staff in my own project."

"The course has re-ignited my fire for using digital in my role"

"Very good programme, great follow up emails, really made me think what I could change to make my job easier for me and patients."

"I really liked the group size for peer support"

"Gained some great tips and knowledge, but not too much that I was bombarded. Good with smaller groups as more questions can be asked and answered. Great info overall"

New Ways of working

"There are less calls to the practice therefore freeing admin to do other tasks, improving efficiency and allowed us more communication with patients"

"It is making the job role easier to manage and helps the patients by being able to provide them with information via bulk text or social media so they are kept up to date with what's going on in practice"

"Saving on using paper and quick responses to patients and a quick way to get information to a large number of people"

"I really enjoy accuRx as I am able to message all new referrals, and I have also started to use video calls too. This is great when you want to connect with a bigger group."

Lessons learnt

Change isn't easy. It takes time to build up the stakeholder network and reach out to the people who would benefit from the programme. The first year has supported a fantastic communications strategy and delivering a number of presentations across the patch. The programme team have delivered showcase events, lunch and learns and masterclasses to top up primary care knowledge in this field.

The key lessons learnt were:

- Timings of sessions was a key learning factor
- Summertime had much lower numbers
- It took time to gather momentum
- Primary Care are still on the journey of understanding innovation and the implementation of digital technology
- Expert reference panel worked really well to review and advise on next steps for innovative ideas
- Capacity continues to be the biggest challenge and how we support primary care to invest time to gain in the long term.



Programme recognition

The programme has received recognition for delivering excellence in transforming digital health and care. In 2022, we were a finalist in the AHSN Network Innovate awards and we have been shortlisted in the 2023 HSJ Digital Awards in the Digital Literacy, Education & Upskilling for our Digital Champions programme. We'll hear about the outcome of this award in June.

As well as being recognised in awards, our aim is that the programme becomes embedded in to primary care so that the workforce know to speak to us about their innovative ideas, regardless of the stage of the development.

We have seen an increase in sign-ups and interest in the Digital Champions course, which is demonstrated through the high numbers of champions signed up for 2023 cohorts already. The course has been CPD accredited for year 2 which will give the course further credibility and will be used to further market the course.

Next steps

The following activities have been recognised to take the programme forward in to year two:

- Design of year two programme for digital champions taking onboard the key learning and establish a continued programme of work for the future workforce.
- Continue to align to ICB priorities and the 2023 Primary Care Recovery Plan.
- Launch of two project calls covering shared care prescribing and sustainability in primary care.
- Scope activities for further project calls across all disciplines of primary care.
- Increase in number of masterclasses linked to gaps in knowledge and skills.
- Development of the accelerator programme focusing on remote monitoring in primary care.
- Continue building the stakeholder network.
- Increase activity amongst Pharmacy, Optometry and Dentistry.
- Develop defined process for innovation across the NHS.
- Build on the successes of sharing the good news with more case studies, talking heads and good news stories including the following in development for Q1 of year 2:
 - Innovation talking head - featuring an innovator within pharmacy to highlight the first Digital Pioneers funded project and showcasing the innovation process.
 - Digital Champions stories – Redmoor Health has created a video series with Champions. We will be branding and theming videos for external purposes to engage future champions.

Appendices

Appendix	Link
Appendix 1	Topol Review, Preparing the Health workforce to deliver the digital future, 2019
Appendix 2	Facing the Facts, Shaping the future, a draft health and care workforce strategy for England to 2027, 2017
Appendix 3	Promoting Innovation in healthcare - 2017
Appendix 4	Redmoor Health – Digital champions year 1 report
Appendix 5	AHSN NENC Digital Pioneers web pages
Appendix 6	<p>Case studies and videos</p> <p>6.1 - Joanna Morton – Digital Coordinator for Sunderland GP Alliance</p> <p>Joanna supported the improvement of GP Practice websites across Sunderland. The course gave her a good understanding of best practice examples of practice websites. Lots of websites in her area weren't up to scratch with the content needed, accessibility features and the maintenance of the website.</p> <p>Most patients used the website to find the telephone number, rather than using the online service available. The aim was to reduce GP and admin times, by the use of digital and promoting self-care. Improving practices knowledge and patient experience was a key purpose of the changes.</p> <p>Working with the website provider and the learning of the programme Joanna has updated 38 practice website, improving accessibility and the uptake of online services. Average website scored increased from 65-82. Joanna believes every practice should have a digital champion.</p> <p>6.2 - Jan Casson – Social Prescribing Link Working for Dementia patients at Well Up North PCN</p> <p>Jan became a digital champion as she was conscious she didn't use digital resources as much as she should due to lack of confidence. As well as supporting patients, Jan has a key role in supporting the friends and family of people with dementia.</p> <p>Many patients live rural and in many cases don't have signal which can make engaging in digital difficult. Jan has focused her efforts on working with patients and their families to find out what technology they do have to support digital care.</p> <p>Bringing an iPad with her to visits allows her to share online resources with patients such as, a patient who enjoyed jigsaw puzzles however due to dementia has lost dexterity in his hands. Jan showed him how he can use an app on his tablet to complete jigsaw puzzles.</p> <p>She has also shared an app on dementia with patients families that gives advice on language to use, explains behaviours and how to support them. This is helping patients and families to self-manage conditions where they can.</p> <p>6.3 - Summer Gilhespy – Practice Manager Support Assistant for Benfield Medical Group</p> <p>Summer wanted to focus on making every contact count through the use of digital. Digital has enabled Benfield Medical Group to become more sustainable.</p> <p>Summer's goals were to promote health information which could in turn mean a decrease in phone calls and patient demand, by educating on UTIs and sick notes and where to go for this support. Summer has also been streamlining the use of their appointment invitations. Using bulk messaging for their smears, covid and flu appointments has saved so much time as patients have been able to book in easily through the link included in the SMS message.</p> <p>Digital has helped reduce the pressures general practice are facing. Summer shared that it might take a small amount of time to learn the skills, however it is worthwhile as it saves times and reduces patient demand.</p> <p>6.4 - Lauran Rathbone – Secretary and Receptionist for Benhill Medical Practice</p> <p>Lauran's goal for the programme was to increase patient interaction on social media and the amount of appointments being booked online to support the reception staff.</p> <p>The practice uses Facebook to distribute information quickly and efficiently. Using an SMS messaging system, Lauran invited 80% of patients to like their Facebook page. This led to an increase in 79 followers and 38 likes, in turn meaning the posts have reached a lot more patients.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Post reach has increased from 250-500 to 1500-2200• Post engagement has increased from 160 to 300-600 <p>Lauran has been able to let patients know in real time if GPs are on leave or systems have gone down, this has led to less patients phoning the practice on that particular day.</p> <p>The practice have used Facebook to raise awareness on cervical cancer, promoting screening and highlighting the different signs and symptoms.</p> <p>Lauran shared that the course has given her ideas of what she can do differently in her practice and that it has been really helpful to learn about what different practices processes look like.</p> <p>6.5 - Rebecca Hall – Health and Wellbeing Coach for Well Up North PCN</p> <p>The course has helped Rebecca improve her knowledge in all things digital. Rebecca wanted to support patients in self-management and through the use of SMS messaging has enabled patients to book their own appointments.</p> <p>Rebecca has been promoting her role on social media and websites, which has led to an increase in the number of self-referrals. Promoting these ARRS roles as a first point of contact for some conditions has led to a reduction in the amount of GP appointments being booked.</p>
Appendix 7	Digital Pioneers on a Page