CPW Report following a survey of CPCLs on access to technology and Connectivity to Digital systems

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Background

The Community Pharmacy Collaborative Lead (CPCL) role was created in conjunction with the formalisation of pharmacy collaboratives within Primary care clusters across Wales, as a part of the community pharmacy contractual framework from April 2021.

The role of the lead is to represent the views of Community Pharmacy Collaboratives at Primary Care Cluster meetings.

An evaluation published in 2023 by Welsh Government made a number of recommendations including :

1) Review the allocated time and funding for the role
2) Build in protected time for specific development of individuals taking on the role
3) Provide support and guidance for CPCLs on use of technology and address functionality and accessibility of Microsoft programmes

Changes to the CPCF for April 2024 onwards increased funding for the role, allowing pharmacy contractors to free up more time for the CPCLs to spend away from their day-to-day role in order to carry out the role. Welsh Government have also invested money in providing Leadership training for up to 40 CPCLs in 24/25.

However CPCLs across Wales still regularly report that issues relating to digital connectivity are impeding them in carrying out the role effectively, and in truly integrating into primary care cluster working.

In response CPW produced a short survey to capture these current issues, which will inform further discussion. The survey was drafted by the CPW executive and was reviewed by selected members of LHB community Pharmacy teams in BCU and SBU prior to being circulated in January 2025.

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Highlights

- Of the 50 CPCLs in post at the time the survey was circulated, 21 responses were received (42%)
- CPCLs from all 7 LHB areas responded. BCU is the LHB with the most clusters and has no vacancies, accounting for the majority of responses.

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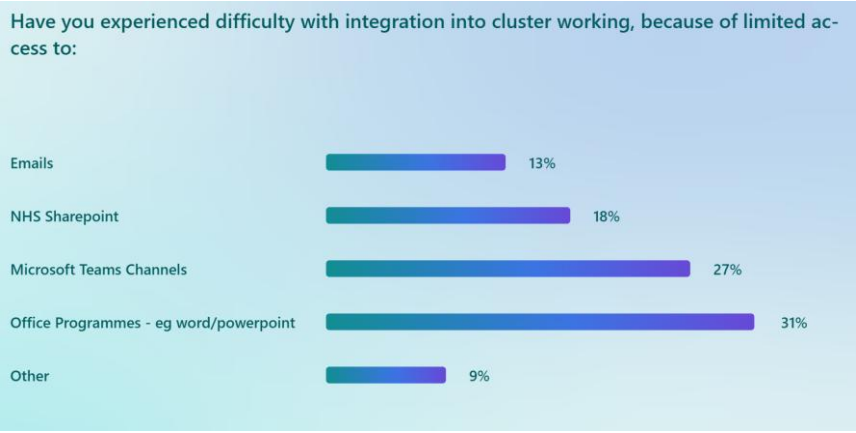
Three Quarters of CPCL roles are negatively impacted by difficulties with technology and connectivity

76% CPCLs said they had experienced difficulties with technology/connectivity that have negatively affected their ability to carry out the role



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Access to NHS Sharepoint, Microsoft Teams Channels and Office 365 functionality were the most common areas of difficulty

"difficulty accessing NHS email/NHS teams from personal devices, work devices do not have webcams/microphones etc. No office on work or personal devices can make it difficult to view and edit documents. Often having to join teams meetings on personal phone which is not ideal."

"Ability to make and save groups"

"Contractor provided a laptop with ms office at their expense "

"Limited by organisational parameters"

"I've used my personal office programmes to write up reports and certain documents. You can get free versions but sometimes come across compatibility issues or certain documents that come through are read only and you can't edit. Sometimes it takes time people end up being frustrated and will avoid doing it or even not doing it just not due to having time to figure it out."

"I have good contact to the NCN's and collaborative lead meetings and info via NHS emails and Teams "

"Not having full teams is a real problem. Can't save groups of email addresses to send to cluster etc. People use multiple email addresses and then area managers want to be copied in also. Access to calendars etc not viable and full proof into current calendars also."

"unable to access full use of microsoft 365 unable to edit spreadsheets or print them"

"Email storage isn't enough, teams won't work on MacBook (would be good if we could have an NHS computer for the cluster lead role) and the teams lite doesn't allow many functions "

"Unable to open attachments embedded in a document"

"Community pharmacists do not keep as close an eye on their emails/calendars unlike our colleagues at the health board we are not generally tethered to a computer. It is easy to miss things, can be difficult to communicate via this platform and difficult/time-consuming to sift through the 'junk'/irrelevant information."

"No training in setting up Teams meeting or presenting PowerPoints "

"Can't print anything off as device not approved by BCUHB"

"Very difficult to view attachments on a mobile phone and to respond effectively. Really need a small laptop. This could belong to the NHS and be passed to any successor"

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Most CPCLs report issues usage and functionality of NHSmail

57% respondents had trouble accessing documents via NHSmail that are required as part of the role. This may include pre reading for meetings, documents circulated for comment or editable forms such as action logs and templates for recording meeting notes

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“Often unable to edit word documents as no office on devices. Sometimes work gets started in one location and needs to be finished at another but access is limited."

"I find it very difficult to fill in the cpcl report form and share it because of the restrictions "

"Laptop is not a device that is allowed to print off nhs sharepoint sites which would be better for sharing things with those who don’t have access"

"As above and Nhs permissions not allowing access from i-phone"

"Sometimes…when the agenda for cluster meetings are sent out and the (minutes) of the previous meeting are attached in the agenda I always struggle to open that document and not sure if it’s the way I do it or if it is something to do with nhs email/or programmes. Mostly I am able to access everything i require but little things crop up."

"Nhs email is poor and far too restricted. Needs to be normalised and enabled to open attachments easily on all devices"

"Can't open some of the excel forums in the RAID logs. Can't save the CPCL report form as a PDF. "

"As above, word and PowerPoint documents embedded within other documents I am unable to open and view limiting my access to information circulated "

"Struggle to connect at home due to having a personal outlook account, a student account and a work account. It can make joing meetings and working on documents confusing/time-consuming. "

"Cannot open embedded documents "

"As above. Accessing is fine but reading and responding to big documents is challenging"

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The equipment and connectivity available to CPCLs is insufficient, and there is an over reliance on use of personal equipment,

Personal Tablets or phones are too often the only method by which CPCLs can host and attend meetings

57% respondents did not consider that they had all of the necessary equipment available to them to carry out the CPCL role effectively

80% Respondents use Personal devices to host virtual meetings, 33% hosting using a phone or tablet device

38% attend virtual meetings on a phone or tablet device.

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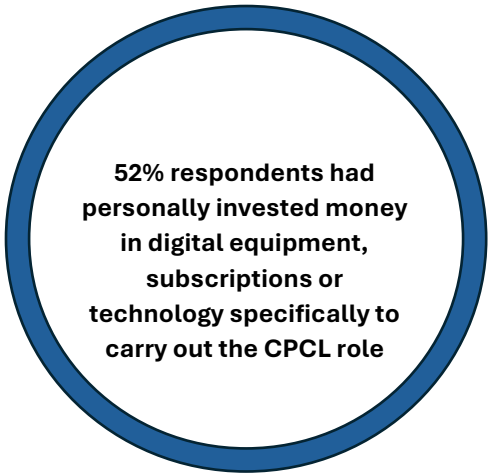
Over half of CPCLs have invested their own money to be able to carry out the CPCL role



"I have had to buy a new laptop as mine was not compatible with teams"

"Microsoft programme”

"Bought a new Lenovo laptop"

"I bought a laptop. But it's a MacBook so I can't run teams on it..."

"I have purchased a monthly subscription to office to be able to carry out CPCL roles at home more efficiently. I have also used my personal phone to contact my colleagues to discuss the topic of the CPCL/meeting attendance. "

"Upgraded tablet "

When asked for further thoughts of experiences on their use of technology associated with the role:

"it would be extremely beneficial to have a dedicated laptop for CPCL work. It would improve ease of access and allow things to be done both at home and at work rather than emailing documents back and forth to access on different devices. "

"A laptop for the role. Easier form completing and Sharing, and printing "

"Would be good to have access to funding for webcams and headset as currently use own. Also for others as most attend meetings on phones. "

"NHS linked laptop"

"Maybe some guidance on programme to use (fine if it's a free version) and just knowing it will be compatible. Maybe admin support as I'm unaware if there is any in within the health board I work for."

"Crossing over to NHS emails and normal life work email is a real problem and should be totally enabled to allow home and work use."

"using my mobile phone to attend and host meetings is not ideal, it would be nice to be provided with equipment to use. "

"Ability to print off and edit excel spreadsheet etc"

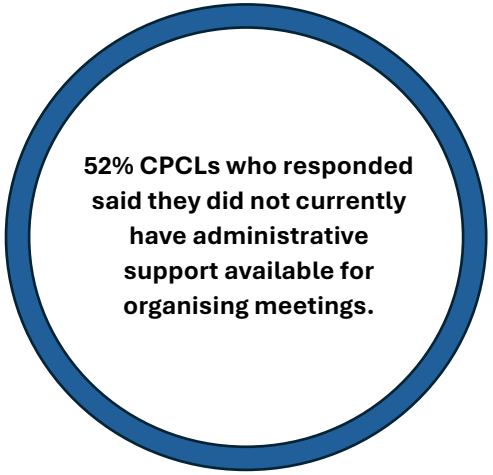
"A laptop for the role which could be handed over if the lead changes would be great. Then all the forms and minutes would be stored on it. "

"I have tried accessing documents both via personal and work computers and have encountered the problems outlined above. Perhaps a suitable device should be provided to CPCLs to ensure accessibility to all information is available but protected? "

"A training session to set up Teams meeting and how to prepare PowerPoints and be able to share them would have helped me."

"Health board approved laptop which can access, edit and print documents off sharepoint and other files from NHS wales "

As part of the move towards ACD, CPW made strong representation that administrative support should be made equally available across all collaboratives in all LHB areas.



Those who did have admin highlighted the importance of this in having the time and space to complete the role effectively, and when asked if they would be confident in organising and hosting meetings without that support said:

"a lot of the meetings I attend with the collaboratives and NCN's are organised and supported by LHB admin staff."

"No lot of work due to cheap version of teams"

"No"

"Yes. It was much harder before I had admin. "

"Yes but the issues would probably be the same and it would take up considerably more of my time than it would admin support (someone who is used to doing the tasks)."

"No "

"not 100%"

Discussion

From the responses provided it is evident that there are a number of barriers to the effective delivery of the CPCL role related to digital technology and connectivity. Some of these aspects will be universal to all pharmacists, not just CPCLs, however in a role where individuals are asked to be representing an entire sector of a contractor profession the inadequacies have consequences far beyond that experienced by the individual.

Inadequate read/write access to documents, the inability to print or download documents to devices, a lack of equipment suitable for joining or hosting meetings and limited access to office 365 applications including Teams all hinders the ability of CPCLs to carry out their duties and contribute to the provision of patient care by their primary care cluster.

This survey highlights problems that extend much further than CPCLs. The issues experienced by these individuals will also be true for their non -CPCL peers. This work should inform discussions into the requirements for community pharmacy in regards to the connectivity with the wider NHS network, for solutions to be incorporated into the Digital Roadmap for Wales. The need for a solution for CPCLs is possibly more urgent.

Suggested priorities for further discussion with appropriate stakeholders are:

- **The sourcing of training sessions for CPCLs on how to appropriately use functions of Office 365**
- **Ensure that CPCLs (and the wider community pharmacy network) are provided with M365 licenses that do not restrict their ability to utilise all the functions available within M365.**
- **Explore options for CPCLs to have use of NHS enabled laptops, if this would reduce issues with accessing M365 documents and applications**