

Scottish Government

GP DACS

Update February 2022, Issue 3

This newsletter aims to keep GP Practice teams, Board eHealth leads and GP Sub-committees up to date about Scottish Government support for the provision of Digital Asynchronous Consultation Systems (DACs) for General Practices across Scotland.

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1. GP DACS overview

GP DACS describes a range of online General Practice digital tools that support clinical triage and remote consultations where the healthcare provider and the patient are not present at the same time. Typically a patient completes an online form in his or her own time, which is then reviewed, assessed, and responded to by the relevant health professional. Systems such as eConsult, askmyGP and EMIS online Consult are all examples of GP DACS. DACS can be used to support both the management of newly presenting clinical issues and of existing medical conditions e.g. data collection for Chronic Disease Management. The focus of this DACS initiative is around managing new 'undifferentiated care' presentations with the use of 'digital triage', although there is clearly potential for crossover with related work around Remote Health Pathways and the digital management of Long term Conditions.

By working with a cohort of practices we would hope to better understand the utility of GP DACS as a pathway for patients to access GP services. The intention is not to replace other methods of access such as 'face to face' (including video consultations) or telephone access, but to augment patient choice and to try to facilitate access to the 'right person at the right time'. Patients would not be obliged to use GP DACS.

Representatives of SGPC and RCGP commented that *"We are supportive of this work. Every patient and every practice will have differing requirements. We hope that with time more GP DACS capabilities will be unlocked and we will have a better understanding of how practices can benefit from these services. However, it would be good to start rolling out these systems for those practices who are enthusiastic, and where they suit practice circumstances."*

2. Insights from patients /citizens' event

In the last issue, it was highlighted that we were working with the ALLIANCE to explore a variety of options that will enable us to obtain insights from the patient's perspective to help inform how best to improve choice in how patients access primary healthcare

services in Scotland. A virtual event was organised to this effect and took place on the 12th of October 2021.

The event was attended by citizen participants sourced through a range of third sector organisations, charities, Health Boards, GPs etc. We also received responses to poll questions from citizens who were unable to attend. The GPs in attendance were those who had experience of using a DACS and were able to share their experience and provide answers to related questions.

High-level findings from participation at the event shows that:

- Half of the participants identified themselves as having used an online system to interact with their General Practice and said their experience has been positive.
- Eighty-three percent of participants would be happy to send requests to their GP via an online access system.

When participants were asked functionality/system related questions:

- Eighty-three percent of them would prefer to create an account on the system while seventeen percent would want to provide identification details each time they access the system.
- Sixty-five percent prefer a combination of free text and structured questions in terms of the format.
- Access via a website (thirty-nine percent) and app (thirty-five percent) were the most popular amongst the participants.

For further information on the patient's insight event and findings, please view the [report](#) which can be found here - [General Practice Digital Asynchronous Consultation Systems - Online Triage Solution | TEC Scotland](#)

3. Exploring the market for a national GP DACS solution – Prior Information Notice (PIN) evaluation findings

The Prior Information Notice (PIN) was issued on the Public Contracts Scotland portal for three weeks from 30th August 2021. Supplier submissions were requested by 20th September 2021. There were sixty-three interested parties in the PIN. At the expiration of the PIN, seventeen suppliers submitted responses. This was a significantly larger response than was anticipated.

The main objective of the exercise was to obtain up-to-date information and feedback from the market in order to understand current and, in development, market capabilities and solutions in relation to the functionality required; also to provide us with indicative costs associated with the incremental implementation and ongoing support of a suitable solution.

A team of GPs, patient and Health Board representatives, procurement specialists and technical/systems experts evaluated the responses received from suppliers. As this was not a tendering exercise, there was no scoring. However, remarks such as Very Poor; Poor; Good; Excellent were used for the assessment of each question.

The market-sounding questionnaire consisted of fourteen high level requirements (further broken down into twenty-six questions) for an online triage solution.

Evaluation findings show that none of the solutions presented by the seventeen suppliers who responded are able to meet ALL identified requirements. One supplier that met the most requirements did so for eighty-one percent of the requirements. The supplier that met the fewest requirements met twenty-three percent of them.

The distribution of supplier performance against requirements was spread across the highest percentage to the lowest with a majority meeting at least fifty percent of the requirements. The table below shows the number of suppliers against each percentage.

Overall Percentage of 'requirement met'												
Percentage	81%	77%	73%	69%	65%	58%	54%	50%	46%	35%	31%	23%
No. of suppliers	1	1	3	1	2	1	3	1	1	1	1	1

The information gathered from this exercise is now being used to inform the procurement strategy and to further refine the functional and technical requirements for a solution.

We are very grateful to the evaluation team for their time and attention in completing a much bigger task than was originally asked of them and at a time when significant additional pressures in the service limited everyone's availability.

4. National approach

Based on the findings from the work to date and informed by research, including a recent study on the use of online triage carried out in NHS Ayrshire & Arran, the Steering Group has reviewed how best to achieve the objective of establishing a national approach to GP DACS.

It has been recognised that there is significant variation in demand for online triage by Practices and also in the value experienced by Practices when implementing online triage. Some Practices report significant benefits with others reporting significant dis-benefit.

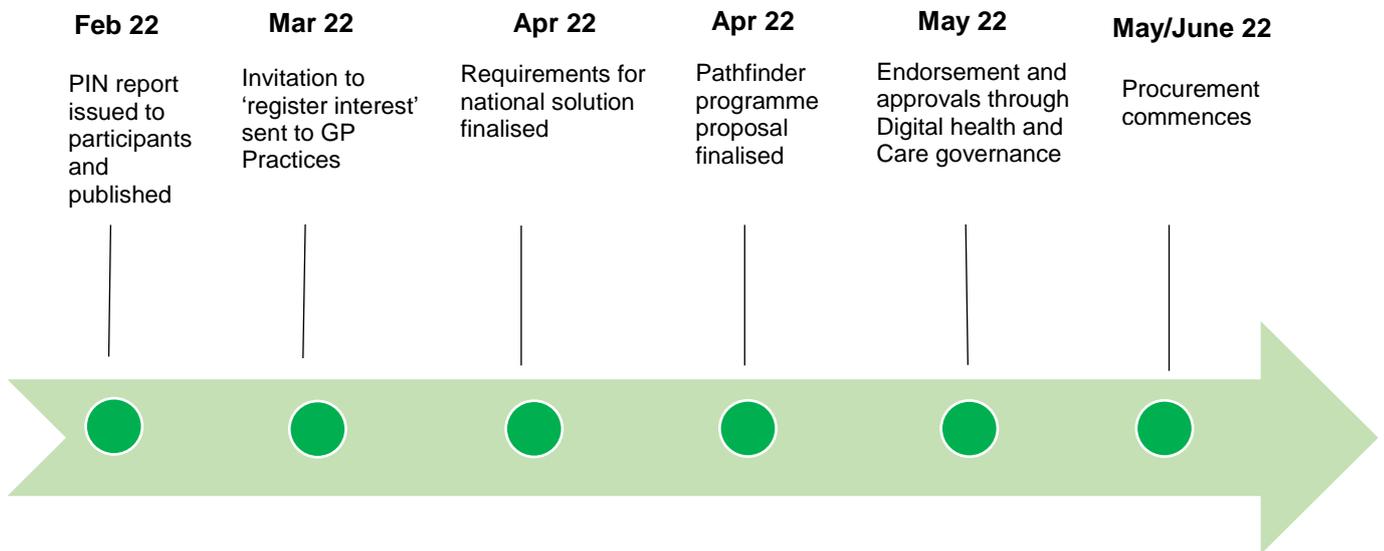
The Steering Group now considers that a 'Pathfinder' programme would be a more appropriate vehicle to achieving a national approach for GP DACS than a 'Procure and Roll-out' programme.

This will allow a structured approach to understanding the methods and supports required to deliver consistently successful local implementation for Practices and patients alike, and will provide the opportunity to adjust the scope of work to include a wider range of digital approaches such as Long term condition management and routine/specific transactions.

5. GP DACS Timelines

Since our last update, there have been changes in terms of the approach the availability of key personnel and changes in the team membership. These have impacted the planned timescales presented in the last update. The PIN evaluation period was extended, in recognition of the high level of submissions received, to allow evaluators carry out a thorough assessment while also managing their primary commitments.

A new programme manager has very recently been appointed to join the team and they have been tasked with taking forward the pathfinder programme. The timeline below lays out current estimates for GP DACS progression over the next period.



Next steps:

- Outline proposals for a GP DACS Pathfinder Project. This will be structured to support citizen centred service design, gather tangible evidence of service and patient benefit and to identify optimum implementation and adoption support strategies for GP Practices.
- Finalise the requirements for a GP DACS online triage solution, further update the draft outline business case and provide a findings summary report to the suppliers that responded.
- Explore the most appropriate procurement route working with the NSS procurement team.

Please note that:

If you have any feedback or want to know more about GP DACS, you can submit your views and suggestions to our mailbox at nss.tec@nhs.scot.

You can also find the [first](#) and [second](#) issue of our newsletter and other resources here - [General Practice Digital Asynchronous Consultation Systems - Online Triage Solution | TEC Scotland](#).

The GP DACS steering group was convened by the Primary Care Directorate, Scottish Government and includes stakeholders representing a range of GP and Practice interests such as Scottish Government Primary Care (SGPC), Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP), Primary Care Reform Digital Operations Group (PCRDOG), Primary Care Informatics (PCI) and Scottish National Users' Group (SNUG), as well as those of Health Board Digital Leads, Health Improvement Scotland (HIS), National Services Scotland (NSS) and NHS Education for Scotland (NES).

25th February 2022