

North West LOCs Secure £1.5M to Strengthen Workforce



A collaborative approach by Local Optical Committees (LOCs) across the North West has enabled the successful securing of over £1.5 million in workforce development funding for optometry. Funding from Cheshire & Merseyside ICB and Greater Manchester ICB has been pivotal, strengthening training pathways and expanding service delivery across the region. LOCs have ensured optometry receives equal development opportunities alongside other primary care professions, building a more confident, capable workforce to meet growing patient demand.

This collective effort has enhanced clinical competencies, supported new services such as Community Urgent and Minor Eye Care Services (CUES) and glaucoma services including enhanced case finding and monitoring services, and improved patient outcomes while easing secondary care pressures. The result is a sustainable, integrated primary eye care system ready to meet the future needs of the NHS and local communities.

Background

The North West region consists of eleven LOCs across three ICB areas: Cheshire & Merseyside, Greater Manchester, and Lancashire & South Cumbria. A coordinated regional and ICB footprint approach has ensured that optometry workforce development was prioritised alongside other primary care professions.

This collective effort has focused on addressing skill gaps, enhancing training opportunities, and promote the further development and expansion of eyecare services such as CUES and glaucoma monitoring. By investing strategically, these foundations have helped the LOCs develop a resilient workforce ready to deliver sustainable, community based services that improve patient access, outcomes, and the overall quality of care.

What We Did

Over the last decade, the North West LOCs have secured more than £1.5 million to invest in optometry workforce development, sourcing funding primarily from Cheshire & Merseyside ICB, Greater Manchester ICB, and Health Education England (HEE).

Key Achievements

Independent Prescribing (IP): A significant investment was secured from HEE in 2016 to fund 80 optometrists across the three ICBs, covering tuition and placement fees. More recently, in Cheshire & Merseyside, 32 optometrists are progressing through three cohorts, supported by a newly established IP Clinical Network, which at the time of writing had over 40 members.

Glaucoma Service Development: In Greater Manchester, significant investment was secured over two phases:

- In 2020, ICB funding supported 75 optometrists to complete the Professional Certificate in Glaucoma
- In 2022, further ICB funding has enabled an additional 31 places to date, with a similar sized cohort expected to start the course later this year

This sustained investment has built a highly skilled glaucoma workforce across Greater Manchester, underpinning the delivery of the Glaucoma Enhanced Referral Scheme (GERS).

In Cheshire & Merseyside, workforce funding has to date supported the delivery of three glaucoma workshops, accrediting 40 optometrists for Glaucoma Referral Refinement (GRR) and community-based glaucoma monitoring.

Foreign Body (FB) Removal Training: In Cheshire & Merseyside, four regional workshops accredited 93 optometrists, significantly strengthening CUES delivery and reducing hospital referrals.

Optometry Excellence Programme: £100K funding in Manchester is driving quality improvement, wellbeing support, digital enablement, and service delivery expansion.

By working collaboratively across ICB footprints, LOCs have ensured efficient funding bids, maximised training opportunities, and embedded clinical development within everyday practice.

Outputs and Impacts

Ongoing workforce development is essential to meet the evolving needs of our aging population in an ever-changing landscape. The funding secured across the North West region has allowed:

- Capacity for over 110 IP optometrists
- 146 optometrists able to undertake glaucoma services to date (plus funding for many more)
- 93 optometrists provided additional foreign body removal training

Increased Workforce Capacity: Training and accreditation initiatives have improved and expanded delivery of services such as CUES and glaucoma services in primary care across the region.

Enhanced Clinical Skills: Workshops and targeted sessions have improved core competencies and clinical confidence among optometrists, ensuring high standards of patient care.

Reduced Hospital Burden: Increased capacity within the primary care workforce has reduced unnecessary referrals, easing pressure on secondary care services.

- In Cheshire alone, over 600 outpatient appointments avoided
- Across Cheshire & Merseyside, over 1700 glaucoma outpatient appointments avoided

Improved Patient Access and Outcomes: Glaucoma Monitoring and referral filtering services have enabled more patients to be seen closer to home in familiar settings therefore improving patient experiences and outcomes.

- Glaucoma monitoring services have enabled over 1,100 patients to be discharged safely to community care
- Cost and Resource Efficiency: Avoidance of thousands of outpatient appointments has delivered significant efficiencies for NHS resources, supporting long-term system sustainability
- Stronger Integration Across Care Pathways: Closer collaboration between primary and secondary care has improved continuity and coordination of services

Workforce development plays a crucial role in enabling the NHS to shift care into the community by empowering optometrists with the skills, qualifications, and confidence to deliver a broader range of services within primary care settings. This expanded service provision improves patient access, supports earlier intervention, and reduces the burden on hospital services. Ongoing investment in workforce development is key to building capacity, strengthening community care, and supporting a more integrated and sustainable healthcare system.



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- Greater Manchester Optometry Provider Board

Further LOC case studies can be found [here](#)

