

# INNOVATION AGENCY (NORTH WEST COAST)

## STAKEHOLDER RESEARCH

LOCAL FINDINGS 2019

## BACKGROUND

During summer and autumn 2019, an independent survey was undertaken of England's 15 Academic Health Science Networks (AHSNs). This research was commissioned by NHS England and NHS Improvement, and the Office for Life Sciences (OLS) to explore and evaluate the views of AHSN stakeholders. The research will support commissioners in their reviews of AHSNs, and to provide independent feedback to AHSNs from their stakeholders that include NHS organisations, researchers, private companies, government organisations, patient and public groups and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations.

Savanta ComRes, an independent research organisation, undertook the evaluation. With input from AHSNs and commissioners, Savanta ComRes developed and ran a 10-minute online survey and subsequently conducted 30-minute telephone interviews with up to 10 stakeholders for each of the 15 AHSNs and for the National AHSN Network.

A national report collating the feedback and key themes from across all AHSNs, can be viewed on the AHSN Network website: [www.ahsnnetwork.com/ahsn-network-stakeholder-research](http://www.ahsnnetwork.com/ahsn-network-stakeholder-research).

This report summarises stakeholder feedback and themes specifically related to the Innovation Agency (North West Coast).

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 An **open-door policy and networking events** are helping establish the Innovation Agency as a valuable and collaborative organisation that involves a wide range of parties and facilitates network building.
- 2 A key strength of this AHSN is its **marketing and visibility**, driven in part by memorable events and presentations of the impactful work being done, as well as the signposting of stakeholders to useful opportunities and supporting them with proposals.
- 3 Stakeholders are keen to see this AHSN build on its successes by **utilising its strengths** in the context of work being done by other AHSNs, as well as connecting them to opportunities across the country.

## OVERVIEW

Stakeholders have broadly favourable impressions of the Innovation Agency which is having a positive contribution in its geographical footprint. This is evidenced by clear examples of its contributions which stakeholders interviewed say have directly supported and progressed new workstreams and innovations. However, limitations are discussed, commonly in relation to the Innovation Agency's effectiveness in creating system-wide

change in the locality. Crucial opportunities for improvement are highlighted in relation to building the Innovation Agency’s knowledge of work being done in other AHSNs.

## WHO WE SPOKE TO

Nine stakeholder groups were identified, and across these, 246 stakeholders identified by the Innovation Agency were invited to take part; 58 completed the online survey from 21st August to 16th September 2019. This represents a response rate of 24% which is in line with the industry average for this type of survey. In addition to the online surveys, Savanta ComRes conducted follow-up interviews with 10 stakeholders between 9th September and 13th November 2019, who put themselves forward to discuss their experiences further. Specific quotas were not set for the stakeholders interviewed as interviewees were self-selecting and interviews were dependent on stakeholders’ availability and feasibility of bookings.

Type	# SURVEYED	% SURVEYED	# INTERVIEWED
Health or social care provider	15	26% (-11)	1
Private company or industry body	15	26% (+10)	4
Research body or university	11	19% (+10)	2
NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)	5	9%	–
Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)	5	9%	1
Local government or Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)	4	7%	1
National government, agency or Arms Length Body (ALB)	1	2%	1
Individual patient or member of the public	1	2%	–
Patients group or public group	1	2%	–
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>10</b>

Thinking about your role and organisation as it relates to your engagement with AHSNs, which of the following best describes your organisation? Base: All stakeholders answering on behalf of the Innovation Agency (n=58).

Percentage point difference to the average survey response rate where difference is more than 5 (n=1,155)

## INTERPRETING THE RESULTS

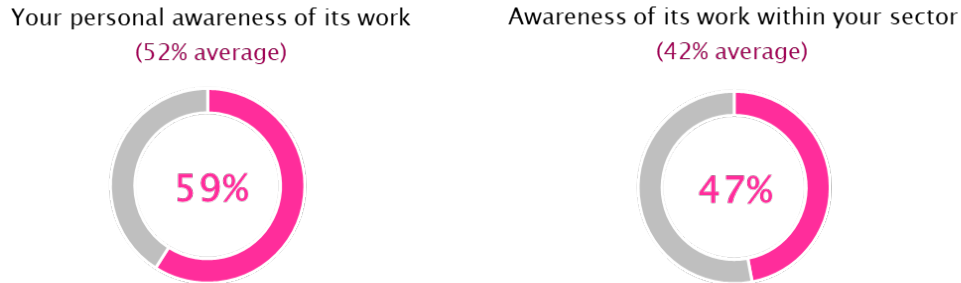
The report includes quantitative findings from the online survey and qualitative findings from interviews with local stakeholders. **The number of online survey respondents are too small to draw reliable conclusions from.** Additionally, comparisons between local survey data and the average across all AHSNs nationally are not necessarily statistically significant meaning higher or lower assessments of an individual AHSN in comparison to the national response rate may be due to the ‘play of chance’. Findings from the online survey at the level of an individual AHSN should therefore be **treated as indicative** only and used with caution.

Insights are based on an aggregated analysis of interviews with participating Innovation Agency stakeholders. Therefore, themes described may not necessarily reflect the views of those answering and are not generalisable to all stakeholder types. For instance, **interviews**

were not conducted with stakeholders from a CCG, VCS, national government, agency, ALB, or patient or public groups.

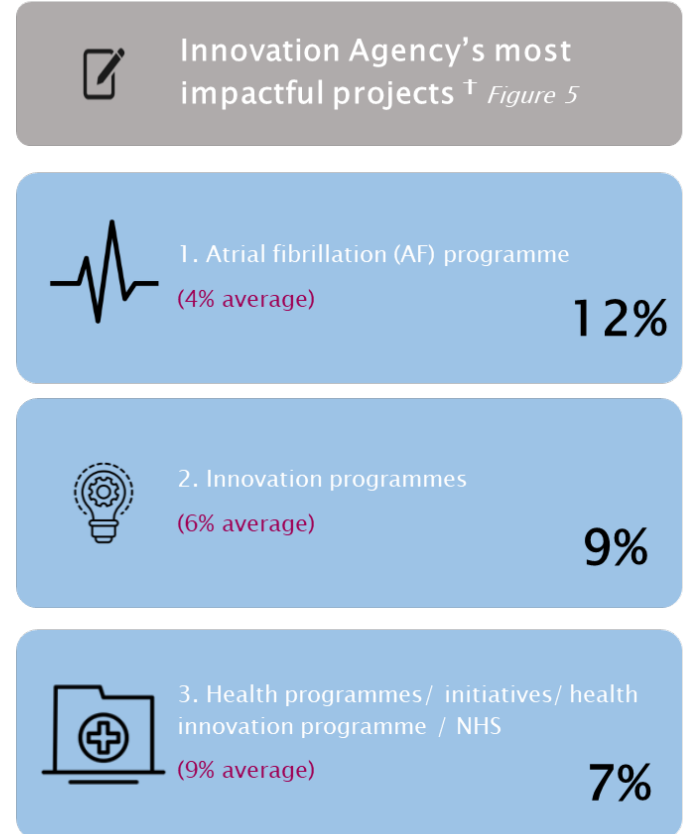
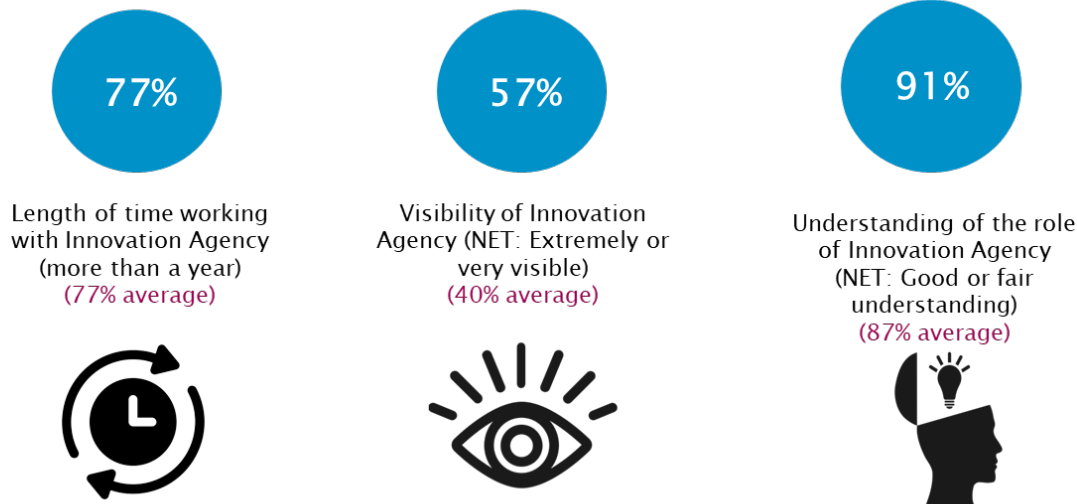
Each local AHSN report has been reviewed by a representative at the AHSN to verify the accuracy of insights and interpretations presented in each report. Savanta ComRes held **30-minute calls** with the representative to collect and incorporate such feedback. AHSNs only saw the findings in the report and not raw data collected in fieldwork.

**Awareness (NET: Extremely or very aware) Figure 1**



**KEY**  
 '% average' indicates the average score across all AHSNs

**Knowledge and Visibility Figure 2**



† Open text box question

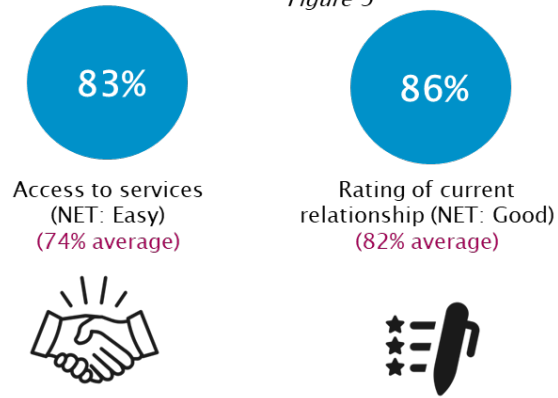
**Figure 1** – Q. Overall, thinking about Innovation Agency NWC's work, how would you describe...? Base: Innovation Agency NWC stakeholders (n=58)

**Figure 2** – Q. And approximately how long have you worked with Innovation Agency NWC? Q. Thinking about its overall visibility and any engagement you may have had, how would you rate the visibility of Innovation Agency NWC in its local area? Q. How would you rate your understanding of the role of Innovation Agency NWC? Base: Innovation Agency NWC stakeholders (n=58)

**Figure 5** – Q. Which Innovation Agency NWC initiative, programme or support service would you say has had the greatest impact on your organisation's ability to meet its objectives or your ability to meet your own objectives? Base: Innovation Agency NWC stakeholders (n=58)

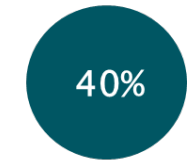
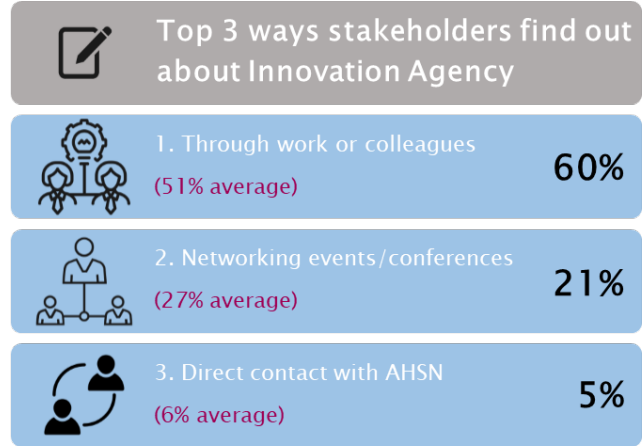
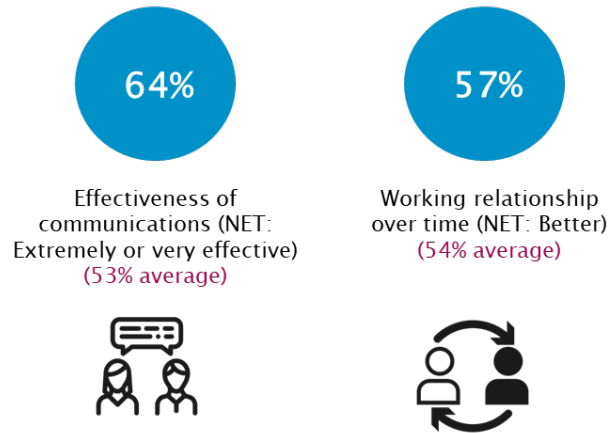
### Working with Innovation Agency

Figure 3



### Communication with Innovation Agency

Figure 4



### MOST NOTABLE FACTOR DRIVING POSITIVE EVALUATION OF INNOVATION AGENCY †

Figure 6

Improved relationships/ good relationships over time/ established work relationships with relevant people (29% average)

† Open text box question



### TOP RECOMMENDATION FOR INNOVATION AGENCY †

Figure 7

Coordinated/ collaborative approach towards learning, sharing, evaluation and roll-out of products/ services (13% average)

**Figure 3** – Q. Overall, how easy did you find it to access Innovation Agency NWC services? Q. Overall, how would you rate your working relationship with Innovation Agency NWC? How did you first find out about Innovation Agency NWC? Base: Innovation Agency NWC stakeholders (n=58)

**Figure 4** – Q. Thinking back over the period of time you have been working with Innovation Agency NWC, would you say your working relationship has gotten better, worse, or is about the same? Q. Which, if any, of the following ways does Innovation Agency NWC currently communicate with you? Q. How would you rate the effectiveness of Innovation Agency NWC's communications? Base: Innovation Agency NWC stakeholders (n=58)

**Figure 6** – Q. You indicated that you have a good working relationship with Innovation Agency NWC and/or your working relationship has gotten better over the period of time you have been working with them. Why do you say this? Base: Innovation Agency NWC stakeholders who say this (n=52)

**Figure 7** – Q. If you could make one recommendation for improvement for the local AHSN or the National AHSN Network to focus on in the next three years, what would this be? For example, is there a service you think should be expanded, or a new offering that should be explored or delivered? Base: Innovation Agency NWC stakeholders (n=58)

# AREAS OF STRENGTH AND GOOD PRACTICE

## FOSTERING NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES AND STRONG PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Stakeholders view the Innovation Agency as a strong facilitator. Those interviewed give examples of how the organisation is capably connecting a variety of different parts of the innovation system together. This is most apparent in the organisation of events and regular meetings which are said to offer commissioners, industry, patients, third and public sector stakeholder to network.

*“They spend a lot of time investing in networking, establishing strong relationships, and they’re good, they nearly always involve patients. They’re good because they also involve industry.”*

National government, agency or ALB

*“They’ll have their **networking events**, they’ll bring down people from CCGs, GPs [and] say, ‘These are the current needs within the NHS or within the system, if you’ve got a product or service that will help support this, you know, please get in touch.’ So, they’ll link people together. They’ll **be linking commissioners from different areas together with people** and then they’ll also get them to practice their pitches first before they go back and pitch it to them.”*

VCS

The Innovation Agency’s relationship-building opportunities are helping different parts of the health and care system to gain exposure of one another. By forging new collaborations, for instance, the AHSN is facilitating the progression of new ideas among research bodies. In addition, the face-to-face nature of the meetings are considered more valuable than generic emails and seem to be building trust in the AHSN and the information that the network provides.

*“Engaging with other industries is always useful. It’s thought-provoking at the most basic level and you can **end up with new collaborations** and it can **directly influence your strategic thinking**.”*

Research body or university

*“If we didn’t have the Innovation Agency, trying to break down the door to get in **to talk to a commissioner of services or some kind of economic buyer or decision maker within the NHS is near impossible**. They are, as I say, [a] full open door and I think that’s by far and away, their biggest advantage.”*

Private company or industry body

The interview feedback is supported by findings from the online survey. For instance, stakeholders who have a good relationship with the Innovation Agency or whose working relationship has gotten better are most likely to say this is because of establishing work relationships with relevant people (40%).

### **OBTAINING FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY PROJECTS**

In establishing strong relationships with their stakeholders, the Innovation Agency has helped progress funding bids and forge new partnerships. Examples of how this is helping support innovation, given by interviewees, are supporting staff hire in community services run by third sector bodies, as well as EU grants to fund new research projects and technical services.

*“They got us into the **Stop and Go** programme which brought millions to the city. They [also] helped me with the technical side on getting the digital care records system for domiciliary care.”*

LEP

*“We’ve just got one of the primary care network link workers, so that’s a result of [the AHSN’s] work. We’re now **pitching for four or five more members of staff** for that, so other primary care networks, and that’s again as a result of [the AHSN’s] work. [They have] also **helped us submit an application for another further eight fulltime counsellors across Cheshire East, Cheshire West**. They’ve also helped us submit another proposal as well, [it was] another one for Crisis Café which I think [was] £758,000. If it wasn’t for [their] work, none of this would happen to be honest.”*

VCS

### **VISIBILITY OF COMMUNICATIONS**

Many stakeholders mention that another strength of the Innovation Agency is the effectiveness of their communications and marketing, for instance via events and by presenting back work that is being done in conjunction with industry to the healthcare sector. One stakeholder interviewed specifically praises the way in which this is delivered; in a way that relates back to the tangible benefits for population health.

*“They are very good at presenting what they’ve done and getting it in front of people’s noses. They know how to **present the information in a compelling way** [...] if you **talk about saving people’s lives or avoiding major morbidity**, saving, =healthcare resources, then these are all things that we all sit up and take notice of.”*

Research body or university

The benefit of this strong marketing appears to be two-fold; not only is it engaging stakeholders in the work being done, it also appears to be having a knock-on effect on the



Innovation Agency's visibility beyond the local area, and trust in the expertise provided. This is apparent in the feedback given in interviews:

*"Marketing is one of their strengths. I think they're quite visible."*

Research body or university

*"If they weren't effective at what they did the CCGs and the primary care networks and others wouldn't be signposting them other to organisations like us. That just shows how effective they are at changing that population-based health."*

VCS

Perceptions of the Innovation Agency as a highly visible organisation is backed up by findings in the online survey, with at least half of stakeholders surveyed rating the Innovation Agency as extremely or very visible at in its local area (57% vs. 40% overall).

## POINTS FOR THE INNOVATION AGENCY TO CONSIDER

### ENSURING STAKEHOLDERS ARE AWARE OF OPPORTUNITIES FURTHER AFIELD

A theme that came out strongly in many stakeholder interviews was the desire to be more interconnected with other nearby regions. Judging from other feedback, this does seem to be happening, for instance the Stop and Go Programme which has required collaboration between the North West Coastal and North East North Cumbrian regions. The onus may therefore be on the AHSN to ensure this is happening across the board and programme areas are being matched to the best region in the wider locality.

*"The more local AHSNs to us geographically, whether that be North Cumbria, whether it'd be over Yorkshire or the Northeast or whatever, they haven't provided any information in those areas."*

Private company or industry body

*"The temptation is when you see somebody who's active in an area that you've got a need in, you sort of latch onto them a bit. It comes back to what I was saying before, you don't know whether you're talking to the best because there is no central repository of information to make that judgement from."*

Research body or university

## TRANSLATING RESEARCH TO PRACTICE THROUGH ROBUST EVIDENCE

Based on interviews with stakeholders, the Innovation Agency is delivering evidence and supporting the scale-up of new innovations, specifically in terms of obtaining funding. However, there is more work to be done with regards new initiatives, according to a number of stakeholders interviewed. For some, this takes the form of robust clinical data or pilot studies, while for others it is the practical implementation within community and health services.

*“They’ve been very supportive, but I’m interested in **getting technology into people’s homes** and we’re using it as part of a service and sometimes if it’s too close to the research it’s not actually practical.”*

Local government or LEP

*“I think they could be more practical in terms of some of the things they do, [for example], to **facilitate the ability to get a trial or a pilot or a test of some description underway**, and naturally, that element of it, they are a bit less involved.”*

Private company or industry body

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

A range of areas for the Innovation Agency to focus on in the future are cited by stakeholders. These tend to mirror national challenges for the AHSN such as navigating the complex health and care system and ensuring sufficient resources are in place. In addition to this, region-specific focal areas cited by stakeholders also include:

### FACILITATING INVOLVEMENT FROM HEALTH AND CARE PROVIDERS

An opportunity identified by stakeholders is for the Innovation Agency to better involve health care professionals by helping them dedicate more time to innovation projects.

*“One of the complaints we get back all the time from the clinicians who we interact with [...] is them getting **recognised time and leeway in their job plans**. They’re so managed now, in a bean counting way, that the professionalism, enterprise and ambition is being managed out of the system.”*

Research body or university

*“It is **quite difficult to spend enough time on what others in the hospital might think of as extracurricular activities**, which would reach outside the hospital. So, I think that limits what I’ve been able to do. But it hasn’t meant that we didn’t get value from what we have been able to do.”*

Health or social care provider

Since the survey was conducted, the Innovation Agency has formed a partnership with the Royal College of Physicians (RCP), with an action plan to embed research in all NHS trusts. This was launched at a joint event on 28 November 2019 and the plan includes updating the RCP's guidance on job plans for consultants to reflect the importance of enabling time for patient-facing research; and convening focus groups to address obstacles to industry carrying out research in trusts.

### UTILISING REGIONAL VISIBILITY AND STRENGTHS

A research body or university stakeholder felt there is an opportunity to utilise expertise in the region and bring innovations that wouldn't be possible in other areas.

*“Liverpool’s quite an interesting geographical location because **we’ve got the highest concentration of specialist trusts, certainly outside of London, maybe, you know, even rivalling London. So, we’ve got a lot of expertise and, unfortunately, we’ve got a lot of ill health as well. So, we can do stuff here that might be found difficult in other areas.**”*

Research body or university

## SUMMARY OF POINTS FOR THE AHSN TO CONSIDER

Across interviews conducted, the following points emerged for the Innovation Agency to consider:

- ✓ Continuing to **host networking events** and face-to-face meetings to expose different parts of the system to one another, perhaps **collaborating with other AHSNs** to set these up.
- ✓ **Promoting the work of the Innovation Agency more widely** to attract further attention from other potential stakeholders seeking the relevant support.
- ✓ Continuing to **identify early opportunities to support in the funding bid** and application process as this is one of the most valuable stages of input for stakeholders.
- ✓ Continuing to build on the progress made since November; collaborating with researchers to find effective ways to **innovate with regards to data-led evidence** that supports agile interventions and predictive tools.
- ✓ Investing time in **developing a catalogue for innovations** to triage the work being done in the local area.