Online Consultation and SMS Platforms – Frequently Asked Questions

Which OC/SMS platforms will be funded by the ICB?

Subject to completion of the procurement process, the ICB expects to fund Patchs, Accurx and Blinx PACO. Practices will be invited to express their preferred option from this approved range.

Practices may also choose to use a combination of approved products. For example, a practice may use Patchs for Online Consultation and Accurx for SMS. This will continue to be supported. However, practices are encouraged to review the full capabilities of each platform and consider all available options before making a final decision.

When making their decision, practices are encouraged to consider future ways of working, including how digital tools can support neighbourhood working, collaboration within Primary Care Networks, and alignment with wider system approaches where appropriate**.**

Why is eConsult not included?

The ICB developed a core specification covering clinical safety, interoperability, governance, accessibility and health equity requirements, including translation capability.

Following assessment against this specification, eConsult is not included in this procurement round. Practices may continue to use eConsult if they wish, but it would need to be self-funded by the practice.

Will practices have to change platform?

Not necessarily. Practices whose current platform is included in the approved range may continue using it.

If a practice is currently using a platform that is not included in the approved range, support will be provided to help practices transition to an approved platform.

Alternatively practices who are currently self-funding a different platform may wish to continue with this arrangement.

Will there be support if we need to move platform?

Yes. The ICB will provide transition support, which may include:

- Platform onboarding
- Data migration where appropriate
- Staff training
- Early-life implementation support

What costs will the ICB cover?

The ICB will fund platform licence costs for the approved solutions and supplier training and mobilisation costs.

Are SMS usage costs included?

No. SMS usage (fragment) costs are currently subject to a wider system review. Further information will be shared once this review is complete.

Can practices use a platform outside the approved list?

Yes. Practices may choose to use an alternative platform. However, ICB funding will only apply to platforms procured through the approved framework which meet the required specification.

Any alternative platform would therefore need to be self-funded by the practice.

By when do practices need to have made a decision?

Practices will be asked to confirm their preferred OC/SMS platform during April. Further details, including the specific deadline and next steps, will be communicated by the ICB.

Practices are encouraged to review the available options, attend demonstrations where available, and consider the most appropriate solution for their practice before confirming their choice.

Will practices be able to trial the platforms before choosing?

Information about each platform, including demonstrations and supporting materials, will be made available to help practices understand the available options before confirming their preference.

Will the platforms integrate with GP clinical systems?

The approved platforms have been assessed for interoperability with GP clinical systems. Further technical and implementation guidance will be provided during onboarding.

Will existing data from our current system be transferred?

Where practices are moving from a different platform, data migration will be supported where feasible and appropriate. Further details will be provided during transition planning.

Will the platforms support accessibility and translation?

Accessibility and health equity requirements were included in the procurement specification. This includes accessibility compliance and translation capability to support patients with different communication needs.

Can practices change platforms in the future?

Yes. Practices may review their platform choice in the future if their needs change.

The ICB's contracts will allow a degree of flexibility to add or remove practices throughout the duration of the agreement. For example, a practice currently using Patchs and Accurx may later decide to migrate to Accurx or Blinx as a single solution

However, ICB funding will only apply to approved platforms available through the commissioned framework at that time. Practices considering a change should discuss this with the ICB to ensure appropriate support and funding arrangements are in place.

Are practices expected to use the same platform within a PCN or neighbourhood?

Practices are not required to use the same platform as other practices within their Primary Care Network or neighbourhood.

However, practices are encouraged to consider opportunities for alignment where this supports collaboration, shared ways of working and improved patient experience across neighbourhood services**.**

Practices may wish to discuss their options with PCN colleagues and local partners when considering their preferred platform.

Who should practices contact if they have questions?

Further information and contact details will be shared alongside the procurement update so practices can contact the ICB digital transformation team for further support or clarification