

SOUTH WEST  
ACADEMIC HEALTH  
SCIENCE NETWORK

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 South West AHSN.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1 Training sessions on different topics such as data usage and leadership have resonated very positively. Stakeholders have a desire to continue working with the AHSN on delivering their organisation's future training needs.
- 2 Some queries are raised around communication and understanding South West AHSN's remit; addressing these may help to further strengthen relationships with stakeholders and open up opportunities for new innovation.
- 3 While examples of good relationships are provided, a few stakeholders also identify opportunities to build these further, through communication of tangible impacts South West AHSN is having in the local area.

## OVERVIEW

The general perception of South West AHSN is positive among most stakeholders, typically because of **strong individual relationships** with staff at the AHSN and the **high-quality support and practical training** they have received. Stakeholders commonly describe the organisation as **progressive, accommodating and energetic**, with few speaking negatively when asked for the words and phrases they associate with the AHSN. In terms of opportunities for future development, stakeholders would like the organisation to **become**

**more consistent** in their approach to different projects and become better **raising their profile** and promoting regional needs. Translating exciting **ideas into tangible results** and ensuring AHSN plans **remain locally focused** are key challenges in the future according to stakeholders.

## WHO WE SPOKE TO

Nine stakeholder groups were identified, and across these, 523 stakeholders identified by South West AHSN were invited to take part; 138 completed the online survey from 21st August to 16th September 2019. This represents a response rate of 26% 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	70	51% (+14)	3
Research body or university	12	9%	1
Private company or industry body	11	8% (-8)	-
Individual patient or member of the public	11	8%	2
NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)	10	7%	-
National government, agency or Arms Length Body (ALB)	9	7%	2
Local government or Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)	7	5%	-
Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)	4	3%	1
Patients group or public group	4	3%	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>138</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 South West AHSN (n=138).*

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

## INTERPRETING THE RESULTS

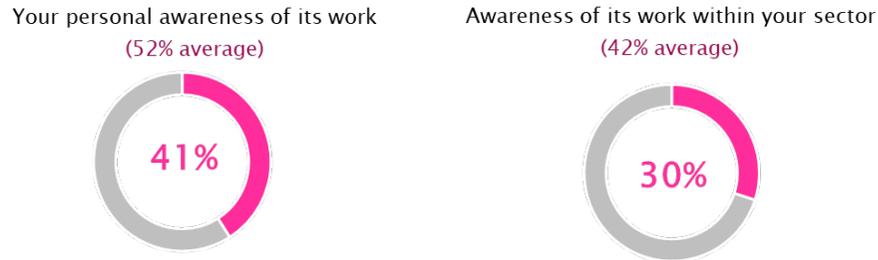
The report includes quantitative findings from the online survey and qualitative findings from interviews with local stakeholders. **The number of online survey respondents are too small to draw reliable conclusions from.** Additionally, comparisons between local survey data and the average across all 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 discussions with participating South West AHSN 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 private company or industry body, CCG, local government or an LEP.** In addition, it should be noted that the quantitative survey results are heavily weighted towards **health or social care provider stakeholders who make up around half (51%) of South West AHSN's survey responses.** Recommendations discussed are based on answering and are not tailored to specific types of stakeholders.

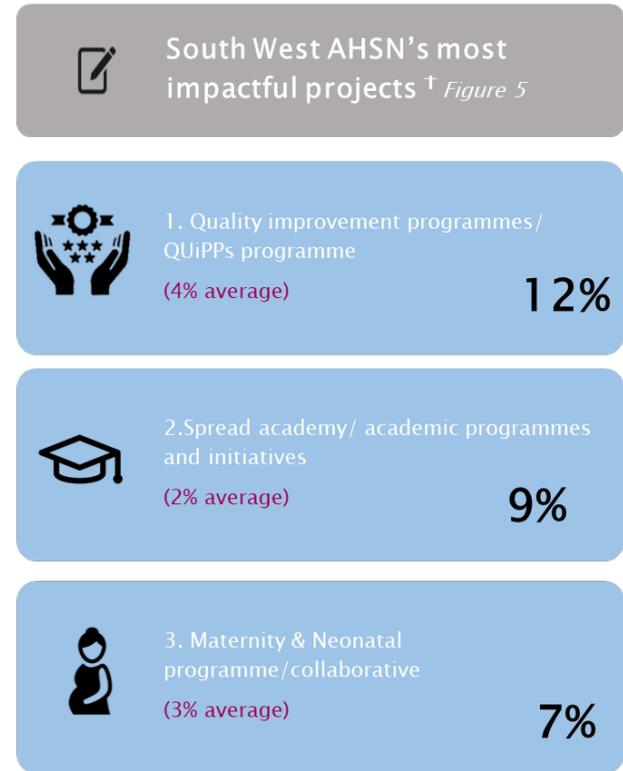
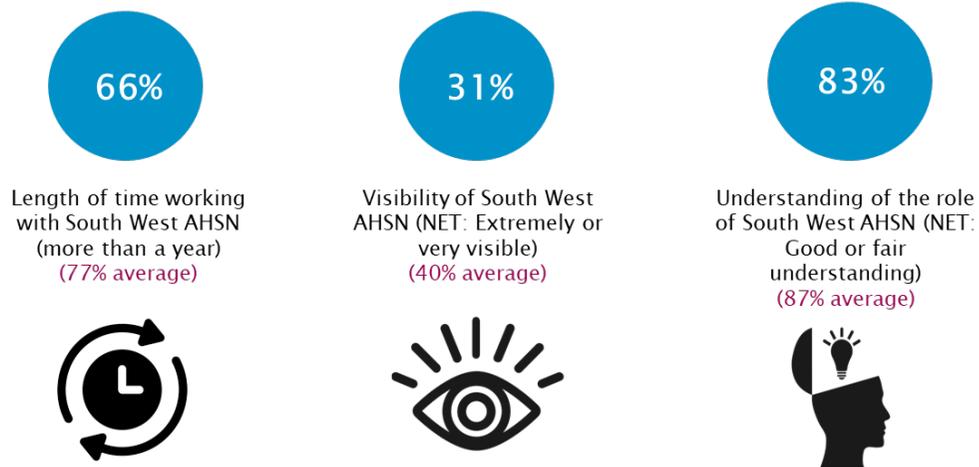
Each local AHSN report has been reviewed by a representative at the AHSN to verify the accuracy of insights and interpretations presented in each report. Savanta ComRes held **30-minute calls** with the representative to collect and incorporate such feedback. AHSNs only saw the findings in the report 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**



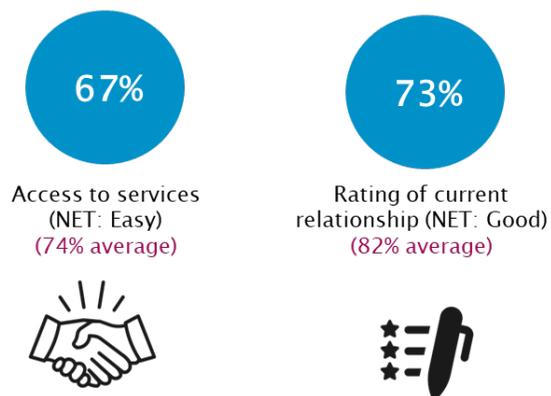
† Open text box question

**Figure 1** – Q.1 Overall, thinking about South West AHSN's work, how would you describe...? Base: South West AHSN stakeholders (n=138)

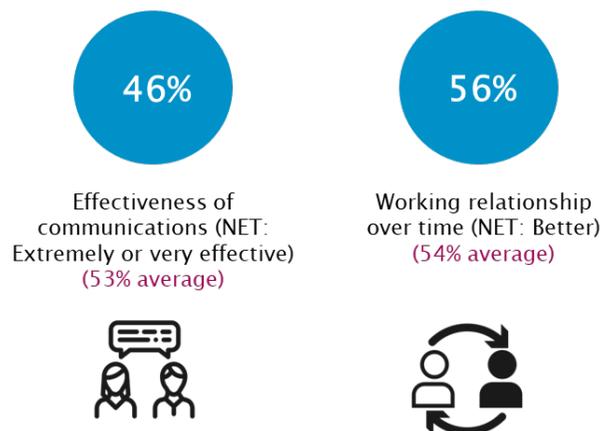
**Figure 2** – D.7 And approximately how long have you worked with South West AHSN? Q.22 Thinking about its overall visibility and any engagement you may have had, how would you rate the visibility of South West AHSN in its local area? Q. How would you rate your understanding of the role of South West AHSN? Base: South West AHSN stakeholders (n=138)

**Figure 5** – Q.15\_2 Which South West 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: South West AHSN stakeholders (n=138)

### Working with South West AHSN *Figure 3*



### Communication with South West AHSN *Figure 4*



**MOST NOTABLE FACTOR DRIVING POSITIVE EVALUATION OF SOUTH WEST AHSN<sup>†</sup>**  
*Figure 6*  
Helpful staff/management/ supportive and collaborative team/ accessible/ more involved to support  
(26% average)

<sup>†</sup> Open text box question



**TOP RECOMMENDATION FOR SOUTH WEST AHSN<sup>†</sup>**  
*Figure 7*  
Coordinated/ collaborative approach towards learning, sharing, evaluation and roll-out of products/ services  
(13% average)

**Figure 3** – Q.14 Overall, how easy did you find it to access South West AHSN services? Q17. Overall, how would you rate your working relationship with South West AHSN? How did you first find out about South West AHSN? Base: South West AHSN stakeholders (n=138)

**Figure 4** – Q.18 Thinking back over the period of time you have been working with South West AHSN, would you say your working relationship has gotten better, worse, or is about the same? Q.23. Which, if any, of the following ways does South West AHSN currently communicate with you? Q.24 How would you rate the effectiveness of South West AHSN's communications? Base: South West AHSN stakeholders (n=138)

**Figure 6** – Q.19 You indicated that you have a good working relationship with South West AHSN 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: South West AHSN stakeholders who say this (n=138)

**Figure 7** – Q25. 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: South AHSN stakeholders (n=138)

# AREAS OF STRENGTH AND GOOD PRACTICE

## ROBUST AND IMPACTFUL TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Training provided by South West AHSN is highly valued by the stakeholders interviewed. Memorable training reported includes sessions around data usage, leadership and pain management. The variety of training methods offered by South West AHSN are considered effective across the various stakeholder groups interviewed. For instance, a health or social care provider speaks positively about the technical training provided face-to-face at their internally organised sessions, while others comment on the ease of online access.

*“On the Somerset Academy, which is the action learning programme that we run here, they’ve come along and one really amazing thing they’ve done was around the use of data and training. [They provided training to] about 40 people from across the system on how they can better use data more effectively within their work. That sort of stuff was brilliant.”*

Health or social care provider

*“I think one of the ones we did during training was about how to try to prevent falls, people falling, and obviously that’s something that I’ve had some experience of because I have fallen and it’s not good. The training was really helpful and then over the year I’ve had training from a lot of organisations. To run the pain management courses for Arthritis Care, I had constant training and updating. So, an awful lot of what was in the training that QuIPPs did I already knew, but it never hurts to be refreshed on things. It was very, very good and it was very intense and very thorough. We do these video conferencing and I’m not a whizz kid on the computer, but they’re incredibly helpful to me and very patient.”*

VCS

This interview feedback is supported by evidence from the online surveys with South West AHSN stakeholders. For instance, **the majority** (58%\*) of VCS stakeholders, patient or public groups, individual patients or members of the public **describe training and development provided as effective**. In comparison just 5%\* describe the training as ineffective. In addition, 9% of South West AHSN’s stakeholders identify spread academy/ academic programmes and initiatives as the South West AHSN’s most impactful projects, significantly greater than the average of 2%.

## CONNECTING DIFFERENT REGIONS

A further strength of South West AHSN, according to stakeholders, is their ability to signpost to other organisations including other AHSNs. Multiple citations in interviews describe South West AHSN as highly effective at utilising their strong links with organisations around the country to introduce them to the most suitable partner. This may

be a key factor in the positive evaluations of South West AHSN more widely as almost all stakeholders interviewed think it is important to connect to other AHSNs. This theme is present in the national AHSN report findings and could therefore present an opportunity for South West AHSN to share good practice in this process with other AHSNs.

*“They seem to have those [national] links. I’m one person in one organisation but they seem to have a ‘me’, if you like, everywhere. So, there’s almost somebody that they can link with and get the information they need and put you in touch with, everywhere, which is great.”*

**Patients or public group**

*“They provide forums where we can interact with other trusts in other regions. So, for example, regionally interacting with other trusts, if it wasn’t for the AHSN in facilitating that level-, I tend very much more to work in the pockets of individual trusts, where they are sort of, fairly instrumental in creating that regional interaction and supporting it that way.”*

**Health or social care provider**

### **STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH INDIVIDUALS IN THE AHSN**

Most stakeholders interviewed describe strong relationships with their key contacts at the South West AHSN. This is often considered a key factor in why they hold positive perceptions of the organisation and why these have improved over time. Approachability, friendliness, a willingness to problem-solve and enthusiasm for improvement are all reasons given to this effect.

*“They’ve always been incredibly helpful. A really useful resource. They’re charming people, a really, really nice bunch of people. We really like them. They are [providing] positive feedback because they’re thanking us for our ideas, and you know, nice sentiments some of them.”*

**Health or social care provider**

*“The fact the people that are in the room want to see improvements made. That is a driving force, it’s seeing improvements being put into practice. We’re very diverse. Totally diverse. They never talked down to anybody, they accepted everybody at face value. When they got to know them, they were able to, either, correct the parts that were wrong or suggest that maybe they weren’t quite suitable, in a very nice way. I think we only lost two members out of the initial lot, so I think we did very well.”*

**Patients group or public group**

Online survey responses suggest relationships with South West AHSN are considered good by three quarters (73%) of stakeholders but that this is slightly lower than average (82%).

South West AHSN may therefore wish to consider some of the points raised in the following sections as opportunities to further strengthen relationships with its stakeholders.

## POINTS FOR SOUTH WEST AHSN TO CONSIDER

### ENSURING INTERNAL CHANGE DOES NOT IMPACT STAKEHOLDER PROJECTS

A few stakeholders interviewed have observed that South West AHSN can be inconsistent in its communication. This can reportedly create a lack of clarity around processes. It is worth noting that stakeholders are generally sympathetic that changes in local focus areas are not always driven by the AHSN itself. However, this does signal an area that South West AHSN may wish to address.

*“They’ve sometimes been inconsistent in their approach and, probably along that same theme, sometimes, it seems that what they’ve been offering or intending to do has chopped and changed and never really taken off.”*

Health or social care provider

*“A couple of times they’ve come and met with me and we’ve talked about setting up regular meetings or regular forums [...] the last one was talking about the adoption of some of the innovations they were trying to spread, which never really happened. I think the person that was coming to speak to me changed twice or three times and then it was never followed up.”*

Health or social care provider

### CLARIFYING WHAT IS WITHIN THE AHSN’S REMIT

A few interviewees suggest South West AHSN has been unable to help them or they have not received the type of support they have required. This has reportedly made them contact them about future projects or initiatives. However, it should be noted that these stakeholders tend to demonstrate a limited understanding of the AHSN’s remit. In a similar vein, health or social care stakeholders interviewed have observed that NHS colleagues are not always familiar with AHSNs.

*“[South West AHSN are] not interested in cancer. I’ve asked them on a number of occasions and they’ve said ‘That’s not on our business plan [...] I never think of calling them to help me, because every time I’ve contacted them to say ‘Can you help me?’ they go ‘No, not really.’”*

National government, agency or ALB

*“I can still talk to NHS colleagues, and they feel a little bit separate from AHSN work. There’s still a little bit of work to do to make sure that the AHSN is perceived exactly as I’m seeing it, which is [an] honest broker.”*

Health or social care provider

Online survey responses in part support these findings. Although the majority (83%) of South West AHSN’s stakeholders say they have a good or fair understanding of the AHSN’s role, 17% report little or no understanding. Meanwhile, the proportion who are aware of South West AHSN’s work in their sector is lower than average (32% vs. 40%).

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

### COMMUNICATING THE TRANSITION FROM IDEAS TO RESULTS

Some health and care provider interviewees have observed that translating ideas on paper into successful implementation and usage is likely to continue to present a significant challenge. While they agree intentions of the staff are undoubtedly positive, there are still issues to be addressed in converting an idea into a solution and communicating this back to stakeholders.

*“I’ve got relationships with a number of them, but I think what they’ve been trying to do is they’ve been trying to work out how best to deliver what it is they’re being asked to deliver. So, they’ve tried a number of different approaches which, I have to say, I’m all for trialling things. That’s what we do for a living. It hasn’t progressed, as in it hasn’t, sort of, grown into a solution. So, there have been, sort of, a number of different starts but in this particular case, it hasn’t quite followed right through.”*

Health or social care provider

*“They come and they present some good ideas, which everyone looks at and thinks, ‘Well, this is all really good stuff. Really, really good ideas,’ but then there’s little traction after that.”*

Health or social care provider

## SUMMARY OF POINTS TO CONSIDER

Across interviews conducted, stakeholders would like to see the South West AHSN:

- ✓ **Continue to deliver training on a variety of different topics** both online and face-to-face and consider scaling these up or sharing best practice with other AHSNs to allow more participants to benefit.
- ✓ Consider the best way to work with stakeholders to **develop clear and consistent objectives**.
- ✓ Clarifying South West AHSN’s **role and responsibilities** to better manage the expectations of stakeholders.
- ✓ Ensure **regular communication and evidence-gathering** of the impact projects are having locally in order to feed these progress updates back to stakeholders.