

Focus ADHD national programme: South East and Dorset collaborative approach



What we do

This national innovation programme aims to improve how attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is diagnosed in children and young people. It introduces an objective assessment (QbTest) into the clinical pathway, standardising practice and providing a clearer, unbiased clinical picture



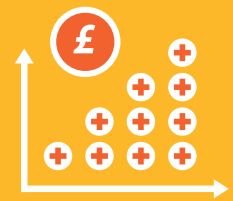
Why are we doing it?

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is a neurological disorder of brain development that impacts on behaviour, affecting around 5% (1 in 20) of school aged children. ADHD is a treatable disorder yet if left untreated, can have significant impact on personal development, academic outcomes, and family interaction

There is no simple test to determine whether a child has ADHD. The process for diagnosing or ruling out ADHD is variable across England. It will often include multiple steps and is based on clinical judgement informed by subjective reports from parents, teachers and observation of the patient.



Children in the UK wait 18 months (average) to obtain an accurate diagnosis, more than the European average of 11 months



Multiple clinic visits over this period result in significant costs to the NHS, estimated at **£23 million**

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Objectives from the national programme

- Increase the number of children and young people who have an objective assessment as part of the clinical assessment, including adding the QbTest into the ADHD assessment pathway.
- Faster assessment and decision making (from first referral to decision to diagnose/rule out).
- Fewer outpatient appointments between referral and diagnosis.
- Fewer nurse observation visits in schools.
- Improved patient and family satisfaction/experience.
- Improved clinician satisfaction and confidence in diagnosing or excluding ADHD.

How did we do this?

The core element of this programme was to work with NHS trusts across England to improve the ADHD assessment offer to children and young people by implementing an objective assessment (QbTest) into the pathway.

Whilst working with local stakeholders across the AHSN footprints, Wessex, Oxford and Kent Surrey Sussex AHSNs agreed to collaborate to benefit from economies of scale, bringing together those with an interest in improving the ADHD pathway and sharing knowledge across the region.

The QbTest objective assessment

The chosen tool was QbTest, manufactured by Qbtech. The objective test measures attention, impulsivity and activity and supplements current clinical assessment processes.

QbTest is not a standalone diagnostic tool nor an instrument to replace clinical judgement. However, it cuts through ambiguous or subjective information with quality results, helping to standardise clinical practice, highlight that individuals have different impairment and needs, and measure individual treatment effect.

Research has shown that the use of an objective assessment tool alongside other clinical information can reduce the time to diagnosis by around five months, resulting in fewer patient visits and improving the experience for patients, family and clinicians. The assessment tool offers instant results that present a report comparing a child's or young person's results against a normative dataset, based on age and sex.

East Midlands AHSN supported a 12-month, real-world demonstrator project, where QbTest was used in different pathways across three East Midlands NHS trusts.



What we delivered in 2020-23:

Implementation:

The core element of this programme was to work with both Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and paediatric services that offer ADHD assessments and diagnosis to children and young people.

This equates to **4,183 children and young people** receiving a QbTest across the South East since the start of the national programme. This has helped many young people, parents and carers understand their symptoms, rule in or out an ADHD diagnosis and support the management of treatment.

Engagement:

The South East AHSNs established a Community of Practice (COP) to support colleagues interested in implementing the QbTest as part of the ADHD assessment pathway.

Well attended communities of practice were conducted every two months, with input from specialists and academics within the neurodevelopmental field.

This has encouraged connections and support between neurodevelopmental teams within AHSN geographies and beyond.

The success and relevance of this group have encouraged providers to continue to come together to host the COP after the closure of the national ADHD Focus programme.

Neurodevelopment and health and justice provision:

In summer 2021 Oxford AHSN undertook a literature review looking at the evidence around ADHD amongst the prison population. This paper informed ongoing work to explore the idea of introducing QbTest as part of the assessment process within a secure setting. With a focus on assessment and diagnosis, the literature around ADHD in prisons and Young Offenders Institutions (YOIs) has been brought together and the **evidence synthesis** shared nationally (download it from the Resources section of Wessex AHSN's **Improving Diagnosis of ADHD** page).

Kent Surrey Sussex AHSN received additional funding from NHS England Health and Justice to pilot QbTest within youth offending settings. The aim is to increase the number of ADHD assessments to a group of young people who are often reported as undiagnosed and to improve the knowledge and awareness of ADHD within these settings.

Patient partnership:

Kent Surrey Sussex AHSN has co-produced a video with children and parents from Medway ND Service, which shares their views and insights on living with ADHD and the benefits of using QbTest. This video has received great feedback and has been shared nationally.

You can watch the video [here](#).



AHSN Network - Net Zero summary

The latest findings from the Focus ADHD national evaluation allowed us to estimate the workforce hours saved through reduced nurse school observations, and outpatient appointments. Using recognised, robust sources for environmental sustainability, the same modelling was applied to estimate the kilograms of carbon dioxide avoided (kgCO₂e) through the reduction in nurse school observations and outpatient appointments.

An estimated **155,894 kgCO₂e** avoided. This is the equivalent of:

- **2,598 tree seedlings** grown for 10 years
- **0.04 wind turbines** running for a year
- **34 cars** driven for one year
- **363 barrels** of oil consumed
- **19 million smart phones** charged
- The average electricity consumption of **20 homes**.

“We’ve been very reliant on subjective methods such as questionnaires, observations, rating scales, and reports from parents and schools - so the QbTest is the first real, almost investigative process which has allowed some objectivity.”

Clinician

Medway Neurodiversity Service

“Parents that have gone through the QbTest process have all said how much it enhanced their ability to get that diagnosis and get the support quickly; because then they can go back to the school - they’ve got the evidence, it’s pure evidence, black and white right there - that they can then say ‘Right, we have this diagnosis of ADHD - now can we get the support that we need for our child?’”

ADHD Ambassador

Medway Neurodiversity Service

Evaluation of the East Midlands AHSN approach showed:

- Time from assessment to diagnosis reduced by an average of **153 days**.
- The number of appointments required to reach a diagnosis was reduced.
- **20%** clinical workforce time was released.
- **85%** of patients found the results helpful.
- **94%** of clinicians reported greater understanding of patients' symptoms.



11
trusts across
27
sites* in Wessex,
Oxford and Kent
Surrey Sussex
have successfully
implemented
QbTest within their
ADHD pathway



An additional
4183**
children and
young people in
the South East
have received a
QbTest as part
of the national
Focus ADHD
programme**



Facilitated nine
community of
practice meetings
across the South
East and Dorset,
attended by
209
healthcare
professionals



Secured an
additional
£110k
funding from
NHS England to
support trusts
implementing the
QbTest across the
South East



411
staff have been
trained to deliver
QbTest



Co-produced a video with
children and parents from
Medway Neurodiversity (ND)
Service on living with ADHD
and benefits of using QbTest.
This has received **597 views**
to date



Published
an Evidence
Synthesis looking
at ADHD in
Prisons and
Young Offenders
Institutions

* Trusts Wessex 2, KSS 6, Oxford 2. Sites Wessex 10, KSS 14, Oxford 3 [CAMHS: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service]

** Wessex - 1733, KSS - 2018, Oxford - 432 data doesn't include sites that implemented QbTest prior to the start of the national programme.

Nationally:



69 trusts across **137** sites are now providing an objective assessment



22% reduction in nurse school observations required in CAMHS[†]



19% release of clinical time in paediatrics and **9.2%** in CAMHS[†]



Over **55,000** patients benefiting since April 2020



An estimated **155,894** kgCO₂e avoided as part of the Focus ADHD national programme. This is equivalent to: **34 cars** driven for one year or **19 million smart phones** charged



In March 2023 NICE published a **Medtech Innovation Briefing** relating to QbTest for the assessment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder



92% of clinicians said the results helped them better understand patients' symptoms[†]



Winner of **three national awards** including two prestigious Health Service Journal (HSJ) Awards

[†] Findings from the national Focus ADHD evaluation October 2022