The Scottish Ambulance Service aims to deliver more care at home or in a community setting where safe and appropriate to do so, thereby supporting the 2020 vision. We aim to develop the capability and skills within our workforce to provide more comprehensive care at the point of contact for our patients, and to develop the role of paramedics within primary care.

In order to treat more patients at home, new roles of Specialist and Advanced Practitioners in Urgent and Primary Care were identified. The advanced skills of Specialist Paramedics mean they can operate autonomously and carry an extended range of medicines so are able to offer a greater range of treatment and interventions directly for people. This will improve the care patients receive and potentially reduce the number of avoidable attendances at hospital Emergency Departments.

A Masters Degree Programme was developed with Glasgow Caledonian University to provide the additional education and skills required. Pilots were designed to develop and test the model of Specialist Paramedics working across the Scottish Ambulance Service and within primary care services. These pilots aimed to improve access to care and treatment, cut waiting times, increase the amount of care provided at home, and utilise and enhance paramedics’ skills in the Primary Healthcare team.

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Methodology
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Results
The first cohort of Specialist Paramedics in Urgent and Primary Care began training in September 2016. There are approximately 100 Specialist Paramedics working in the Scottish Ambulance Service, with a further cohort beginning training in 2018/19. The first cohort of Advanced Practitioners (undertaking year 2 of the education programme) will be in place in 2018/19. A number of pilots with primary care have taken place across Scotland with 30 Specialist Paramedics working across both in hours and out of hours primary care services (see map below).

Feedback
“Most of my work involves visiting patients – many of whom are housebound in their own homes – and helping to treat acute illness such as chest infections, COPD, or Urinary Tract Infections. Patients are often seen sooner by a paramedic and it means GPs have more time to dedicate to patients needing more complex care.” Lauren O’Connor, Specialist Paramedic working in Regent Practice

“How Params are specialised in assessing all types of emergency and urgent presentations and transferring this skillset into Primary Care has seen a real benefit in supporting GPs and others in the Primary Healthcare team. This project helps patients to access the help they need sooner, and often in the familiar setting of their own homes.” Jim Ward, Medical Director, Scottish Ambulance Service

Conclusion
The Inverclyde pilot has demonstrated that 65% of home visits are suitable for a Specialist Paramedic to attend and that patients are seen earlier in the day by a Specialist Paramedic than a GP. Based on this pilot, there is the potential to save 230,000 hours of GP time if this model was expanded across Scotland. This represents a potential financial benefit of up to around £56 million per year.

2. The 2018 GMS Contract in Scotland