The Recertification Framework requires interaction with peers and encourages a community approach to learning. Well run peer groups are ideal environments for learning, sharing professional experiences, being challenged, presenting case studies and peer assessments.

Peer groups are a useful way to maintain your professional development. While being part of a peer group is not compulsory as part of the ENHANCE programme, it is a valuable way to access both continuing education and practice support, as it provides members with a sense of community of practice and an opportunity to seek feedback from colleagues in a supportive environment.

Participation in peer groups provides opportunities to identify and explore personal learning needs which leads to reflection and planning, a key component for group 3 learning goals.

**Does participation in a peer group count for ENHANCE points?**

If your peer group meeting is planned and structured, with a stated purpose and outcomes and is relevant to your professional practice of pharmacy, you may allocate ENHANCE group 1 points for participating. Contact ENHANCE for more information about how Group 2 points may be allocated in your situation.

**Reasons for forming or joining a peer group**

There are many reasons why you might want to form or join a peer group e.g.

- Opportunity for regular interactive peer to peer discussion, to share your experience and to learn from your peers.
- Advice or information from peers increases the range of input and allows for different perspectives.
- Provides regular opportunities to participate in group education, discussion and/or case review, especially when providing services such as MUR/MTA.
- Wider networks for pharmacists working in more isolated geographical or specialised practice areas.
- Opportunity to contribute by sharing your experience and knowledge.
- Get feedback on your ideas and thoughts.
- Benefit from a wide range of experience and knowledge.
- Specific support for pharmacists working in specialised areas of practice e.g. Palliative Care.
- Help with motivation and ideas to continue the CPD life-long learning journey.
- Provides accountability.
- Goal setting is easier with more perspectives contributing to the process.
- Keep up to date in a flexible and cost-efficient manner – and can be a lot of fun!
Outcomes from being part of a peer group

Learning Communities (or peer groups) are groups of people who share an interest or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. Groups like these have three distinguishing characteristics:

1. **Domain:** A peer group is not merely a social club or a network of connections between people, but is defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to that domain and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.

2. **Community:** In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.

3. **Practice:** Members of a peer group are practitioners. Together, they develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems— in short, a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction.

Some examples of outcomes could be:

- Problem solving - “How did you manage...?”
- Requests for information - “Where can I find......?”
- Seeking experience - “Has anyone dealt with this situation before?”
- Reusing assets - “I’ve just read an article that discusses this subject. I’ll email a copy of it to you all.”
- Coordination and strategy - “Can we combine xxxx to achieve ....?”
- Building an argument - “How do other people do this? What information can I find to enable me to make some changes?”
- Growing confidence - “Before I do it, I’ll run it past my peer group to see what they think.”
- Discussing developments - “What do you think of the new IT upgrade? Has it really helped?”
- Documenting projects - “We’ve discussed this several times now. Let’s write a strategy for dealing with it.”
- Visits - “Can I come and see how you’re managing.......? I think I need to change the way I’m doing it”
- Mapping knowledge and identifying gaps - “Who knows what, and what are we missing? Who can help us?”
Considerations when setting up a peer group

Peer group meetings may be highly structured or they can be informal and changeable depending on the current needs of the group. Cooperation among group members and a willingness to be an active group participant are necessary for the group to be successful.

There are some important things to be considered, especially as a new group is formed.

**Group culture**

Meetings should be constructive, inclusive, supportive and educational. A positive culture of participation should be developed to encourage each member to participate and contribute to discussion at each meeting. Support those who struggle to do this, through positive encouragement (no question is a silly question!), and leave enough space or create opportunities for the quieter members of the group to have their say.

Only one member of the group should speak at a time and the others should actively listen.

Avoid direct criticism of colleagues. At the beginning of each meeting, the meeting facilitator should remind the group that each member needs to be treated with respect and understanding even if viewpoints differ. Conflict is not a problem – the diverse opinions and perspectives of each member is important, but the environment must allow a robust discussion around ideas without direct personal criticism of a colleague.

Group members should arrive on time and come prepared.

**Trust**

Trust between members is essential if the group is to flourish. It takes time for trust to develop within the group and for productive and open discussion to flow freely. A lack of trust leads to the situation where group members conceal their weaknesses and mistakes or hesitate to ask for (or offer) help or feedback. This quickly leads to disengagement within the group and members begin to find reasons to avoid attending.

An excellent mantra for any peer group is “What happens in the group, stays in the group!”

**Commitment and Accountability**

This is about individual members not letting themselves or the group down by failure to prepare for, attend and fully participate in group meetings. It’s also about demonstrating behaviours that positively contribute to the group culture to ensure that optimal outcomes from the group can happen.

Together, group members need to identify what behaviours or actions are acceptable or unacceptable. Examples might be avoiding ‘behind-the-back’ conversations, full engagement in meetings, meeting commitments on time. Discussing, understanding and committing to these expectations in advance helps members feel more comfortable addressing behaviours that detract from the group’s function.

For accountability to become ingrained in the group culture, no exceptions should be allowed. In addition, no single member should be above accountability and all group members, not just a select few, should be responsible for ensuring it happens.

Effective groups empower people to work to solve their own problems, and act as role models for each other.
Guide for setting up a Peer Group

Suggestions for setting up a successful peer group:

- A size range of between 6 to 12 members is ideal, but can have more or fewer members as agreed. The larger the group, the harder it is for everyone to feel free to contribute, or even that their attendance matters, the smaller the group the less diversity, knowledge and experience is available to the group.
- Appoint a coordinator or contact person to send out notification details for meetings
- Ensure that all members contact details are collected and distributed to the group, ensure the contact list is kept current and up to date
- Appoint a facilitator to run each meeting - this role can be rotated among group members if preferred
- Establish a regular meeting cycle e.g. monthly or bi-monthly
- Establish and stick to a time limit for meetings, around 1 to 2 hours is appropriate and achievable
- Establish clear ground rules for participation and conduct to ensure that everyone benefits from the activities.
- Set goals for what the group wants to achieve and evaluate these periodically e.g. annually to see if these goals are being met. This could include creating an intended programme to ensure that all topics that need to be covered are addressed.

Facilitation and structure of meetings

Good facilitation and structure is necessary to ensure regular and ongoing participation from all group members. Once the group is more established and the trust has built within the group the structure can be relaxed and flexible according to the needs of the group.

The group could be led by one chosen facilitator, or this role could be shared on a roster basis – whatever works for the group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Everyone shares knowledge and skills</th>
<th>In general, facilitators have four responsibilities:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common courtesy</td>
<td>- to provide a structure to the meeting (introduction of speaker &amp; topic, keeping to time, wrap up review and summary, where to from here if necessary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid distracting side conversations</td>
<td>- to create an open forum for discussion and to make sure that everyone has a chance to participate and express their ideas and thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s said here stays here, what’s learned here leaves</td>
<td>- to lead and encourage discussion and keep the discussion moving in a positive direction –asking open ended questions and reinforcing and clarifying the content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn electronics to silent or vibrate mode</td>
<td>- to maintain a safe and respectful group environment that ensures the meeting remains positive and constructive and members feel comfortable sharing their knowledge and insight with each other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Confidentiality of information

Discuss how the group will ensure privacy of information will be maintained e.g. Do not use real names for example Mrs AB or a 60 year old male etc. Once again ‘What is said in the group, stays in the group!’

Suggested format for meetings

1. Initial greeting and introduction of any new members – any ‘housekeeping’? It’s a good idea to keep a record of attendance – this would enable a pharmacist to provide verification of participation if required.
2. Confirm the agenda and purpose for the meeting so that everyone is clear on what topics or cases are to be discussed.
3. State the desired learning outcomes from the meeting
4. Keep the meeting on track - It is the facilitator’s role to bring the group back to focus on the topic at hand if conversation goes off track to issues that are not relevant or appropriate to the majority of members. Remind the group of the purpose of the meeting and the learning outcomes. Off track questions could be parked for another meeting or for continuation outside of the meeting.
5. Ensure there is sufficient time for open discussion and questions among group members
6. Take some time at the end of each meeting to:
   ▪ review what has been discussed
   ▪ identify any learning outcomes
   ▪ encourage members to identify what they will do differently as a result of participating in the meeting
7. Agree on topic or presenter, time, date and venue for next meeting.

Suggested topics include:

- Case review – A group member may present a case to the group and discuss how they dealt with that case e.g. presentation of MUR case
- Invite a presenter to the group to discuss relevant cases or practice issues. This could include another health professional e.g. GP, Physiotherapist or a cultural advisor etc.
- A group member is designated to present information about a selected topic – maybe one in which they have some expertise, or one they need to research.
- Review significant events in practice
- Journal review, linked with case examples
- ENHANCE recertification issues
- Discuss group 3 goals and self-reflection