

The NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF)

Essential guide for NHS staff

What is the Knowledge and Skills Framework?

The Knowledge and Skills Framework – KSF for short – is a key part of the NHS Agenda for Change pay system. It applies to all staff employed on Agenda for Change terms and conditions. It's essentially about helping you learn at work so that we can continue to deliver high quality services for patients and the public.

How does the KSF do this?

The NHS Agenda for Change agreement includes a commitment that all staff will have an annual review of their work with their manager (or someone delegated to do this) and support for their learning at work.

The skills and knowledge that need to be applied in your job will be defined in a KSF post outline. At least once a year you and your manager will meet to:

- discuss how well you are currently applying your knowledge and skills (**a KSF development review**);
- identify your learning needs; and
- plan how they will be addressed (**a personal development plan**).

You will then undertake some learning and development – this could be 'on the job' or something more formal such as a training course. After you have done this, you and your manager will consider whether the learning has helped you improve what you do (evaluation). The overall aim is to help you – and all other NHS staff – to do as good a job as possible for patients and the public.

How does this link to pay?

As well as supporting your learning, the KSF is linked to pay progression. It does this at two 'gateways' on each payband.

- The **foundation gateway** - checks that you are on track in developing the knowledge and skills that you will need to apply when you are fully functioning in the post. The foundation gateway takes place 12 months after you have joined a payband no matter at what point you start on it.
- The **second gateway** - checks that you are applying the knowledge and skills that are needed by anyone fully developed in that post. The second gateway takes place at a fixed point towards the top of the pay band.

In between the gateways staff are expected to progress up the pay increments as they continue to learn and develop with the support of their manager. Even at the gateways the normal expectation is that, having met your learning needs, you will progress up the incremental scale in the payband.

How will I know this is fair?

There should be 'no surprises' in the KSF process. Your manager should discuss your learning and development needs with you at least once a year, and agree with you how they will be addressed. Also your manager has a duty to talk to you about any specific issues in your work, if and when they arise, rather than leaving them to a review meeting. The KSF is designed to make sure the process is fair and transparent. It does this by using the same descriptions for everyone in the NHS who is doing similar types of work and by putting these into a standard format – known as a KSF post outline.

If there is an issue about your performance at work, this should be dealt with separately from the KSF process, under agreed local procedures. The KSF and the development review process are not designed to deal with disciplinary issues.

What happens if there are concerns about my development?

If there are concerns about how you apply the knowledge and skills in your job you will be formally told about them by your manager. You will then need to agree an action plan with your manager to help you develop and apply the necessary knowledge and skills. If your progression through the gateways is delayed, you will receive your pay increment when you can demonstrate that you are working at the level required in the KSF outline for your post.

What does the KSF post outline do exactly?

A KSF outline sets out how anyone employed in a particular job should apply their knowledge and skills. KSF outlines focus on the post and not you as an individual. They describe what is needed in your post rather than your own unique mix of knowledge and skills. The KSF outline for your post will differ from your job description. Your job description sets out the duties and responsibilities of the post whereas your KSF outline describes the knowledge and skills you need to apply in the post.

"Improving the health of the public and patient care – through the NHS KSF"

KSF outlines are made up of:

- six areas that the NHS needs everyone to do, known as the core dimensions – communication; personal and people development; health, safety and security; service improvement; quality; equality and diversity
- a small number of other areas, known as specific dimensions which relate more specifically to the job, for example, information processing, health protection.

Once the dimensions relating to your job are identified, the KSF post outline describes these in more detail, including:

- **the level** at which you have to apply the knowledge and skills on a range from 1 – 4;
- **the indicators** which describe the types of skills and knowledge that apply in each of the dimensions; and the
- **areas of application** which give practical hands-on examples of the skills and knowledge relating to your particular post.

Who decides what goes in KSF post outlines?

The process of developing outlines should be agreed in partnership by representatives of managers and staff. Outlines should meet organisational needs and be realistic for staff to deliver. Outlines should be shared at the earliest opportunity with the staff who are employed in that post. This is so they can be clear about the basis of their learning and pay progression.

I can see how KSF post outlines are used at the second gateway, but what happens at the foundation gateway?

For the foundation gateway, some of the full KSF post outline is taken away and a reduced outline (a subset of the full outline) is used. This sets out the knowledge and skills that have to be applied after one year in post. Again this is based on joint agreements between representatives of managers and staff to make sure that the subset is set at the right level.

What do I have to do to show I am applying the right knowledge and skills in my job?

You should not have to do anything special to show you are applying your knowledge and skills beyond doing your job as well as you can, and taking part in agreed learning to develop your knowledge and skills. When you and your manager sit down at your development review meeting to discuss your application of knowledge and skills, they will be interested to know what you think is going well and what could be done differently to improve outcomes, as well as explaining their own views to you.

If you work closely with your manager, for example, in an office or ward, they will be seeing you most days and their ongoing involvement in your work can form the basis of your discussions. If you and your manager work at a distance, you will need to bring other information into the discussion. Precisely what you use will depend on the nature of your job, but it may include getting the views of others you work with more closely or looking at tangible outcomes of your work such as records. If you are already using a portfolio for other purposes, for example, for Continuing Professional Development you can bring that information as well, however, there is no need to develop such portfolios for the KSF itself.

With your manager you will decide what is included in the notes of your development review. These do not need to be extensive, the purpose of the notes is to form a record of the outcomes of your discussion.

How does the KSF benefit patients and the public?

- it helps organisations design, review and update jobs around the needs of patients and the public
- it helps to develop good quality services delivered by staff who are effective in applying their knowledge and skills
- it offers a quality assurance process for service delivery.

How should the KSF benefit me and other staff?

- it helps you deliver good quality services for patients and the public
- it gives you the right to learn and develop at work as part of your terms and conditions of service under the Agenda for Change agreement
- it is a single framework used by all so it brings fairness and objectivity to the decision making process about staff and their development
- it can inform your longer-term career and development at work.

How does the KSF benefit organisations?

- it helps improve productivity and service effectiveness by directly linking staff development and review to employment and organisational needs
- it links workforce planning and development with service development
- evidence shows that it will improve staff recruitment, retention, morale and the quality of services
- it will improve the commissioning and delivery of education and training and hence provide better value for money.

How can I find out more?

There are a number of things you can do:

- 1 Every NHS organisation should have a named person who holds responsibility for the KSF. Find out who they are through your HR Department and contact them.
- 2 Contact your union rep – or if you have one your union learning rep.
- 3 Visit www.nhsemployers.org.
- 4 Visit www.e-ksfnw.org for information on the electronic tool.