

Skills Escalator Briefing

Why do I need to know?

The Skills Escalator strategy is a means of enhancing the supply of NHS staff. This is because it promotes the development of the existing workforce and it attracts a wider range of people (such as the long-term unemployed or socially-excluded members of the local community) to join the NHS workforce, enlarging the available pool of labour.

What is the Skills Escalator strategy?

The Skills Escalator brings together lifelong learning, equality and diversity, regulation, recruitment and retention, pay modernisation and the Career Framework and the Changing Workforce programme.

This strategy is an integral part of the *HR in the NHS Plan* (Pillar 2, The Model Career). The Department of Health published the Lifelong Learning Framework for the NHS, 'Working Together, Learning Together', in November 2001. The framework is intended for use by employers and SHA/Workforce directorates to ensure staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge to work flexibly in support of patients and are supported to realise their potential. The Lifelong Learning Framework concept underpins the Skills Escalator.

Under Agenda for Change, employers will be able to fit new jobs into a national framework using a new NHS job evaluation scheme. There will also be a common language in the "knowledge and skills framework" to describe the knowledge and skills that a person needs to be effective in a particular NHS post. The framework is applicable across the range of posts in the NHS and will ensure better links between education and development and career and pay progression. A career framework is being developed, identifying different skill levels across the range of NHS careers.

How does it work?

The Skills Escalator approach offers a structured programme of skills development and a variety of step-on and step-off points. It encourages all staff, through a strategy of lifelong learning, to renew and extend their skills and knowledge, enabling them to move on the escalator. Meanwhile, efficiencies and skill mix benefits can be generated by delegating roles, work and responsibilities to the most appropriate level.

Use of the Skills Escalator approach means that staff are skilled systematically to take advantage of the next promotional opening. It does not guarantee a promotion. It helps to fill known skills gaps and reduces stagnation by re-stimulating people with new challenges.

Key benefits

- the Skills Escalator operates at all levels of the workforce, thus offering a powerful recruitment message of ongoing opportunity. Its extreme expression is that in theory, staff with the desire and ability can progress from cleaner or porter to consultant or chief executive.
- traditional entry points such as pre-registration programmes for the established professions will continue, but they will be complemented by other entry routes such as cadet schemes and role conversion, attracting people in other careers who are seeking new challenges and drawing people back into the NHS labour market.
- it will enable people to start or further develop careers in the NHS, as young people starting out or in mid or later life as a second career. Those who are finding it difficult to get into permanent employment, who have limited formal education, and older people looking for second chances, can be introduced or re-introduced to the working environment and developed so that they can subsequently be employed within the NHS.
- those already within the NHS will benefit from the opportunity to develop and enhance their skills and take on new and more challenging roles.
- communities will benefit from an active approach to employing and developing staff by NHS organisations who are major local employers.

Illustrative categories within the Skills Escalator

- pre-employment/employment orientation programmes
- starter jobs with structured training and development
- staff already working within the NHS in jobs requiring fewer skills, developed by use of job rotation/training and development programmes
- staff who can be developed to access education towards specialist, managerial or professional qualifications
- specialists, managers and/or professionals acquiring a wider range of skills at staged intervals
- staff in more demanding or complex posts encouraged through role development and flexible working to continue expanding their skills and experience
- the most advanced staff continuing to develop by means of flexible 'portfolio careers', planned in partnership with employers.