

## Supporting appraisals: a simpler KSF

Effective appraisals are an essential part of NHS employment practice, leading to improved staff performance, higher staff satisfaction and better patient outcomes. The NHS Constitution also commits the NHS to providing staff with clear roles and responsibilities, and personal development and 'line management support to succeed'.

A robust appraisal system that focuses on performance and development should ensure that all staff have annual reviews, and the Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) provides a useful supporting framework to identify development needs.

Following an independent review, the NHS Staff Council has developed a simpler KSF that gives employers and staff a flexible, adaptable tool to support the appraisal process. This *Briefing* outlines the simpler KSF, its role in appraisals and how trusts are tailoring the KSF and driving up appraisal rates.

### Key points

- Effective appraisals improve performance and patient outcomes.
- Appraisals help deliver the NHS Constitution pledges on developing and training staff.
- The simpler KSF provides a flexible personal development tool for appraisals that can be tailored to meet local needs.
- The simpler KSF helps trusts to align and deliver key organisational and individual objectives, to deliver QIPP.
- The new KSF tools aim to improve the coverage and quality of appraisals, measured by the NHS staff survey.

## Background

The KSF was first introduced as part of Agenda for Change. Intended to support the appraisal process, it helps employers identify the knowledge and skills that staff need to do their job and their development needs.

Five years on, an independent review of the KSF, led by the Institute for Employment Studies for the NHS Staff Council, found that take-up of KSF is variable. Some trusts felt that KSF was too complex and difficult to integrate into staff appraisals, leading to varying appraisal rates across trusts.

However, the evidence is clear that effective appraisals deliver better patient outcomes: "a hospital which appraises 20 per cent more staff and trains 20 per cent more appraisers, is likely to have 1,090 fewer deaths per 100,000 admissions" (Carol Bottrill and Michael West 2002).

Employers and staff have called for a simpler KSF that is easier to use.

In response, the NHS Staff Council has simplified the KSF to make a better link between KSF and appraisals. It gives employers the flexibility to tailor the KSF to meet local needs, recognising that one single approach does not 'fit all', but still with the option to use elements of the full KSF if required.

## Simplified KSF – what's changed?

The simplified KSF is outlined in the NHS Staff Council's *Appraisals and KSF made simple – a practical guide*.

It aims to help line managers and staff identify the skills required for a role, and any personal development needs, as part of the appraisal meeting.

The simplified KSF now **focuses on the six core dimensions** that apply to every job:

- communication

- personal and people development
- health, safety and security
- service improvement
- quality
- equality and diversity.

The **six core dimensions have been rewritten** so they are simpler, shorter and easier to understand.

To help managers and staff apply them to their roles, the dimensions now include examples of behaviours and actions that indicate whether they are being met or not. These will be particularly helpful for bands 1 to 4 where staff may be less familiar with appraisals, to support personal development, and help drive up appraisal rates where coverage is low.

The NHS Staff Council guide outlines a **simple process for carrying out appraisals**, using the simplified KSF for development reviews. There are advice and tips for managers and

staff to show how appraisals can benefit organisations and ultimately patient care.

There are **different options for developing post outlines** to identify the skills, knowledge and behaviours required for roles. For example, producing summary post outlines or generic post outlines for different bands, or just using existing job descriptions and person specifications.

The simpler KSF **significantly reduces the need to collect 'evidence'** for reviews. If managers and staff are discussing performance on a regular basis, there is no need for staff to produce written evidence for the appraisal or to discuss every skill and knowledge area, but just to focus on the specific development needs.

There is a range of resources and practical tools to support employers which are available on NHS Employers website at [www.nhsemployers.org/SimplifiedKSF](http://www.nhsemployers.org/SimplifiedKSF) for trusts to

adapt. These include setting objectives, making the links to organisational goals, top tips for managers and staff on appraisals, and template appraisal forms, as well as the full NHS Staff Council guide, *Appraisals and KSF made simple – a practical guide*.

There is also a suggested approach for **developing objectives as a team**, but still with individual development reviews.

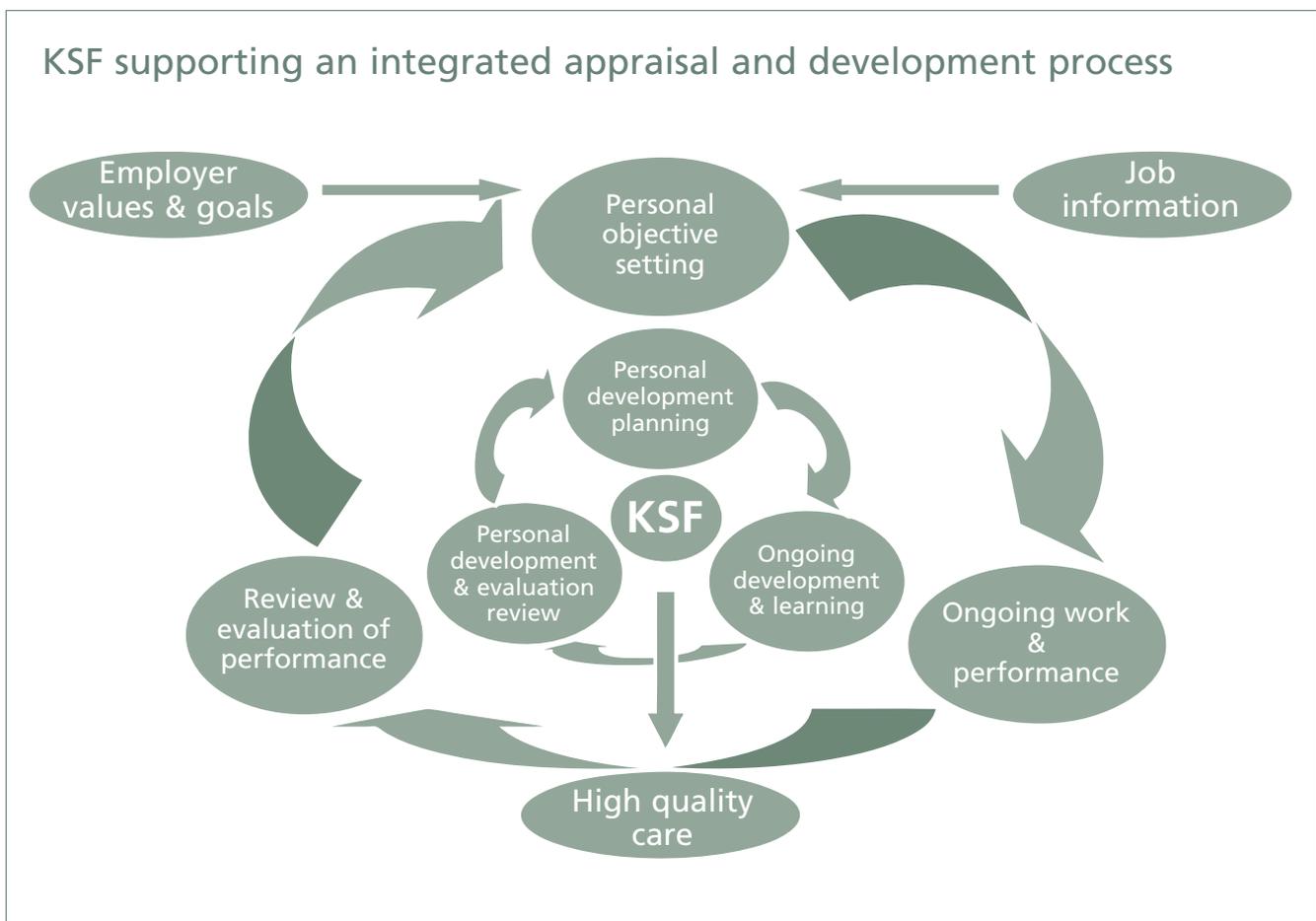
Trusts can continue to use all or parts of the full KSF if it is helpful, including the original specific dimensions which may be useful for staff with on-going professional development. For example, some trusts have mapped their own competency frameworks against the specific KSF dimensions.

In response to employer feedback, there is a **new optional dimension on leadership and management** that can be used for senior roles.

## Staff appraisals – key steps

Research with trusts that have successfully embedded appraisals identifies the following key steps to support the appraisal process organisation-wide:

- Communicating the appraisal process – including reminders on dates and required preparation, with signposting to relevant guides and support for line managers and staff.
- Preparing for the appraisal meeting – both the line manager and member of staff need to invest time in preparing for the meeting and employers should allow some protected work time to enable them to do this.
- Annual appraisal meeting – the key milestone that enables a two-way discussion between the line manager and staff member. This meeting looks at performance and development



for the previous year, before focusing on these areas for the next 12 months, using the simplified KSF for discussions on development needs.

- Follow-up – completing and agreeing the appraisal form in line with the organisation’s appraisal process.

- On-going and interim reviews – regular, on-going discussions and feedback on performance and development throughout the year.

## Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust – adapting the KSF

Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust (SRFT) has adapted and simplified the KSF to make it easier for staff to use as part of the appraisal process, and to drive up appraisal rates.

Managers and staff said they wanted a simple appraisal and KSF framework that links the trust's priorities and values, with individuals' performance reviews and development plans.

In response, the trust agreed to revise KSF based on agreed criteria, to help shape its approach. The new-look KSF should be: simple enough for all managers and staff to use; integrated with the existing appraisal process and make the process more effective and efficient; incorporated into the appraisal documentation rather than generating extra paperwork; suitable for application across all departments throughout the trust.

The trust used the criteria to develop a radically different version of the KSF which has four core dimensions of attitude, safety, communication and quality.

Each dimension has one single level and all four dimensions are applicable to every member of

staff. Salford has also introduced an additional leadership and management dimension, for staff who 'influence' or manage others.

The trust's 'Salford Knowledge and Skills Framework' (SKSF) is part of its new appraisal process and documentation, that ensures the SKSF is integral to completing the appraisal process.

As a result of its new approach, Salford's appraisal compliance rates have increased dramatically, from 48 per cent to 78 per cent over three years. Over the same timeframe, the 'percentage of staff with appraisal with personal development plan in the last 12 months' has risen from 46 per cent to 64 per cent. The trust is now in the top 20 per cent in the NHS staff survey for appraisal compliance rates.

More importantly, most staff report that their appraisal and personal development plans help them to do their job better, and the trust has achieved higher satisfaction results in the staff survey for two years running, since the framework has been introduced.

## Improving appraisal rates

Employers who have effectively implemented appraisals and a tailored version of the KSF, have identified the following good practice to improve appraisal rates:

- Managers should carry out a formal review with every

staff member they appraise at least once a year, with regular catch-ups and a mid-year review.

- Appraisers should receive appraisal training before carrying out a review – identifying this training as a personal development need, if required.

- Appraisers should take time to be familiar with their organisation's appraisal and development review process and the (simplified) KSF.
- Managers should not be reviewing more than ten to 12 people a year. If a manager has more, they should consider delegating

## Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust – 'KSF made simple'

After adapting the main principles of the full KSF and developing the post outlines, managers and staff at Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust felt the outlines were too long, difficult to understand and a real barrier to the appraisal process.

In response, the trust committed to developing outlines that are accessible to all staff and simple to use, to support appraisal discussions.

The trust mapped all its outlines against the Agenda for Change pay bands, developed generic profiles (outlines) and then simplified

the process, introducing a new minimum requirement for staff to have a profile based on just the six core dimensions.

Following consultation with staff and staff side representatives on the new approach, the trust then simplified each level in each of the six core dimensions even further.

As a direct result, the trust has seen a significant increase in appraisal meetings, up from 61 to 88 per cent, with early evidence that in the same period some areas in the trust have also reduced staff sickness absence rates.

some of the review responsibility and/or consider a team-based approach to developing objectives.

- Managers should ensure that all of their staff have a job description, person specification and, if required, a post outline. These need to be in place to support staff recruitment or internal promotions.

### View from NHS employers

Ensuring that staff are clear about their role and how they contribute to the organisation's objectives, with on-going development and support, is good employment practice.

The business case for appraisals is also clear. Trusts that have effectively embedded appraisals across their organisation, using a simplified approach to appraisals and the KSF, have seen dramatic increases in their appraisal rates.

There is also strong evidence that effective appraisals – focusing on performance and development – impact positively on patient care.

Appraisals and the simplified KSF tool can help to actively engage staff in delivering some of the current challenges on efficiencies, whilst helping to deliver services differently, to benefit patient care.

### Resources

Details of the simplified KSF, with tools and templates to support the appraisal process, are all available on the NHS Employers website at: [www.nhsemployers.org/SimplifiedKSF](http://www.nhsemployers.org/SimplifiedKSF)

Materials include a tool to assess how well your organisation is doing on delivering effective appraisals, guidance and tips on appraisals and objective setting, case studies and the full NHS Staff Council guide, including templates for local tailoring.

The guidance will be useful for HR teams and anyone who is involved in staff appraisals, training or organisational development.

### Good practice

We are keen to hear from organisations that have simplified the KSF as part of their appraisal process and have improved appraisal rates.

Please email your examples to [sharedlearning@nhsemployers.org](mailto:sharedlearning@nhsemployers.org)

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