# NHS Board Succession Planning Guidance

December 2022

# Introduction

This guide was designed for use by ICB and other organisational boards and their supporting people functions, with the intended purpose of providing an introduction and overview to the succession planning process and best practice succession planning guidance for your organisation or system.

Succession planning is an integral part of the talent management cycle, feeding into the process of identifying – through individual *Scope for Growth - career conversations*, developing – through a range of leader development programmes including Executive Director Pathway, Aspiring Chief Executive and Nye Bevan, assessing – through the *NHS Leadership Competency Frameworks* and mobilising individuals – through regional and national talent pools.

All these elements serve to empower and motivate every colleague_across our diverse workforce to grow, develop and unleash their full potential wherever their career leads them, delivering sustainable health outcomes and implementing transformational change to improve patient care and reduce health inequalities for all.

Included in this guide are several links and templates to help implement and facilitate the succession planning process, which may be tailored to suit individual organisational or system needs.

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# An introduction to succession planning

**What is it?**

Succession planning is the process of identifying and developing potential future leaders or senior managers, as well as individuals who could fill other business-critical positions, either in the short or the long term.

The aim is for organisations and systems to be willing and able to fill key roles effectively if the current post holder were to leave, whilst ensuring that the diversity, quantity and quality of leaders needed are identified, developed and supported to contribute.

It delivers on good risk management practice, helps organisations and systems to identify where there is a need to introduce new capabilities and skills and ensures we meet the NHS Long Term Plan commitments to have teams delivering a service fit for the future whilst reflecting the communities it serves.

## Why is it important?

Succession planning is a key component of workforce planning – a process to ensure the right number of people with the right skills are employed in the right place at the right time to deliver on the organisations or systems objectives, ultimately contributing to better patient care and health outcomes.

Succession planning enables an organisation or system to understand its talent pipeline more effectively and understand its diverse talent through a more inclusive lens, create talent pools of individuals for focused development and deployment opportunities and identify where posts may be easier or harder to fill so that appropriate action can be taken.

# An introduction to succession planning

**Why is it important? (2)**

There is also clear evidence that "a diverse workforce in which all staff members' contributions are valued is linked to good patient care" Kline, R. (2014) *The "snowy white peaks" of the NHS: a survey of discrimination in governance and leadership and the potential impact on patient care in London and England*. Succession planning is an essential process to develop a diverse talent pipeline of teams at every level of an organisation or system to enable innovation, improve performance and reduce health inequalities.

Embracing succession planning that is strategic, intentional and inclusive leads to more diverse and representative teams, with proven impact on performance and culture. Through developing your internal candidate pool by providing training and growth opportunities to all staff members, this will include those from under-represented groups who may be traditionally overlooked or face barriers to development opportunities and account for staff who may be perceived as 'over-qualified' to provide fair opportunity for all.

In light of the Ockenden review, where constant churn and change of the leadership team resulted in lack of oversight of serious clinical issues and concerns, as well as loss of organisational memory due to lack of continuity, it is crucial the NHS learns from these findings by effectively succession planning and ensuring it has the right people with the right skills to fill business critical roles.

# An introduction to succession planning

**Workforce planning vs. Succession planning**

Workforce planning is concerned with the quantity and skills of the workforce 'as a whole' within a team/service/organisation or system, whereas succession planning is concerned with the requirements related to critical posts.

Whilst succession planning is a key aspect of workforce planning, there are distinct differences between the two laid out below.

Effective **workforce planning** ensures appropriate levels of staff are available to deliver safe, high-quality care to patients and service users. Creating an effective workforce requires an evidence-based workforce plan, integrated with finance, activity and performance plans.

**Succession planning** focuses on future leadership and statutory posts, and skills/ knowledge/ experience gaps in critical roles.

The effective implementation of succession planning will contribute to continuity in leadership and risk minimisation by ensuring that the organisation or system is not vulnerable because it doesn't have the right people in place to deliver its business plans.

There are a wide range of benefits for succession planning including a reduction in organisational or system turbulence caused by leadership change, to the creation of a culture of opportunity if the pool of potential successors is seen as both deep and wide. It also encourages the approach of talent being owned by the whole NHS and social care, developing successors that will not only meet future organisational or system needs but also those of the wider NHS and social care on a longer-term basis.

# Key succession planning components

**Who should be involved/whose responsibility is it?**

The organisational CPO and their supporting people and OD functions will typically be responsible for developing the process and related materials, as well as implementing and facilitating the succession planning process for their organisation. This must be done with the full involvement and engagement of the CEO, Executive and Non-Executive Board members, EDI leads, staff network Chairs and other key senior leaders.

Succession planning needs to be owned by the line manager but should be actively championed by the leadership team.

People and OD functions will map supply and demand of roles, providing visibility on succession plans and with the support from regional NHS England talent colleagues, lead on and ensure development and support to diverse talent pipelines.

ICB CPOs will help, advise, share best practice and work with providers to enable good practice and consistency where required.

All those involved in the process will champion and challenge on equality, diversity and inclusion. It should be a proactive, systematic and intentionally inclusive investment in building a pipeline of leaders within an organisation or system and is everyone's responsibility to do well.

# An introduction to succession planning

**Guiding principles**

1. When considering succession planning, due attention should always be given to equality, diversity and inclusion matters, using local workforce and population data as one potential source to understand current profile and any under-representation based on age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation

2. Succession planning should be based around strategic need, context, organisational values, aspirations, capability assessments and risk

3. Those responsible for succession planning must be future focussed with a good understanding of future strategy and the likely capabilities needed in business-critical positions, and avoid talent 'tunnel vision' where the focus is purely on current skill needs and neglects to incorporate more diverse successors

4. Remember to balance the need for rotation with the need for knowledge retention, ensuring corporate memory and established best practice are not lost in the process of obtaining fresh insight and challenge

5. Intelligence related to the succession pipeline, both its depth and breadth, should extend to staff at multiple levels in the organisation or system, supported by a consistent talent identification process at local, regional and national level

# An introduction to succession planning

## Guiding principles

1. Approaches to succession planning should be undertaken beyond organisational and system boundaries, acknowledging that you won't be sighted on all talented individuals – seek to connect with talent teams/regional colleagues/HR networks to jointly review the *succession plan heat map* and how to maximise opportunities to fill vacant posts with a wealth of diverse skills and experience from across the health and social care system, rather than in a standalone organisation or function

2. Open and transparent *Scope for Growth - career conversations* with your workforce are paramount to understanding individual wants and needs with regards to personal development and career progression, and encourage a person-centred talent culture

3. When creating a process for identifying successors, as the starting point will likely have subjectivity, focus on overcoming this and making the process visible to all and without competition

4. Succession planning is a shared endeavour and responsibility for its success should be championed by the leadership team within an organisation and/or system

5. Any succession planning process should be underpinned by data, have metrics for measuring success and be reviewed regularly, rather than seen as a one-off activity

# Key succession planning components

## Short-term succession planning

Succession planning in the short-term involves identifying individuals with the potential to step in at short notice should a position require emergency cover due to absence, illness, sudden leave or an urgent area of work arises. It relates to reducing risk to the organisation or system in the short-term and providing contingency cover while more formal arrangements can be made or put into place. Risk and emergency cover planning should be consistent with Business Recovery plans.

Short-term succession planning will often look to the immediate successors for a post and will often present the opportunity for a Deputy to act up for a period of time and provide relevant stretch and development.

## Long-term succession planning

Long-term succession plans naturally have a longer planning horizon and look to the future needs of the organisation or system. This involves recognising and creating a talent pipeline of those with potential and helping them to develop, whilst recruiting a diverse mix of values, capability and skill.

Long-term succession planning activity feeds into the talent life cycle as it looks beyond the first few tiers of senior management within the organisation or system, and looks to support individuals with good performance, potential and aspirations to progress both map out and meet their developmental needs, whilst potentially being several pay bands away.

Succession planning needs to be concerned with developing longer-term, more diverse successors as well as short-term replacements. Talent pools and pipelines are likely to be considerably larger than the range of posts they cover.

# Key succession planning components

## Who does succession planning apply to?

Succession planning typically covers the most senior roles in an organisation or system, together with short and longer-term successors for these posts, regardless of how new in post an individual may be.

Organisations and systems who adopt an inclusive approach to managing and developing talent will look to identify critical roles and capabilities at multiple levels. It does not have to apply to every role, but it is useful to consider succession across different areas in an organisation or system, where jobs might be clustered by role, function or level so that generic skills can be developed.

The aim is to develop a pool of talented individuals, each one of whom is adaptable and capable of filling a variety of these roles, including roles for the future that don't fit within those currently prescribed.

## What are critical roles?

Critical roles are key to the success of the organisation, they may be individual senior or key positions, or several positions for which similar skills are needed or essential in emergencies i.e., technical roles that could leave an organisation vulnerable if not filled quickly. These differ for each organisation (even similar organisations).

A vacancy in a critical role will have a significant tangible impact on the ability of the organisation or system to deliver outputs, achieve milestones, or meet performance/ operational/ clinical/ budgetary requirements. Whilst arguably all roles in the NHS are critical in one way or another, it is helpful to prioritise them where possible, and in this context, focus on the key Executive and Non-Executive roles that formulate the Board or site-based teams if applicable.

Recognising that organisational and system requirements change regularly to meet new challenges or priorities, roles defined as critical can change over time to reflect these changes and should be amended accordingly.

# Key succession planning components

![NHS]

**Removing bias and how to be intentionally inclusive**

1. Whilst professional qualifications and work experience contribute to the selection process, organisations and systems should also consider those with additional lived experience of a marginalised/minority community of value, in addition to their professional expertise and experience.

2. Line managers and anyone involved in the succession planning process to be trained to identify what might cause bias to occur and what de-bias action can be taking to mitigate or remove biases – this should be an ongoing exercise as changing perceptions isn't a quick fix, and this activity should be endorsed by the senior leadership team.

3. The criteria, skills and abilities which are a requirement for candidates should be clear, transparent and accessible, with person specifications reviewed for diverse ways to demonstrate experience and skill. There is a risk however that current leaders inevitably view the requirements for success in the context of their own past journey to the role. It is important multiple perspectives are brought into the process, including inclusive HR advice, to counteract this and judgement isn't made by one individual alone.

4. Research by BITC* reveals that "Black, Asian and ethnic minority people value mentors more than other ethnic groups. They are more likely to want a mentor and more likely to value the impact of having one. Employees from Black, Asian, and ethnic minority backgrounds display high levels of career ambition but often feel a lack of opportunity for career progression in their workplaces." Organisations and systems should make mentors available and accessible to staff.

**N.B** this list is non-exhaustive and organisations or systems should continually look to conduct inclusive succession planning practice

# Best practice succession planning

The following stages are paramount to effective succession planning:
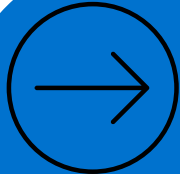
## 1. Identify business critical roles

- engage all stakeholders for clear accountability and advocacy for succession planning processes and outcomes

- assess which positions require a succession plan and review the identified roles to consider future options if the incumbent were to leave i.e., merger with another role, split into multiple roles or removed from structure completely

- map key leadership competencies required for the critical posts, being mindful that whilst this tests suitability based on past performance, it doesn't look for future potential to learn

- link these activities with wider talent management practices and organisational/system strategies

# Best practice succession planning

**2. Identify key talent readiness, requirements and opportunities**

- assessment tools and frameworks such as 360 evaluation, appraisals, *Scope for Growth - career conversations* and assessment centres should inform this to evaluate individuals' performance, potential and aspirations

- support colleagues to identify their career goals, aspirations and conduct a skills gap analysis

- this should be done with the knowledge of those being named as successors but do not guarantee roles to individuals who are seeking to move

- this should factor in individuals outside of the traditional organisational boundaries

# Best practice succession planning
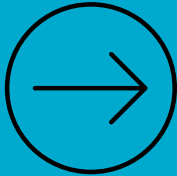
## 3. Create the succession plan

- be clear in the plan of an individual's level of readiness against the leadership competencies and what development they may need, including what steps will be taken to support this and establishment of timelines

- be proactive in providing and supporting opportunities to shadow, make possible lateral moves or undertake secondments

- Individuals placed onto the succession plan should also join the regional/national talent pools

# Best practice succession planning

**NHS**
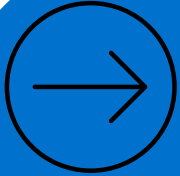
## 4. Assess and mitigate risks

- capture any risks and identify mitigating actions

- consider risks relating to lack of diversity, supply pipeline, selective plans and excluding timeframes

# Best practice succession planning

**NHS**
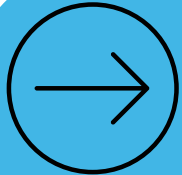
### 5. Measure impact and ongoing review

- decide on and create metrics for success that determine the strength of the leadership pipeline e.g., internal versus external, diversity of pipeline, average length of readiness to step into role etc.

- ensure there is a two-way feedback system in place and that individuals are contributing to their own career decisions throughout as well as meeting the organisational/system requirements

- look to continually review and improve the process;
  like most leadership development activity, the succession planning process is iterative and collecting data will help to understand and improve best practices

# What does good look like?
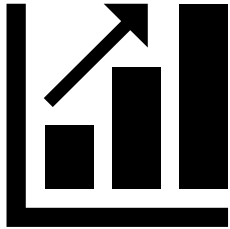
NHS

Increased % of successors from the most marginalised communities (I.e., black/disabled/trans or non-binary) on a succession plan
Increased % of successors from the most marginalised communities (I.e., black/disabled/trans or non-binary) progressing from middle management (B7-8c) to senior management (8d-VSM)

Critical positions with 2 or more identified successors
Increased % of successors who have potential to succeed more than one position

Reduced recruitment campaign costs
Reduced overall time to hire
Reduced reliance of interims or the use of search firms, due to increase in critical positions filled internally versus externally

# Postface
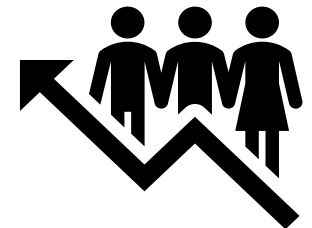
As mapped out in the future of HR and OD documentation devised as part of the People Plan, organisations and systems must have formal governance in place to enable senior involvement and oversight in talent management, succession planning and development.

Organisational and ICB CPO's should "create a vibrant and active succession planning framework within the people profession to ensure inclusive talent acquisition and management across systems and organisations"

Leadership capacity and capability is also a key inspection area by the CQC, with characteristics of services they would rate as good in this area including "compassionate, inclusive and effective leadership is sustained through a leadership strategy and development programme and effective selection, deployment and support processes and succession planning."

# Links and related resources

- NHS Leadership Academy Talent Management Toolkit

- NHS People Plan

- The future of NHS human resources and organisation development report

- Succession Planning template (incl. succession plan heatmap)

- Scope for Growth – career conversations – Coming Soon

- NHS Our Leadership Way – Coming Soon

- NHS Leadership Competency Frameworks – Coming Soon

- Types of unconscious bias with examples, effects and solutions

- WRES and WDES