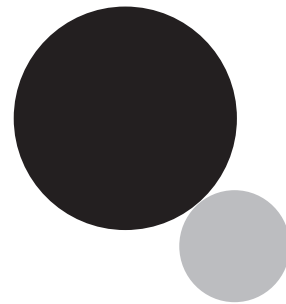


**Specifications for Job
Descriptions, Knowledge
and Skills Framework and
Employment Survey**



HQIP CA PD 015

for Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnership

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Specifications for Job Descriptions, Knowledge and Skills Framework and Employment Survey

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Background to the work

The project specifications for Job Descriptions, Knowledge and Skills Framework and Employment Survey is intended to support the professionalisation of clinical audit in NHS organisations. The project was focused on producing the following:

- a standardised set of job descriptions for clinical audit jobs
- a standardised set of person specifications for clinical audit jobs
- a standardised set of Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) specifications of core and specific dimensions and levels for clinical audit jobs
- a standardised set of full KSF outlines for clinical audit jobs

The job descriptions were produced based on two sources of evidence:

- a review of published job descriptions for clinical audit jobs
- a survey of clinical audit jobs in NHS organisations.

As a consequence of this work, NHS organisations will have available detailed guidance on the following:

- the structure of clinical audit jobs for NHS organisations
- the roles and responsibilities for various clinical audit jobs
- the KSF specifications for various clinical audit jobs
- the salary bands for various clinical audit jobs.

The guidance should help NHS organisations to achieve the following:

- assess if current numbers and levels of clinical audit staff are suitable
- enable development opportunities for staff in current clinical audit jobs
- review the current performance of clinical audit staff in clinical audit jobs

Project specifications

The project included completing the following work:

- researching published job descriptions for clinical audit-related roles
- drafting job descriptions and person specifications for the roles outlined in the outputs
- independently assessing the job descriptions and person specifications through the Agenda for Change evaluation process
- surveying staff who work in clinical audit about current structures, salary band levels and levels of responsibility.

The following job roles were to be included:

- Clinical Audit Administrator (Band 4)
- Clinical Audit Data Input Clerk (Band 4)
- Clinical Audit Facilitator/Analyst (Band 5)
- Clinical Audit Specialist (Band 6)
- Clinical Audit Practitioner (Band 7)
- Head of Clinical Audit (Band 8).

The following outputs were to be provided:

- job description for each job role
- person specification for each job role
- Agenda for Change scoring sheet for each job role
- primary KSF outline for each job role
- secondary KSF outline for each job role
- report from the survey of staff.

Project approach and components

Published job descriptions

We searched for any job descriptions related to clinical audit available through publicly accessible sources.

See the separate **Report on published job descriptions for clinical audit staff in NHS organisations** for our findings.

Survey of clinical audit job structures

We carried out a survey of clinical audit staff to learn the job structures, responsibilities and salary bands for clinical audit jobs in NHS organisations in England.

See the separate **Report on survey on clinical audit staff structure and roles in NHS organisations** for our findings.

Job descriptions and person specifications

We developed job descriptions and person specifications for the following job roles:

- Clinical Audit Administrator (Band 4)
- Clinical Audit Data Input Clerk (Band 4)
- Clinical Audit Facilitator/Analyst (Band 5)
- Clinical Audit Specialist (Band 6)
- Clinical Audit Practitioner (Band 7)
- Head of Clinical Audit (Band 8).

See the separate **Report on job descriptions, person specifications and KSF outlines for clinical audit staff in NHS organisations**.

KSF broad outlines and full outlines for job roles

Using the job descriptions developed, we developed a summary sheet identifying the core and specific dimensions and levels of the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework for each clinical audit job, along with KSF outlines for each job, including gateways. We also used the job descriptions and KSF outlines to complete job weighting for salary bands.

See the separate **Report on job descriptions, person specifications and KSF outlines for clinical audit jobs**.

Conclusions from project components

For convenience, we have abstracted conclusions from components of this project in this section to facilitate noting any consistencies and key themes in the findings.

Published job descriptions

The following conclusions are based on analysis of published job or role descriptions related to clinical audit jobs in NHS organisations.

- Few NHS organisations appear to have a job for managing clinical audit exclusively and it is not entirely clear how clinical audit is managed in NHS organisations. Jobs that include responsibility for management tend to be defined in relation to clinical governance; however, such jobs can be vague about defined accountability for managing clinical audit strategy, policies, programmes or support in the organisation.
- NHS organisations do not appear to recognise high-level expertise in clinical audit through salary bands of 7 or 6 for job titles such as Clinical Audit Specialist or Clinical Audit Practitioner. Where clinical audit jobs exist at salary bands of 7 or 6, they tend to be clinical audit-management related.
- The most frequently available clinical audit job description is for the title of Clinical Audit Facilitator; however, there isn't consistency in the salary bands for this job with Clinical Audit Facilitator jobs banded at 6, 5 or 4.
- Given the frequency of availability of published job descriptions related to clinical audit jobs, there is the possibility that clinical audit jobs tend to be at lower rather than higher salary bands. There are several different clinical audit jobs at salary band 4, for example, including Clinical Audit Facilitator, Clinical Audit Assistant, Clinical Audit Administrator, or Clinical Audit Filing Clerk.
- Some NHS organisations have designated some clinical audit jobs at low salary bands, including 3 and 2 for jobs such as Clinical Audit Assistant and Clinical Audit Filing and Admin Support.
- There appears to be little consistency across organisations in the use of titles for the various roles and the allocation of roles for the various titles.
- In general, clinical audit job descriptions appeared to emphasise carrying out specific tasks, such as clinical audit programmes and projects, and supporting others undertaking clinical audit projects through training and giving advice. There appeared to be less recognition of roles related to influencing the NHS organisation through development and implementation of strategies and policies and very little reference to the demonstrated achievement of measured improvements in the quality of patient care.

- The lines of accountability in the available clinical audit job descriptions demonstrate different perceptions of the organisational 'home' for clinical audit staff in NHS organisations. Clinical audit staff can be part of any of the following structures: governance, quality assurance or research.

Survey of clinical audit job structures

The following conclusions are based on the survey of structures of published job or role descriptions related to clinical audit jobs in NHS organisations.

- There is variation in every aspect that was included in the survey on clinical audit jobs, eg, staffing levels, salary bands, job titles, and accountabilities. The reasons for the variation are not explained by the size of NHS organisations or the organisation type. The reasons may include factors such as:
 - the 'positioning' of clinical audit in the organisation not only in terms of who the service reports to but also how clinical audit is used to promote the organisation's quality improvement and assurance strategies
 - the relationship of clinical audit to other activities related to the quality or safety of patient care
 - the track record of success of clinical audit in the organisation
 - the number of clinical divisions, directorates and services and the locations of services
 - the number of clinical audits required by external organisations.
- The lines of accountability indicate that there are different perceptions of the importance of clinical audit to NHS organisations and where clinical audit fits in the organisation's strategy. Clinical audit is accountable to quality improvement, risk reduction and safety, clinical effectiveness, clinical governance or research.
- The job title of Clinical Audit Facilitator is the most commonly used job title. However, there were four salary bands allocated to the job: 4, 5, 6 and 7. The long list of job titles in use and the number of commonly used job titles that cross more than two salary bands indicate inconsistency in the titles, roles and scope of clinical audit jobs.
- The variation in the perceived importance in the organisation of various responsibilities for clinical audit and the level of staff carrying out the responsibilities could indicate a lack of understanding of the clinical audit process in relation to quality improvement and lack of recognition of the knowledge and skills required to carry out the process effectively.

Job descriptions, person specifications and KSF outlines for clinical audit staff in NHS organisations

The following observations are based on the process of developing KSF outlines for clinical audit jobs.

- The term audit is referred to in *The NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (NHS KSF) and the Development Review Process* in the following ways:

- as an example of a formal evaluation that might prompt an improvement in the Description of Core Dimension 4 on Service Improvement and in Level 4 of Core Dimension 5 on Quality
- as an example of a task related to evaluating services in Level 1 of Core Dimension 4 on Service Improvement
- as an example of evaluating own and others' work in Level 2 of Core Dimension 4 on Service Improvement
- as an example of evaluating the effectiveness of service improvements in Level 4 of Core Dimension 4 on Service Improvement
- as an example of a purpose for gathering, analysing and interpreting data and information in the Description of Dimension IK2 on Information and Analysis.

These references represent clinical audit as an **evaluation tool** that produces data from which a decision might be made to make improvements in the quality of patient care or service. The **references do not represent clinical audit as a quality improvement process**. Also, the references do not acknowledge the technical knowledge and skills that are required to carry out clinical audit competently. For example, the following knowledge and skills are not referred to explicitly: selecting an appropriate sample size and type; developing valid measures of quality or safety of patient care; analysing problems in the provision of care to identify their root causes; and implementing changes in practice that result in measured improvements. Achieving changes in practice is acknowledged in the KSFs; however, the KSF indicators and examples of application do not relate to the clinical audit process.

- The term clinical audit is referred to in the *NHS Job Evaluation Handbook* only in the context of responsibilities for **research and development**. The implication of positioning clinical audit with research in the document is that clinical audit is a kind of 'informal' research. In the levels established under responsibilities for research and development, audit is under Level 1, the lowest of 6 Levels described. Only complex audits 'using research methodology for example specific one-off audits designed to improve a particular area or service' are positioned at Level 2. Again, the job evaluation process does not appear to recognise that clinical audit is a quality improvement not a research or evaluation process, and does not acknowledge the analysis and change stages of the clinical audit process.

In summary, the NHS documents that guide the process of positioning clinical audit staff in NHS organisations may have had the effect of holding back the development of the individuals in these jobs, and the effective implementation of the clinical audit process in NHS organisations.

- As a consequence of the representation of clinical audit in the KSF process, it is possible that the knowledge and skills needed for staff employed to support the clinical audit process in NHS organisations are systematically unrecognised and therefore that clinical audit staff are systematically undervalued in relation to other workers in the NHS.

- The review of published job descriptions for clinical audit staff and the survey of clinical audit jobs appear to confirm the systematic undervaluing of the knowledge and skills needed to drive the effective implementation of the clinical audit process in NHS organisations. Strategic, leadership or influential roles are scarcely referred to in job descriptions for clinical audit staff. However, based on our knowledge, expertise and judgement, we identified several dimensions in the KSF for which level 4 (the highest level) is appropriate for senior clinical audit staff, for example, communication, quality, and learning and development, all dimensions that encompass strategy, leadership and influence.
- Although there was a major effort to adopt the KSF approach in NHS organisations, there is variation among NHS organisations on how the KSF process is implemented and used as a basis for grading jobs and appraising performance in jobs. The organisational variation itself may contribute to the extensive amount of variation observed in the review of published job descriptions and in the clinical audit job survey of clinical audit job titles, responsibilities, salary bands and accountabilities.

Summary of conclusions

The conclusions are summarized in the table in order to identify key themes. The tick marks indicate the source(s) from which a conclusion has been derived.

Conclusions	Published job descriptions	Clinical audit staff survey	Job descriptions/ KSF outlines
It is not entirely clear how clinical audit is managed in NHS organisations; there is variation in the way clinical audit is managed	✓	✓	—
NHS organisations do not appear to recognise high-level expertise in clinical audit through salary bands of 8 or 7 or 6 for clinical audit jobs.	✓	✓	—
The most frequently occurring clinical audit job is Clinical Audit Facilitator There appears to be little consistency across NHS organisations in the use of titles and roles for clinical audit jobs	✓	✓	—
Clinical audit jobs appear to emphasize specific tasks and not strategic, leadership or influencing roles in NHS organisations	✓	✓	—
The lines of accountability for clinical audit demonstrate different perceptions of the place of clinical audit in NHS organisations, specifically quality improvement or assurance, governance, or research	✓	✓	✓

The extensive variations among clinical audit jobs, along with the undervaluing of knowledge and skills related to clinical audit in the formal job evaluation processes in the NHS, may contribute to systematic bias in judging the contribution of these jobs to the NHS. These factors also may contribute to the clinical audit process not realising its potential as a potentially powerful quality improvement process that benefits patients and the quality and safety of patient care.

Recommendations

Based on our completion of review of published job descriptions related to clinical audit staff; carrying out a survey of clinical audit staff on structures and salary bands for clinical audit jobs; and developing job descriptions, person specifications and KSF outlines for specified clinical audit jobs in NHS organisations, we can offer some recommendations to HQIP for taking the work on clinical audit staff jobs forward in the NHS.

Our recommendations for consideration by HQIP are as follows.

- HQIP should work with relevant national organisations to develop a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities in jobs in NHS organisations that relate to clinical governance and assurance, particularly in relation to clinical audit and the priority given to managing and supporting clinical audit activities in NHS organisations in these jobs.
- HQIP should actively promote the need for a Head or Manager of Clinical Audit in order to focus more clearly accountability and responsibility for an NHS organisation's performance in clinical audit.
- HQIP should actively promote the clinical audit jobs of Clinical Audit Practitioner and Clinical Audit Specialist at salary bands 7 and 6 in order to promote the further development of scientifically-based knowledge about best practice in clinical audit and the routine application of that knowledge in NHS organisations.
- HQIP should promote the separation of various jobs now under the title of Clinical Audit Facilitator in many NHS organisations, establish a single recommended appropriate salary band for the job of Clinical Audit Facilitator and encourage staff in the facilitator role to aspire to the higher salary band jobs of Clinical Audit Practitioner and Clinical Audit Specialist.
- HQIP should replace the recommended job title of Clinical Audit Data Input Clerk with the job title of Clinical Audit Assistant, which allows for this job to be used more flexibly in NHS organisations and allows individuals in the job to carry out more of a range of tasks.