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Health Education and  
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# NHS Wales guide to Succession Planning

Guidance notes



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## What is succession planning?

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Succession planning is the process of selecting and developing key talent to ensure the continuity of critical roles across NHS Wales. It's about the early identification of top performers in the organisation who could be the next potential leaders of the future. Succession planning aims to monitor, train, and develop talent throughout NHS Wales with the vision to place them into leadership roles.

In the current climate of a competitive employment market and competing high level roles within the private sector it's important to note that employees get promoted, move companies, and retire at a high pace. Succession planning enables critical roles to have a plan in place that ensures there is a talent pool readily available to fill those roles as and when required with applicants that are equipped and ready to step into the role.

Succession planning is about critical and hard to fill roles, it should focus on roles that are vital to the organisation's competitiveness and continuity.

The focus is on selecting and developing key talent, meaning that for those identified roles the selected talent is nurtured and developed into the future leaders of NHS Wales. As an organisation grows it has been identified that it is more cost-effective and seamless for an organisation to develop and promote from within an organisation to ensure continuity and stability.

Succession planning is the responsibility of organisational leaders and is nested within an organisation's People strategy, which aligns with the organisation's business strategy. Successful planning depends on the full involvement to rise to and succeed in a key position (leader or non-leader), is a critical requirement of succession planning. This can involve upskilling a high-potential candidate to grow or acquire skills needed for their future career.

Employee's development requires an employer to regularly evaluate an employee's readiness, to the degree to which their skills and experiences meet the requirements of the targeted succession role or roles for which they have been identified. The employer also must determine how long before the individual would be considered "ready now" to take on the role. This process helps an organisation to build its bench strength with several diverse candidates in the pipeline who are "ready now" to fill key roles. Ideally, as the process moves forward, the organisation will have identified more than one successor for each key role, and at least one of those will be "ready now" for each key role.

# Why is succession planning important?

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Succession planning is important to ensure we have an organisational development plan for the future leaders across NHS Wales. A succession plan reduces risk and disruption and enables business continuity in the case of an expected or unexpected departure.

The desire to promote from the 'home-grown' talent pool is particularly apparent where there is a high degree of organisation-specific knowledge in business-critical roles.

They have relevant operational experience, understand cultural nuances, and have benefitted from 'in-house' leadership programmes. Succession planning can help retain top talent as they are aware of internal opportunities to progress their careers. It is therefore central to the internal element of talent management programmes across NHS Wales.

Succession planning is highly linked to retention within the organisation. Using succession planning in conjunction with the local Retention plans will encourage success of the work being undertaken in this area.

Succession planning can be considered as a critical tool to the success of the future leadership within the organisation, it ensures vacancies are not open for extended periods of time or filled on an interim basis by people who are yet to acquire the training, development or skills to undertake such a critical role. Knowing who is in line to fill the next senior position and being able to mentor these individuals to the next generation of leadership is vital to maintain the continuity of high-level leaders and team morale.

- ❏ Key knowledge and expertise can be transferred rather than lost when someone in a critical role departs.
- ❏ Succession planning gives high-potential and high-performing individuals a clear career path within NHS Wales.
- ❏ It helps the organisation plan and prepare for future leadership requirements. This reassures the board that the organisation has a long-term strategy to plan and create a succession pipeline.
- ❏ It will help boost an employee's engagement and retention with defined objectives to their career path in NHS Wales. A study by software advice states that 94% of employers said that succession planning positively impacts their employee's engagement levels. Also 90% of workers said that they would be more likely to stay in an organisation where talent and career paths were defined.
- ❏ A succession plan presents a national, structured approach to preparing the next generation of leaders practicing compassionate leadership and developed leadership skills to steer the organisation forward.
- ❏ Succession planning is a cost-effective model, saving expenditure on external hiring for roles which can escalate to thousands of pounds recruiting, onboarding and training.
- ❏ Easier integration into the role with a structured and defined training path, resulting in a shorter term 'settling-in' period once stepping into the role.

# Steps to succession planning

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- ❏ Communicate the strategy to board and key stakeholders with the idea to form a fully collaborative network within the organisation. This will help consolidate a 'one team' approach to succession planning. The strategy is very important for all the team to be familiar with and to work together toward the shared vision of what succession planning is and how best to achieve great results. Regular updates to board and setting timelines for each action will ensure that each stage is being discussed and progressed in order to achieve quality and impact within your local organisation.
- ❏ Access to 'Gwella' to utilise the resource hub with a full toolkit of guides and templates that can be used and developed for your organisation. Gwella will host the NHS Wales succession planning and talent management Resource Hub which will host the succession planning template. The use of the succession planning template will be critical to use in your journey within your local organisation. Other resources are also available to be able to support in other areas of your talent journey.
- ❏ Identify critical roles. Critical Roles can differ from each organisation. The guides are non-prescriptive in regards to the definition of critical roles as this can vary greatly locally. Critical roles are defined as roles that are key to the smooth, effective running of your organisation and are generally difficult to fill. These roles can also be thought of as significant if the current incumbent were to suddenly leave or become unwell.
- ❏ Refer to the NHS Wales succession planning and talent management cycle fact-finder document. This document will provide necessary questions and discussion topics with key members of the succession planning and talent management journey. This document will help outline some of the key questions to not only start your journey but to focus your minds as to where you are in your journey and where you would like to get to.
- ❏ Discuss the above with the key departments for example, line manager, current incumbent, L&D/W&OD, HR and local retention lead. It is important to ensure that you collaborate with key departments and individuals with your succession plan. For succession planning to be impactful in your organisation it will require a team effort and alignment with the end goals which will stretch across a multitude of departments.
- ❏ Identify candidates, readiness, requirements and opportunity. This will be a part of the succession planning tool but will be down to the organisation to record this data and how best to implement the succession planning strategy and timelines locally.
- ❏ Create a succession plan (using the excel succession plan template). The succession plan must include timescales, development opportunities, programmes to attend, shadowing etc. All of this is included in the template and can be used as a point of reference to record an individual's journey stage by stage.
- ❏ Risk assess. It's important to assess the risk within your current structure of how 'at risk' the organisation would be if the current incumbent of a critical role were to leave. This will help to focus the succession planning work and understand the timelines of 'readiness' for critical roles.

- Measure and review against timescales. In order to achieve a high standard of quality and impact it's important to review and measure the succession plans. Are the right roles being identified as critical? Are the steps to readiness being followed? Is the training/succession plan helping to get the candidate to the level of readiness required and 'in-time'.

Succession plans should be created with the candidates in question, and it should be a fully transparent process with the potential successors aware that this does not guarantee them a role.

## Equality, fairness and transparency

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The succession planning process should be one of fairness, openness, and full transparency to the task ahead and the hopes of transition/succession into a role. It is important that the employee understands that this does not secure the role, it develops them to get the best opportunity to be 'ready' to transition. With openness should go fairness; objective assessments of all potential successors needs to be made, with the view to create a development plan.

Talent reviews/career conversations/PDR's provide opportunity to support and/or challenge in this area and to examine how to improve the process and practice. With the value of diversity and inclusion now widely recognised, organisations are increasingly aware of the need to ensure that diverse talent is properly developed and that diversity considerations are built into talent development activities and talent pools.

## Local contextual points to consider

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- What is your starting point, who are your key stakeholders that need to be on-board with your succession planning? What stage is your organisation at with talent management? This will help define the steps you need to take.
- At what level would the succession plans work in your organisation? To start you might want to start with critical roles or top talent roles and then filter this downwards.
- How will candidates be identified? What is your current review process?
- Who will create the succession plans?
- How will the succession plan be accessible?
- How often will development be reviewed?
- What do you want to achieve?