

## The e-KSF tool - Briefing for IT departments

Tim Newham, April 2006

### What is the Knowledge and Skills Framework?

The Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) is the staff development part of Agenda for Change. It will be mandatory for large proportions of NHS employees to have a KSF-based job description (*called a post outline, in KSF language*) and an annual KSF-based appraisal (*called a joint review*). Organisations will be required to report back on their progress on implementing the KSF, which should be complete by October 2006, as measured by every affected member of staff having a KSF-based personal development plan

### What is the e-KSF tool?

The e-KSF tool is a web-based application, developed in partnership with the Department of Health, to make it easier for organisations to implement the KSF. The tool is funded by the DoH Pay Modernisation Unit, and so is available free-of-charge at point of use. Central development, maintenance, hosting and user support are all provided centrally. The only IT requirement of the local organisation is to provide suitable internet access, PCs, and sufficient IT skills training to ensure that staff members can use the website.

### What data does the e-KSF hold?

The e-KSF database holds information about employees, employee development and the KSF. The following is an overview list:

- **Employee details** – including name, email address, manager name, staff group, job title, department
- **KSF Post outlines** – post outline title, dimensions, levels, indicators and examples of application
- **Employee achievements against KSF** – which post outline each employee holds, and how they are progressing against each KSF dimension (with evidence)
- **Employee development** – personal development plans for each employee, including identified sources of funding, and the individual's evaluation of their learning
- **Organisations' development provision** – an optional module to track the organisation's provision of courses and other learning approaches
- **Employee objectives** – an optional module to capture an individual's performance objectives and record progress against these.

All of this data is provided to users via a pure web-based interface. Aggregate data can be accessed and exported via online reports.

The e-KSF does not replicate payroll systems, but is likely to have overlaps and links with other HR, learning management and employee development systems.

## **What about the Electronic Staff Record?**

The Electronic Staff Record (ESR) is being provided in England and Wales to manage HR and payroll data, and is being implemented between 2005 and 2008/9. ESR will not manage KSF data or processes. All relevant data held in the e-KSF tool will automatically be linked to the ESR, and vice versa, with no input required from local NHS organisations.

Much of the work required to provide data for the e-KSF (for example, identifying who will review whom) would also be required for the ESR, so the e-KSF project can be seen as a stepping stone towards ESR implementation. The e-KSF and ESR teams will work together to ensure that change-over between systems will be as seamless as possible for users and organisations.

## **What technology does the e-KSF tool use?**

The e-KSF tool is purely web-based, residing on a set of servers in Bristol. The e-KSF data is stored in an SQL database, and the tool is built using .Net (dot Net). Web pages are served as dynamic html over SSL (secure sockets layer). No cookies or client plug-ins are used. The servers are physically and electronically secure, and data is backed up on-site and off-site daily.

The e-KSFNow news and information site also contains a Flash-based interactive guide. This guide is not critical for the implementation of the e-KSF, but will reduce user training and queries. Therefore the “Flash” plug-in is a useful addition to users’ PCs.

## **What is the minimum technical specification I need to run the e-KSF?**

- **Client**
  - Being web-based, there is no specific software required on client computers, other than an internet browser. Internet Explorer 6 or above, and Adobe Acrobat Reader 6.0, are required. Recommended operating systems are Windows 2000 / XP.
  - A screen resolution of 1024x768 is recommended (the tool will function on screens of 800x600, but with large amounts of scrolling).
  - Client PCs need access to the internet (note – this is an internet-based tool, not an NHSNet-based one). For maximum value, all staff would have access to internet-based computers. However, the tool can be implemented with only manager-type users having access.
  - The e-KSF has been developed for Windows (PC) machines only.
- **Network**
  - Although the e-KSF tool will function over dial-up (56kbps) networks, ADSL (broadband) or cable connections are strongly recommended.

## What else do I need to know?

### **Identifying users**

e-KSF currently uses email addresses as unique login identifiers – which means that all users of the system need an allocated and known email address (but note that this email address doesn't necessarily have to be active). We're about to implement alternative methods of identifying users, allowing you to choose from local payroll numbers, NI numbers, mobile phone numbers or user-defined usernames – all together with personal passwords.

If you have organisational systems which already hold information about employees (for example payroll or HR systems), we can build links between your existing systems and the e-KSF (usually using *web services*). These links are not part of the DoH funded project, so would incur a local cost. We can handle the following models of data sharing:

- Uploading of spreadsheets – for older systems, we can take emailed spreadsheets of data from you on a regular basis and upload them to e-KSF manually. The first upload of data is provided free-of-charge provided spreadsheets are completed in the format defined by us.
- One-way automatic transfer – if you prefer to use your current system as the master source of all employee data, we can build automatic scripts to regularly take data from your system and write it to the e-KSF system
- Two-way synchronisation – maintaining constant links between your system and the e-KSF, so that wherever data is entered both systems are updated virtually instantaneously.

### **Safe lists and trusted sites**

The web address of the e-KSF tool is [www.e-ksf.org](http://www.e-ksf.org). Further information can be found on our news and information site – [www.e-ksfnw.org](http://www.e-ksfnw.org). Please add these two sites to any “safe list” that you may have, to avoid the site or the emails that the site automatically generates to users, being blocked. Adding [www.e-ksf.org](http://www.e-ksf.org) to users’ “trusted sites” also minimises any potential problems.

### **Pop-up blockers**

The e-KSF also makes extensive use of pop-ups to aid user navigation, so please also ensure that any pop-up blockers your organisation uses are also set to allow pop-ups from the e-KSF web addresses.

To remove an IE pop-up blocker, open an IE window, click on the Tools menu > Pop up Blocker > Select the option ‘Turn off Pop up Blocker’.

You can also right click on the Internet Explorer's toolbar (the area displaying the Standard buttons for Back and Forward etc), and uncheck the items from the list displayed, as one of them (except Address Bar and Standard Buttons), might be preventing pop-ups being displayed.

### **Support**

User support is currently offered during UK daytime-working hours. All users of the system should be informed of how to use the support functions during their training. This support is focused on the technical aspects of using the tool – as long as the individual can access the internet with the correct version of client software, other technical support is our responsibility.

## Possible Internet Explorer and Adobe Acrobat Settings

If your users experience problems using e-KSF, we've found that they may be solved by changing certain settings on client PCs:

- **Internet Explorer Settings**

Specific internet explorer settings should be configured as follows:

**On Security Tab** - Click on the Custom Settings. If the Security Level is "Custom", certain settings should be in place.

**Under the heading 'Downloads'**, Option 1 'Automatic prompting for file downloads' should be 'Enabled'. Option 2 'File download' should be Enabled.

**Under the heading 'Miscellaneous'**, Option 4 'Allow script initiated windows without size or position constraints' should be Enabled.

**On Privacy Tab**, Uncheck Block Pop ups option and make sure that no other pop up blocker is installed on the machine.

- **Adobe Acrobat Settings**

Please make sure you have Adobe Acrobat 6 or higher installed on your machine. When Adobe Acrobat is installed on your machine, kindly check the following:

1) Go to:

Internet Explorer-> Tools menu-> Internet Options-> Advanced tab

Go to the Security section all the way at the bottom.

Clear the check on the "Do not save encrypted pages to disk"

Close all Internet Explorer (IE) windows

Start IE and download the file again

2) Please make sure you do not have multiple versions of Adobe installed on your machine. In that case, please uninstall the other versions and make sure you have only one active Adobe version which should be version 6 or higher.

3) Also check the Adobe integration with the browser.

You can do this by launching the Adobe Version 7 application, Click on Edit Menu, Click on Preferences, Choose the category = Internet from the left pane. Under the 'Web Browser Options' group box, please select the check box 'Display PDF in Browser' and press OK to save your settings.

4) It might be possible that the PDF extension on the machine is associated with the wrong program.

If you are using Windows 2000 / XP, 'right click' on the file. Click 'Open With' and choose 'Acrobat'. Finally click on the check box of 'Always use this program'.

If you are using Windows 98, press 'Shift and right click' on the file. Click 'Open With' and choose 'Acrobat'. Finally click on the check box of 'always use this program'.

5) Another possibility can be after pressing the PRINT button for PDF report, before the actual report is generated, an Open / Save Dialog box appears. Kindly use the 'Save' option, to save the PDF and open the PDF report from your local drive, if the 'Open' option does not work.

## What does my organisation need to decide?

For organisations deciding to use the e-KSF tool, discussions need to take place around:

- **The implementation strategy** – whether to pilot with some groups first or go for a “big bang” approach.
- **Identification of an administrator** – the person charged with recording approval of post outlines and potentially maintaining the user records to take account of new starters/leavers/changes in details.
- **The training strategy for the e-KSF tool** – all users of the e-KSF tool would need to be trained in its use, and this training may be best carried out by IT trainers.
- **The IT resources** – does the organisation have sufficient internet access points, and sufficient staff trained in using the internet?
- **How to populate the user data** – see also integration, below, but if integration is not the preferred option it would still be sensible to identify electronic sources of user data (e.g. payroll systems, or email systems) so that basic information can be uploaded to the tool in bulk.
- **Whether to integrate the e-KSF tool** with local HR or other staff data systems (for which a business case is recommended – with the initial cost being weighed up against the reduction in administration effort and costs). If integration is the preferred option, more detailed discussions need to take place with the e-KSF technical team.

*For more information about e-KSF, please contact [support@e-ksf.org](mailto:support@e-ksf.org) or see [www.e-ksfnow.org](http://www.e-ksfnow.org)*

*For more information about the KSF overall, please see [www.wise.nhs.uk](http://www.wise.nhs.uk)*