

Knowledge for Healthcare

Mobilising evidence; sharing knowledge; improving outcomes

Executive summary



A strategic framework for
NHS Knowledge and Library Services
in England 2021-2026

Developing people
for health and
healthcare

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1. Our ambition

Healthcare is a knowledge industry. “It is not enough to have the right teams in the right place, collaborating to deliver high quality, efficient patient care. It is essential that they use the right knowledge and evidence at the right time.”¹

It is through education, and sharing knowledge, research evidence and best practice, that we continue to inspire and inform innovation and improvements in healthcare, patient safety and outcomes.

Information will “increasingly become the currency of healthcare, and our ability to access, understand and interpret it at individual and population level will be a key determinant in the future success of our healthcare system”² NHS knowledge and library services are crucial to unlocking this value. Every day more than a

million decisions are made across the healthcare sector which have a profound and lasting impact on people’s lives, influencing both the quality and cost of health services.³ Knowledge and evidence are business critical because the quality of care, patient safety and service transformation is underpinned by informed decision-making.

As the strategic lead for NHS knowledge and library services on behalf of the system, Health Education England is committed to a compelling ambition to drive transformation and success across the healthcare system.

Our ambition

NHS bodies, their staff, learners, patients and the public use the right knowledge and evidence, at the right time, in the right place, enabling high quality decision-making, learning, research and innovation, to achieve excellent healthcare and health improvement.



Building on the achievements during the first phase from 2015-20, Health Education England is:

- investing in a high-quality digital knowledge infrastructure to meet the requirements of staff and learners
- empowering the NHS knowledge and library services workforce with the skills and confidence to deliver the vision
- shaping forward-looking and innovative health knowledge and information services

Through phase two, 2021-26, we will work with our partners to harness this capability to successfully transform policy, practice and health outcomes in line with the NHS Long Term Plan.⁴

The priorities are to enable all NHS staff and learners to benefit equally from high-quality knowledge services, and to optimise the expertise of knowledge service teams to inform decision-making from Board to ward, at the bedside and in community and primary care settings.

Knowledge and Library Specialists

Take the 'heavy lifting' out of getting evidence into practice



Health Education England



"It helps the committee to provide an objective viewpoint and to take things forward for best outcomes for patients. It saves me and the committee a lot of time, when we receive clear literature advice."

Clinical Change Management Group

The Deputy Library and Knowledge Service Manager at University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust is a member of the Clinical Change Management Group, the purpose of which is to ensure a systematic approach is taken to proposed changes of clinical practice, new service models, and extensions to scope of practice.

Pertinent evidence is made available through objective and comprehensive searches, delivered in a timely, easily digestible format leading to a reliable evidence base for the group.

M Krishna Lingam, Consultant Surgeon and Chair of CCMG, working with the library team at University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust.



1.1 Our purpose

This strategy sets direction and priorities for the development of NHS knowledge and library services in England 2021-2026.

Our ambition is to optimise the use of evidence and knowledge for policy and practice and maximise value for money. There is renewed focus on:

- getting the right team, resources and services in place
- mobilising evidence and knowledge
- enabling resource discovery
- assuring the quality of knowledge services
- improving health literacy
- developing the knowledge and library services workforce

Excellent knowledge services require strategic buy-in, collaboration and commitment to maximise investment, nationally, locally and across health systems.

We encourage Boards to strengthen their capability to manage knowledge and mobilise evidence, getting the right expertise, roles and resources in place to realise the business benefits of NHS knowledge services in our digital age.

Health Education England operates as part of a broad ecosystem bringing knowledge, research and evidence to the workforce. Partnership working is central to sharing best practice, optimising limited resources and reducing duplication.

A strong scientific tradition of evidence-based decisions about care is one of the organising principles which have stood the test of time for the NHS.⁴ Indeed, a duty to promote “the use in the health service of evidence obtained from research” is embodied in legislation.⁵



“By offering an ‘open door’ for anyone looking for answers, being non-judgemental, providing clinical decision support and digital resources 24 hours a day, NHS knowledge specialists put the evidence into evidence-based practice.”

Patrick Mitchell

Director of Innovation and Transformation,
Health Education England

“Evidence does not speak for itself but needs to be mobilised at the right time, and through the right people, to make a difference in decision making.”⁶

1.2. Embracing new opportunities

The Service needs more people, “working differently by embracing new ways of working in teams, across organisations and sectors, and supported by technology.”⁷

Library and knowledge specialists have a key role in empowering all NHS staff and learners, in all disciplines, specialities and settings, to respond effectively, seizing these opportunities. This calls for knowledge services, information products, tools and techniques delivered ‘just in time’ and ‘just for me’.

This also calls for the creative use of library space to enable the spread of organisational innovation and to address digital poverty.

Supplying the evidence base to the NHS, the work of knowledge specialists enables organisations, teams and individuals to use evidence and share ‘know-how’. This strengthens:

- decision-making by practitioners and teams
- the Service at strategic and policy level
- the performance of healthcare organisations



Figure 1: Strengthening the Service

2. The next phase

Health Education England aspires to lead the development of world-class knowledge services, enabling the NHS to deliver excellent healthcare and health improvement.

Demand for knowledge services has grown, with a 30% increase in service users since 2014 shown in the annual statistical returns submitted by NHS Library Services 2018-19. During phase one we have established a strong evidence base on which to found the next phase of Knowledge for Healthcare. We have demonstrated the value proposition for NHS knowledge services, the benefits of aligning health librarians with multi-professional teams, the importance of implementing equitable funding.

Using this evidence base, and taking a phased approach, Health Education England will work with partners to achieve equity of access and opportunity delivered by:

The right resources: Informed by an independent audit,⁸ our ambition is to ensure that knowledge services have the right resources to offer the right services. An independent cost consequence analysis⁹ demonstrates the return on investment

The right team with the right roles: Services with more knowledge specialists work with more teams, releasing more time for care, having a greater impact¹⁰

The right services: Knowledge services built on the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion.



2.1 The right resources

Health librarians use their expertise to take the 'heavy lifting' out of getting evidence into practice and give the 'gift of time' to healthcare professionals.⁹

The core value proposition is simple: "The service provides healthcare professional staff with time-saving accelerated access to better quality evidence which, in turn, enables the NHS to meet its statutory obligations to utilise evidence from research, and, as importantly, for healthcare professionals to use their time more effectively to drive improvements against the quadruple aim."⁹

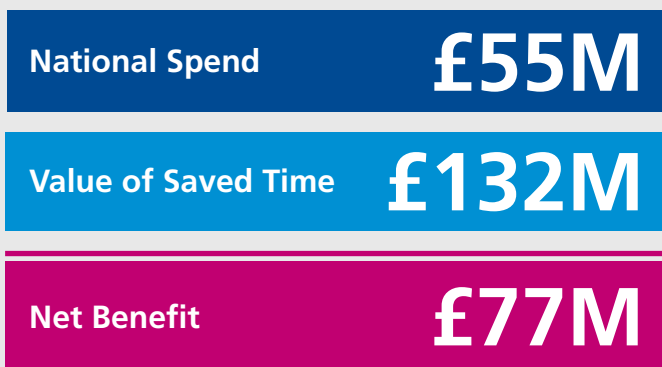
An independent study commissioned by Health Education England found that:

- There is a growing and consistent body of robust international evidence to support this value proposition⁹.
- Recent research from the NHS shows similar benefits
- Assuming findings from the international literature are applicable, knowledge services are potentially already generating an overall economic benefit of £132m p.a. for the NHS, delivering a net economic benefit of £77m per annum

The economic value could increase to £106m per annum were target staff ratios for librarians achieved.

Health Education England is committed to achieving equitable and sustainable funding for NHS knowledge and library services irrespective of the setting in which staff are based.

An equitable funding model will enable delivery of the full benefits of knowledge services to inform evidence-based care and innovation for the NHS across England.



The economic value could increase to £106m per annum were target staff ratios for librarians achieved.

Figure 2: The economic benefit



2.2 The right team

We see growing demand for embedded knowledge brokers responsible for searching and presenting synthesised and summarised evidence. Today's NHS requires proactive knowledge services with a blend of expertise including:

- Posts embedded in clinical and management teams delivering decision-ready information
- Knowledge managers who mobilise both organisational knowledge and staff know-how to underpin strategy and operations

The independent study demonstrated that in clinical time savings alone, knowledge and library services provide a benefit cost ratio of 1.5:1. The potential time saving where a librarian embedded within a team undertakes an evidence review is higher, and including the wider benefits for staff and patients within the context of critical care, the overall benefit cost ratio increased to 3:1⁹.

To fully realise this value, Health Education England recommends that all NHS organisations aspire to improve staffing ratios for knowledge specialists per member of the NHS workforce.¹⁰ This can be achieved through incremental steps redesigning services and roles as well as expanding this specialist workforce.

“Library and knowledge services form the backbone of all our efforts to provide healthcare staff with the necessary tools to acquire and disseminate knowledge. The use of specialist clinical librarians, patient education librarians and appropriate technology is indispensable in a modern NHS.”

Mr. Kalidasan Varadarajan

Director of Medical Education
Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals
NHS Trust

2.3 The right services

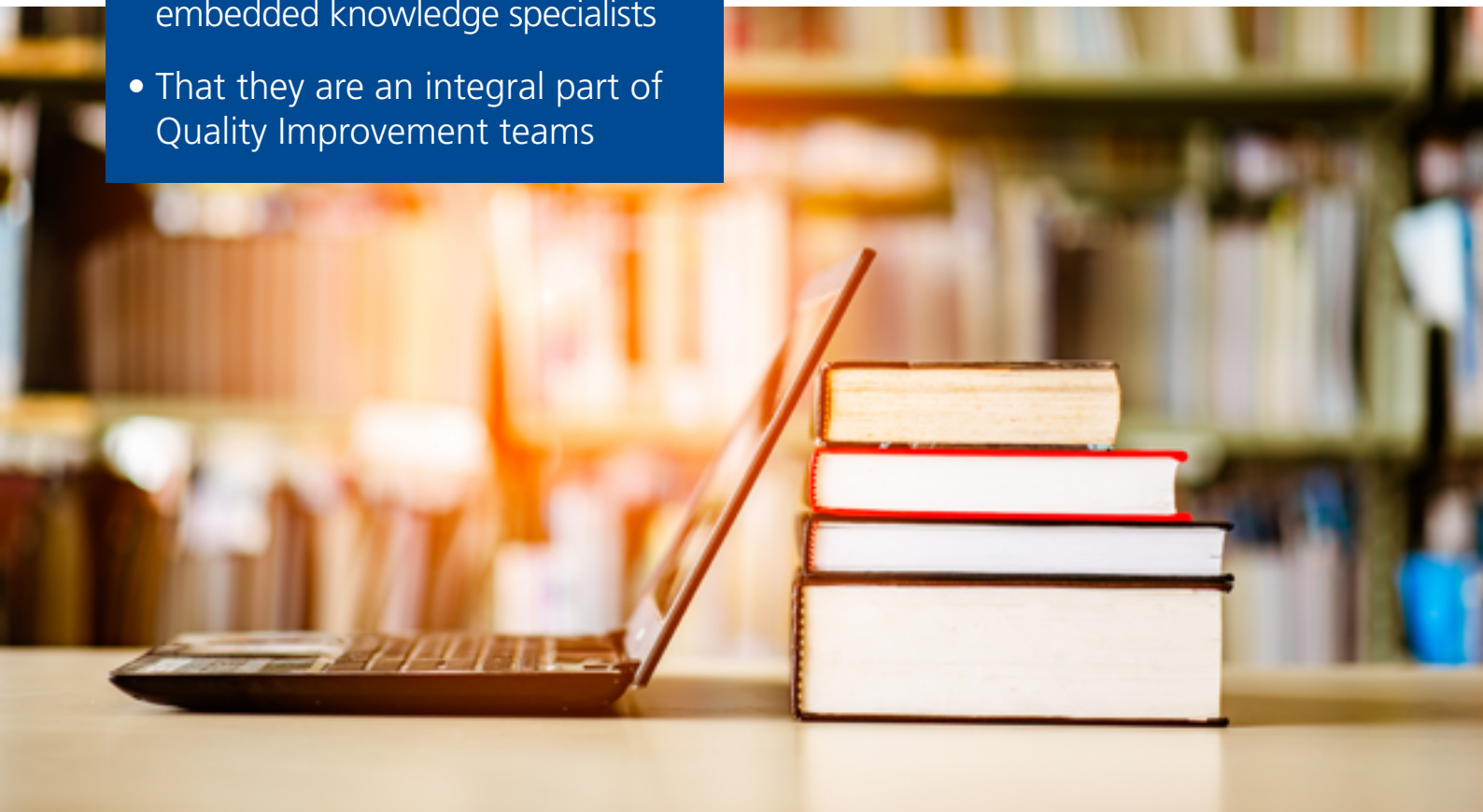
An independent study, incorporating a review of three high performing knowledge services hosted in trusts rated as outstanding by the Care Quality Commission,⁹ demonstrated the key features of a high performing NHS library service.

Key features of a high performing NHS library service include:

- The positioning of the Knowledge and Library Service in relation to the Clinical Practice Guidelines Committees (senior leadership role)
- A leadership role in the governance and management of knowledge resources and assets (e-platforms)
- That there is specialty/departmental alignment, preferably with embedded knowledge specialists
- That they are an integral part of Quality Improvement teams

As the system leader for NHS knowledge and library services, we will:

- Advocate our policy that all NHS staff can “freely access library and knowledge services”¹
- Contribute to building a digitally inclusive workforce by providing access to digital content and helping staff and learners develop the necessary skills
- Work with information producers to encourage content development that is culturally sensitive and reflects the needs of the population
- Train knowledge teams to understand and adopt the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion
- Partner with information providers to develop the health literacy of citizens, underpinned by essential digital skills

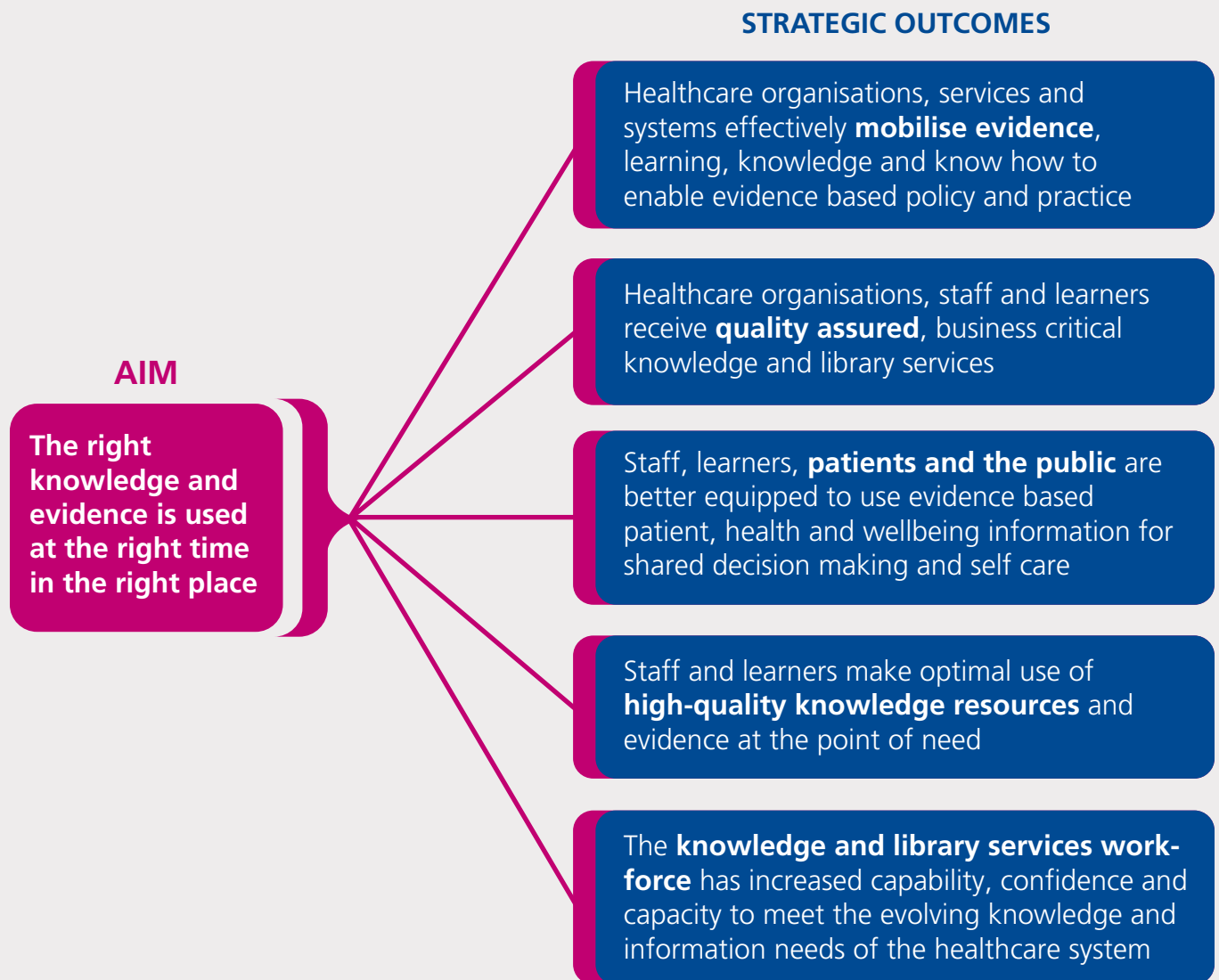


3. Turning the strategy into action

Bringing together all the evidence, we used driver diagrams as a quality improvement technique to shape this iteration of the strategy.

This approach allowed leads to engage with members of working groups, and stakeholders, exploring the factors to be addressed to achieve the overall ambition.

Driver diagrams act as a useful visual communication tool that map interdependencies. We identified five primary drivers of the transformation needed to deliver on our ambition.



4. Mobilising evidence and knowledge

“Healthcare is a knowledge industry. Decisions are not made in isolation but must take account of individual and organisational knowledge as well as the best available evidence. Enabling the workforce to access and use high-quality evidence is fundamental to the delivery of high-quality care.”¹

The NHS requires proactive knowledge services. These business-critical services call for a blend of expertise, encompassing:

- embedded roles in clinical and management teams
- knowledge managers who mobilise corporate knowledge and staff ‘know-how’

Knowledge specialists release the time of health professionals by seeking out evidence and good practice. They synthesise and summarise information to deliver information that is decision-ready.

They also “nurture a learning culture which is critical to transformation, efficiency and innovation within the NHS.”¹ Knowledge specialists assist researchers and knowledge translation.

The Health Education England team will provide professional advice and consultancy to enable organisations to mobilise evidence from research and learning from practice.

We will use an online mobilising evidence and knowledge self-assessment tool to help organisations identify their needs and priorities for knowledge management.



Figure 3: Mobilising evidence and knowledge self-assessment tool

Our ambition is for the healthcare workforce to:

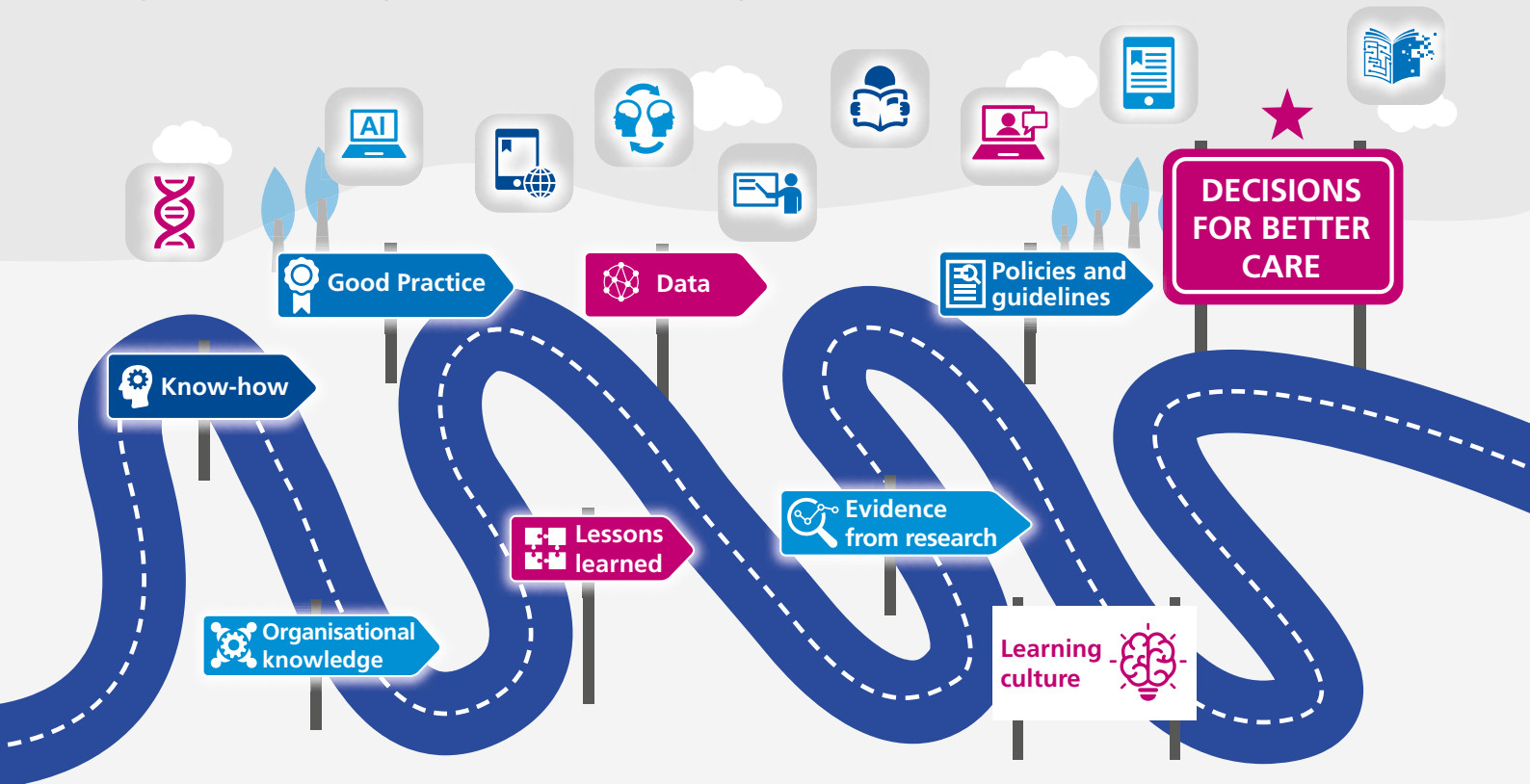
- Apply and use evidence
- Build know-how
- Continue to learn
- Drive innovation

Our ambition is for the healthcare workforce to Apply and use evidence, Build know-how, Continue to learn and Drive innovation. We will:

- raise awareness amongst healthcare staff of approaches, tools, techniques and models to spread and adopt innovation.
- equip knowledge specialists to nurture innovation.
- provide engaging resources to help healthcare staff gain confidence in [knowledge mobilisation](#).
- build the [information skills](#) and research confidence of healthcare workers.

Harnessing technological advances offers the potential for the NHS to better mobilise knowledge.

Figure 4: Mobilising evidence and knowledge



Based on Lambe, A. (2018) Knowledge Management Toolkit. Leeds: NHS England and NHS Improvement



5. Quality and impact

As the steward of national NHS investment in knowledge and library services, Health Education England assures the quality of these services, driving improvement and innovation on behalf of patients, carers, families and the tax-payer.

We will:

- Implement the Quality and Improvement Outcomes Framework with a national assurance process integrated within the Health Education England Quality Framework as a requirement of the Education Contract with providers¹¹
- Amplify #AMillionDecisions - our joint advocacy initiative with CILIP, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals.
- Promote our Value and Impact Toolkit to demonstrate the difference that knowledge services make to patient care
- Showcase and share good practice via innovation awards
- Build the evidence base for the value and impact of knowledge and library services
- Equip knowledge and library practitioners to enhance their own research skills.
- Evaluate the implementation and impact of the Knowledge for Healthcare strategy

Our policy advocates that library study and wellbeing space should be available to all staff, educators and learners both during and outside the working hours of the knowledge and library services team.



“Our Library and Knowledge Service enables us to be a learning organisation, ensuring our staff are well supported to make informed decisions and continue to drive innovation.”

Rob Webster CBE

Chief Executive of South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust; Lead Chief Executive West Yorkshire and Harrogate Integrated Care System

6. Health literacy and patient information

Patients, carers and members of the public who use health information have better health-related outcomes. Health literacy levels in England are very low. 43% adults aged 16-65 cannot understand word-based health information sufficiently well to make health decisions. Where numbers are added in, 61% of adults are unable to understand and act on the information.¹²

Health literacy is underpinned by information literacy and digital navigation skills. These skills are essential for interaction with increasingly digital health and care services. Knowledge service teams make an important contribution in improving health literacy.

Our ambition is to help the health and care workforce, and information providers in the community, to enhance their communication skills and use techniques and resources to address the health literacy challenge. We will provide training and techniques to:

- Increase health literacy awareness; enabling healthcare staff to support shared decision-making
- Champion the skills needed for health literacy, underpinned by digital literacy
- Select or develop accessible, evidence-based patient, health and wellbeing information

Knowledge and library services play an increasingly active role in supporting NHS staff wellbeing. Working with partners in this field, Health Education England will lead a cross-sectoral partnership, to build health literacy skills within the community. This work will be informed by local priorities using [geodata](#) commissioned by Health Education England.¹³

The aim is to establish a sustainable, common information environment through which skilled librarians and information providers support and empower health literate citizens.

Local NHS knowledge and library services staff will share their knowledge and skills with information providers in community. By building on existing activity, and working in partnership with expert information providers, we aim to empower citizens to be more confident to look for health information in libraries and online and to engage with health and care services.

“The expertise of knowledge and library staff supports the development of health literacy for patients, ensuring medical information is both understandable and patient-centred, allowing patients to make informed decisions about their care and thereby ensuring equality of access to healthcare.”

Professor Liz Hughes MBE

Deputy Medical Director, Health Education England

7. Quick and easy access to digital knowledge resources

Health Education England aspires to develop world-leading knowledge services for the NHS.

Staff and learners require seamless access to high-quality digital knowledge resources. To achieve value for money for patients and taxpayers, we will ensure that investment in digital resources and services is informed by a sound understanding of the needs and preferences of healthcare staff and by robust usage data.

We will work through our Concordat with Arm's Length Bodies to develop a system-wide approach to maximising access to digital knowledge resources. This will include championing Open Access publishing and joint negotiation with publishers.

Our priorities are to:

- introduce a new national discovery service to “provide NHS staff with a single, coherent national gateway to their trusted library and knowledge service, connecting them seamlessly to quality resources, services and support tailored to their needs”.¹⁴

- transition to regionally-shared library management systems
- improve equity of access to resources by transitioning to more nationally-coordinated procurement and management of digital knowledge resources
- continue to promote and embed BMJ Best Practice

We will support the role of expert searchers by implementing technologies to assist with the end-to-end expert search process.

We will support knowledge specialists' role in providing clinicians and managers with the most current, reliable and significant information by:

- developing a single interface for healthcare staff to access good quality, topic-specific bulletins
- promoting personalised alerting services

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8. Developing the right knowledge services workforce

Focused on the changing landscape and priorities of the NHS, we anticipate knowledge services working across larger footprints.

A capable and confident knowledge and library services workforce is needed in the right roles, with the right numbers to deliver knowledge and evidence to the Board, at the bedside and in community and primary care. This calls for flexible models of service delivery with multi-skilled knowledge specialists, confident to work with senior stakeholders.

“Library and knowledge services with better staff ratios are more able to work proactively with a wider range of healthcare teams to enable evidence-based decision-making, impacting on treatments options and the quality of patient care as well as impacting on productivity gains and cost improvement and the spread of innovation.”¹⁰

Providing expert professional advice to employers, Health Education England will advocate for the policy recommendation to grow the number of knowledge professionals to a minimum of 1 qualified librarian to every 1,250 NHS staff.

We encourage practitioners and employers to use the CILIP Professional Knowledge and Skills Base for service design and individual professional development¹⁵.

Health Education England will explore the opportunity to launch a Learning Academy as an employer-led centre of excellence for all health knowledge and library staff. We will support self-directed personal and professional development as well as provide leadership development opportunities.

“The information professional dimension of Knowledge for Healthcare cannot be over-stated. In the highly specialised and regulated environment of healthcare, it is this connection back to professionalism that enables librarians and knowledge specialists to deliver meaningful impact.”

Nick Poole

Chief Executive Officer, CILIP

The application of advanced technologies will change the roles and functions of knowledge staff and offer them exciting opportunities to innovate and extend their roles. CILIP is leading a review of the impact of technologies on library and information roles and ways of working¹⁶. We will build on the findings to develop education and training to meet the needs of the current and future knowledge services workforce.

9. Delivering on the ambition

Health Education England has developed an Evaluation Framework through which to measure our performance through phase two of Knowledge for Healthcare.¹⁷

Six impact objectives:

1. Healthcare organisations mobilise evidence and internally generated knowledge to enable evidence-based policy and practice
2. The healthcare workforce and learners receive high quality knowledge and library services
3. Staff, learners, patients and the public are equipped to use evidence-based patient, health and wellbeing information for shared decision making and self-care
4. NHS-funded knowledge and library services are equitable, efficient and productive
5. The knowledge and library services workforce has the capability, confidence and capacity to meet the evolving knowledge and information needs of the healthcare system
6. Partnership working is the norm in delivering knowledge to the healthcare system



“Applying knowledge into action is the currency of a successful healthcare organisation. Taking the ‘heavy lifting’ out of getting evidence into practice to improve the quality of care, NHS Knowledge and Library Service teams offer the ‘gift of time’ to healthcare professionals.”

Dr Navina Evans

Chief Executive

Health Education England



We encourage Boards to:

- strengthen their capability to manage knowledge and mobilise evidence
- put the right expertise, roles and resources in place to realise the business benefits of NHS knowledge and library services in our digital age.

We welcome the continuing engagement of health knowledge and library teams without whose drive and commitment none of this can be achieved.

Sincere thanks are extended to the many individuals who have helped to shape this strategy.



You are warmly invited to contact the Knowledge and Library Services Leads to discuss how to get involved: kfh.England@hee.nhs.uk.

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