



Healthcare  
Improvement  
Scotland

# Good Practice Skills for Strategic Planning

March 2024

# Why we developed the Good Practice Skills for Strategic Planning

## What is strategic planning?

Strategic planning describes the process of identifying the needs of your population, setting a clear and agreed-upon vision and objectives, assessing the effectiveness of existing provision, generating and assessing options for future services, through to commissioning, evaluating, and reviewing those services regularly.

It is an end-to-end process that begins with a comprehensive assessment of population needs and includes system-wide planning of resources and activity that responds to that need. Good strategic planning has three core components outlined in Figure 1.

Good strategic planning used for improvement, redesign and transformation:

takes a **whole system approach** considering the totality of resources across health and care.



analyses **emerging trends and population need** against existing support and demand.



**looks to the future** to ensure changes address future need and challenges to stay ahead of long-term.



Figure 1. Core components of good strategic planning.

Strategic planners have a unique world view that plays a vital role in the planning and development of health and care services and support. Strategic planning provides valuable insight on what support should be provided and how it should be provided.

In the context of health and social care, the roles involved in strategic planning are less formally recognised career pathways. These strategic planning career pathways are seemingly better established in other industries.

Strategic planners tend to have middle to senior manager level experience, with an ability to understand core issues and opportunities that will typically span a 'long' duration ie issues which are multifaceted, complex and culturally challenging. In recent years, as health and care organisations have made significant financial savings, strategic planning roles have often borne a disproportionately high share of payroll savings, further reducing strategic planning capacity across the system.

Due to this less formally recognised career and professional pathway, there is natural variance in the specific areas of developed expertise. Health and care organisations are largely left to develop the strategic planning skills of their own teams and organisations.

# About this resource

The Good Practice Skills for Strategic Planning supports local planning teams identify and build the skills and competencies required to consistently implement good strategic planning within their organisations. It is designed to be used as a tool to frame conversations between staff members and managers as part of the annual review process.

The Good Practice Skills for Strategic Planning follows the five themes from the **Good Practice Framework for Strategic Planning**.

This resource is designed to complement existing processes and resources available for understanding the strategic planning role. It doesn't create a template for the 'ideal strategic planner' – we don't expect that one planner will realistically or should hold all skills detailed here. Strategic planners have a rich diversity of backgrounds, experiences and skillsets. This is a powerful strength enabling teams to tackle complex problems with innovatively and creatively. The resource brings better understanding of the role that strategic planners play in the system and provides a consistent language that can be used in discussions around roles, progression and development.

The Good Practice Skills for Strategic Planning is designed to support the following types of activity, but is not limited to just these:

- Facilitating conversations between strategic planners and their managers on short, medium and long term development areas.
- Helping to demystify the role of strategic planning for those joining the profession.
- Informing decisions and helping to articulate the case for investments in workforce development within strategic planning teams.
- Allowing strategic planners to identify and articulate their strengths and ambitions in a role that is often hard to describe to others.
- Providing language that can be useful in helping explain the role of strategic planning to non-planning stakeholders.
- Supporting managers in strategic planning teams with workforce and team planning including:
  - Understanding gaps in skills not currently covered within the team.
  - Identifying opportunities for strategic planners to work together on projects that require a combination of skills.
  - Decisions on the roles, functions and influence they want the team to have in their organisation and the wider system.
  - Understanding the skills and competencies required in the team to enable them to achieve their vision.
  - The implication for future team structures, roles and recruitment decisions.

## Competencies and skills

Core competencies and associated strategic planning skills are outlined for each of the themes in the Good Practice Framework for Strategic Planning. Included is a description on what it means to be a strategic planner under that theme.

Click on the theme below to explore the strategic planning role in, and approach to:



[Priority enabling general competencies](#) are included within the resource. These are not strategic planning specialist skills but are considered important in the ability to support and implement good practice in strategic planning.

The various roles within strategic planning will expect differing levels of competency in relation to these skills and competencies – depending on the role, experience and seniority of the roles. There is a [guidance and a template](#) at the end of this document that can be used to articulate the differing competency levels expected for each role in local strategic planning teams.

# Building a planning culture

Building a planning culture as a strategic planner means understanding the role of strategic planning within the organisation, supporting good planning and supporting the development of a planning culture in the team and across the organisation. Building a planning culture means that we:

- Advocate for the inclusion of public, service users, workforce, providers from all sectors, professional groups and politicians as partners in planning, decision making and service delivery.
- Advocate for planning to include all services and supports relevant to health and wellbeing including community assets, housing, primary and acute healthcare, third and independent sectors as well as all community planning partners.
- Advocate for the consistent focus on the wide definition of ‘workforce’.
- Work collaboratively with others to contribute strategic planning insight and support to build the planning culture in others.
- Prioritise drawing stakeholders together to develop a shared vision, clear governance arrangements, trust and understanding.

The key skills and competencies associated with analysis as a strategic planner are outlined in Table 1 below.

Skill	Description	Competencies	Good Practice Framework theme
<b>1. Understanding the role that strategic planning has to play</b>	Understanding good strategic planning and knowing how to diagnose which approaches and methodologies should be used within each specific context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to understand and articulate what good strategic planning is and the unique viewpoint of strategic planning focused on whole system, future focused and starting with need and not supply.</li> <li>• Understanding the value that strategic planning offers.</li> <li>• Knowledge and understanding of where planning is happening within the organisation or system.</li> <li>• Understanding when strategic planning approaches should or shouldn't be used in a piece of work.</li> <li>• Knowledge of what strategic planning methodologies are available and diagnose which ones should be used in any given context.</li> </ul>	Leadership

Skill	Description	Competencies	Good Practice Framework theme
<b>2. Understanding relevant stakeholders to include in planning</b>	<p>Working with a wide variety of stakeholders, including existing groups and networks, in a clear and structured way.</p> <p>Understanding the wide definition of workforce and services, to include volunteers, third sector staff, contractors, community assets, housing and carers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear understanding and mapping of the relevant stakeholders on the topic.</li> <li>• Facilitating planning in a way that is accessible and inclusive for workforce, volunteers, third sector, carers, and lived and living experience.</li> <li>• Building and maintaining relationships with relevant stakeholders to support planning at a whole system level.</li> </ul>	<p>Partnership and co-production</p> <p>Breadth of focus</p>
<b>3. Developing a shared vision, values and objectives</b>	<p>Co-producing a vision and values with stakeholders that contribute to national health and wellbeing outcomes. Supports shared understanding of vision and values, with commitments about the need for change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating the co-production of strategic vision, mission, values and objectives.</li> <li>• Supporting organisations to understand the role that they do or should play in health and social care.</li> </ul>	<p>Vision and values</p> <p>Breadth of focus</p> <p>Leadership</p>
<b>4. Supporting the implementation of good strategic planning across the system</b>	<p>Supporting the use of evidence of good practice, systematic approaches and robust engagement.</p> <p>Strategic planning being led by people committed to and accountable for transformation that support collaboration across boundaries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenging the status quo to make a difference, including tackling shifts in the system rather than incremental change, when needed.</li> <li>• Working to support good practice in strategic planning where planning is happening.</li> <li>• Using the strategic planning viewpoint to influence planning across the system.</li> <li>• Supporting people out with the planning team to build their understanding of their responsibilities in relation to planning.</li> <li>• Working with others to challenge the status quo ie ask the hard questions and shine lights on things that aren't always seen.</li> </ul>	<p>Capacity</p> <p>Leadership</p>

# Analysis

Analysis as a strategic planner means trying to understand a problem, need or idea at a broader system-wide level by drawing on a wider set of intelligence than might be done by other professions or roles. Analysis:

- Includes a mix of qualitative and quantitative data from a variety of sources.
- Includes data from the third and independent sectors as well as the statutory sector and from community, staff and user engagement.
- Focuses on defined populations and their needs, not conditions, services or pathways.
- Clearly identifies and includes data on each of the following needs felt, comparative, normative and expressed need.
- Seeks to understand what is driving – and will drive in the future – population behaviour.
- Forecasts demand based on current trends and known changes.
- Identifies the implications of the data for services and support.
- Checks validity and quality of data through, for example triangulation.
- Makes comparison to national and local standards, peers, and ‘best in class’ providers.

The key competencies associated with analysis as a strategic planner are outlined in Table 2 below.

Skill	Description	Competencies	Good Practice Framework theme
<b>1. Understanding the strategic context</b>	Understanding the strategic planning implications of the wider context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of legislation, policy, strategy, practice, fiscal and economic context to understand the relevant context and priorities.</li> <li>• Articulation of the implications of the context for planning.</li> </ul>	Interpret
<b>2. Assessing the population need</b>	Looking at needs rather than existing services and pathways, while understanding what is driving behaviour and looking at what might be needed in the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis and interpretation of evidence from multiple qualitative and quantitative data sources and insight.</li> <li>• Identification of needs within a population including identifying comorbidities and multiple and complex needs, unmet demand, health inequalities, barriers to access, and areas where health and care need are linked with non-health and care areas.</li> </ul>	Breadth of data Needs Assessment

Skill	Description	Competencies	Good Practice Framework theme
	Ensuring that there is data available to measure what matters from a range of sources, blending qualitative and quantitative and supporting data sharing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpretation of intelligence to get to the heart of the problem or opportunity.</li> <li>• Forecast future need within the population and demand based on need and patterns of demand.</li> <li>• Articulation of the implications of population need for planning, design of services, and change.</li> <li>• Understand the difference between population need and expressed demand to identify challenges within the current system including unmet need, barriers to access, inequalities, and people receiving support that doesn't match their need.</li> <li>• Understanding the limitations of data and evidence – including what the information can and can't tell us about a problem or issue.</li> </ul>	
<b>3. Understanding the status quo</b>	Identifying current performance and shape of services with support from data about how the system feels to people using it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map existing provision at a system-wide level including all parts of the system relevant to meet multiple and complex need within the population.</li> <li>• Analyse whole and integrated system flows.</li> <li>• Identifies the service level and performance of all current providers from all sectors.</li> <li>• Analyse information to understand what the system feels like to people who use it.</li> <li>• Understand unexpected variation and mismatches between need and supply.</li> </ul>	Breadth of data Supply Interpret
<b>4. Understand evidence on good practice</b>	Draws on relevant qualitative and quantitative evidence, data, insight, policy and strategy to articulate what good support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systematic data and literature reviews to identify an evidenced based understanding of what good practice looks like in meeting the identified population need.</li> </ul>	Breadth of data



Skill	Description	Competencies	Good Practice Framework theme
	looks like in meeting identified population need.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw on Scottish and international evidence and good practice to inform an understanding of what good looks like for NHS Scotland.</li> <li>• Identifying the required enablers and the inhibitors of good practice within the system to identify what needs to be in place to enable us to achieve good practice.</li> </ul>	
<b>5. Identifying gaps</b>	Linking supply/demand analysis to the future vision of the system and supports understanding of the impact of potential changes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thematically analyse the gap between the status quo and the desired state (drawing on vision and objectives, population need, and good practice) to identify problem definitions and areas of focus. Examples of gaps include workforce, physical infrastructure, skills, governance, leadership, and suitable services that match need.</li> </ul>	Gap Analysis

# Planning

Planning as a strategic planner means drawing on multiple evidence sources to systematically and comprehensively understand the areas for change, assess the value of the options available and support the subsequent design of services and support. Planning:

- Ensures we take a full system approach to identifying gaps, options, and support rather than considering population need or change in isolation.
- Focuses on planning for future need as well as existing need.
- Has the population need as the starting point for exploring change, not challenges within existing provision.
- Focuses on when, where and how to best meet people’s needs.
- Openly considers commissioning and decommissioning of services and links investment and disinvestment to agreed outcomes and prevention.
- Ensures that options are identified and assessed using a systematic and comprehensive approach.
- Thoroughly tests assumptions about how activities will achieve results.
- Includes planning of all resources.

The key competencies associated with planning as a strategic planner are outlined in Table 3 below.

Skill	Description	Competencies	Good Practice Framework theme
<b>1. Assessing options for change</b>	<p>Exploring alternative models that consider current assets, innovation and core business.</p> <p>Uses consistent methods to analyse options, understanding underlying assumptions and required strategies for implementation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw on priorities and objectives, population needs assessment, good practice and gap analysis to develop a range of options available for decision makers to consider. For example, models of care or change ideas around services, governance, workforce, training, leadership, and other components of the health and care system.</li> <li>• Develop a range of key criteria to assess options against drawn from priorities, values, and the realities of the local delivery context.</li> <li>• Comprehensively analyse the options against the criteria to understand preferred options, core underpinning enablers, and implications for resourcing, governance and other areas.</li> </ul>	<p>Options generation</p> <p>Options appraisal</p>

Skill	Description	Competencies	Good Practice Framework theme
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quantify the return on investment, cost benefit ratio, or use of other quantitative impact methodologies to understand relative benefit of options.</li> <li>Articulate analysis that is needs led and cognisant of the available resourcing (financial, workforce and infrastructure) and risk management. This provides a realistic and pragmatic options appraisal for decision makers and supports quality and financially sound decisions on disinvestment (recognising that not all disinvestment results in cost reduction due to direct/indirect and anticipated/unanticipated impacts).</li> </ul>	
<b>2. Writing strategies and plans</b>	Developing clear and meaningful strategies and plans that clearly communicate the vision, objectives, challenges, solutions and direction of travel.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draw on a wide source of evidence, information and work to develop strategies and plans that are clear, coherent and accessible to the relevant audiences.</li> <li>Working collaboratively with others internally and externally in the development of strategies and plans and buy in from key stakeholders in their direction and content.</li> </ul>	
<b>3. Contributing to the design of services and support</b>	Supports balanced design of services across sectors in a way that links workforce planning and commissioning implications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draw on strategic planning activities such as needs assessment, vision and mission setting, strategic plans, gap analyses and options appraisal to inform the design of services as part of a broader team.</li> <li>Professional facilitation of groups of stakeholders to enable them to articulate their priorities, challenges, insight, and evidence in a way that builds a clear way forward.</li> <li>Articulation of the design and redesign of services and support into a clear, accessible, pragmatic and action focused output that outlines how all the various pieces fit together.</li> <li>Understanding the specific role that strategic planning plays in each context and identifying when to step back.</li> </ul>	Service design

# Delivery

Delivery as a strategic planner means supporting the commissioning and ongoing improvement of services and support by bringing a strategic planning world view and an emphasis on system-wide, future focused evidence on population need as the driver for commissioning and improvement. There isn't a clear and consistent line between where strategic planning team's responsibilities end and other teams' responsibilities start. This can vary between situations and the stakeholders' strategic planners are working with. Being comfortable at managing this grey area becomes important for successfully providing strategic planning support for the delivery of plans and transformation. Delivery:

- Ensures decisions on commissioning and decommissioning are based on a strong evidence base of population need and are considered at a system-wide level.
- Ensures long-term planning is built into ongoing delivery to inform future improvement and change so that long term planning never stops.
- Works to develop new ways of commissioning services to best meet our population's needs.
- Supports the adoption of deliberate, clear and consistent methodologies for strategic implementation, change management, process improvement and project management.
- Continues to ensure energy is focused on strategic implementation.

The key competencies associated with delivery as a strategic planner are outlined in Table 4 below.

Skill	Description	Competencies	Good Practice Framework theme
<b>1. Translating planning into commissioning decisions</b>	Translation of plans into implications for commissioning and decommissioning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding what commissioning in and the strategic planning role within commissioning.</li> <li>• Understanding the collaboration with finance, procurement, contract managers, and operational colleagues required in supporting commissioning decisions.</li> <li>• Understanding of different commissioning and decommissioning approaches.</li> <li>• Understanding commissioning and decommissioning implications of decisions, design of services and plans.</li> <li>• Drawing on strategic planning analysis and planning outputs to inform decisions about where funding is allocated (supporting or driving start, stop, keep conversations).</li> </ul>	Capacity building  Service redesign and improvement

<p><b>2. Supporting ongoing implementation of strategies and change</b></p>	<p>Utilising strategic planning insight and perspective to influence implementation of strategies and change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting delivery teams to continue to work towards the long-term objectives alongside short- and medium-term goals.</li> <li>• Supports delivery teams to adjust plans and approaches in light of new or changing circumstances.</li> <li>• Supports delivery teams to continue to take a whole system approach throughout the life of the work.</li> <li>• Building understanding and awareness of strategic planning and its value in others through ongoing support to delivery teams.</li> <li>• Working with stakeholders to identify and develop a shared understanding of respective responsibilities and the point of handover from strategic planning to other teams, tailored to each situation/context.</li> <li>• Understanding the specific role that strategic planning has to play in each context and clearly identifying when to step back.</li> </ul>	<p>Market/provider relationships and development</p> <p>Capacity building</p> <p>Service redesign and improvement</p>
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# Review

Review as a strategic planner means participating in the ongoing measurement, monitoring and evaluation by contribution a strategic planning lens to how best to measure outcomes, impact and success. **Review isn't something that comes at the end, but instead the competencies in this skill area should be seen as applying right from the outset of all work.** Review:

- Contributes to the development of performance measures that are focused on system-wide outcomes to make sure we are measuring the right things.
- Commits to regular review of plans in light of performance and changing external and internal drivers.
- Participates in honest and open conversations about barriers to implementation or unintended consequences.
- Participates in the sharing of strategic planning learning.

The key competencies associated with review as a strategic planner are outlined in Table 5 below.

Skill	Description	Competencies	Good Practice Framework theme
<p><b>1. Supporting measurement, monitoring and evaluation</b></p>	<p>Contributes a strategic planning perspective to support the development of measurement, monitoring and evaluation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies the measurement, monitoring and evaluation that should be conducted by your organisation that links closely back to the heart of the need or challenge is identified, considers impacts at a whole-system level and can be used to inform good practice strategic planning in the future.</li> <li>• Regularly reviews and adapts strategic plans and priorities in response to external or internal drivers – from the beginning and throughout a piece of work and not just at the end.</li> <li>• Openly shares learning from a strategic planning perspective with others in relation to learning on both outcomes and process.</li> <li>• Systematically implementing processes in your work that enable cross area learning.</li> </ul>	<p>Strategic outcomes Strategy and marketing Share learning</p>

# Priority enabling general competencies

The Good Practice Skills for Strategic Planning focuses on the specific specialist skills associated with good strategic planning. It is designed to complement rather than duplicate or replace other approaches to the development of more generalist skills around relationships management, leadership and management. There are five key skills that aren't strategic planning specialist skills but are considered important in the ability to support and implement good practice in strategic planning. These are outlined in Table 6 below.

Skill	Description
<b>Influencing</b>	Build buy in for the value that strategic planning can offer, the importance of good practice in strategic planning the importance of future planning and having a long-term vision, and to achieve good outcomes, utilising a range of approaches to create engagement, buy in and good conversations. Including acting as a disruptor for positive change as appropriate.
<b>Working with complexity and uncertainty</b>	Work confidently with complexity and uncertainty rather than try to oversimplify or avoid tackling the challenges. Being able to clearly communicate complexity in an accessible way.
<b>Communication</b>	Clearly articulate complex and sometimes specialist strategic planning knowledge and information in a way that is convincing and accessible to non-planners. Written and oral communication that succinctly draws together varied and complex messages into a clear and impactful story.
<b>Innovation, creativity and problem solving</b>	Identify opportunities for change on often intractable challenges in meeting population within the context of rising need, sustained budget pressures and ongoing workforce challenges. Including acting as a disruptor for positive change as appropriate.
<b>Leadership</b>	Demonstrating leadership through successfully supporting, influencing and facilitating joint working between disparate stakeholders and communities around a problem, area or programme.

These skills can be seen as wrap around skills that support the effective delivery of the 5 skill pillars outlined in the rest of this resource – as per figure 2.

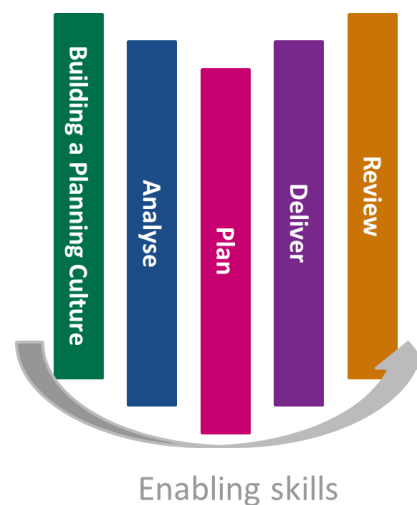


Figure 2. Enabling skills that underpin the five areas of strategic planning specialist skills

# Applying the Good Practice Skills for Strategic Planning to the competency level expected for each role in your team

Each strategic planning team will look different in structure and the distribution of roles and responsibilities. To adapt the Good Practice Skills for Strategic Planning to your team there are several key steps:

## Step 1

Identify and name the roles within your team along with a description of their roles and responsibilities. This is usually a combination of their formal job descriptions along with detail from the realities of their responsibilities, functions and expected level of performance.

## Step 2

Consider the skills and competencies required to effectively fulfil these roles. Table 7 on the next page can provide a useful template for structuring this discussion. It enables you to outline which skills are relevant to their role and at which level of skill they are need for these roles.

This table requires you to allocate a rating of *0 Unaware* to *5 Expert* against each of the skills for each job role. It is likely that the level of competency required will increase with the seniority of the role, however it is fully expected that a role may have a mix of *2 Practised* to *5 Expert* depending on the nature of that role.

## Step 3

Table 7 can also be used as a self-assessment tool for staff to use in discussions with their managers. Staff can use the completed template to identify where they feel they currently are, identify where they want to get to by the end of the year, and highlight the areas they want to focus on for that year's development. We recommend that no more than three areas are chosen as priority development areas.



Table 7. Template for considering the skills and competencies required to effectively fulfil roles in your team. See Table 8 on the next page for more information on each competency level.

Skills		0	1	2	3	4	5
Building a planning culture	Understanding the role that strategic planning has to play.						
	Understanding relevant stakeholders to include in planning.						
	Developing a shared vision, values and objectives.						
	Supporting the implementation of good strategic planning across the system.						
Analyse	Understanding the strategic context.						
	Assessing the population need.						
	Understanding the status quo.						
	Understand evidence on good practice.						
	Identifying gaps.						
Plan	Assessing options for change.						
	Writing strategies and plans.						
	Contributing to the design of services and support.						
Deliver	Translating planning into commissioning decisions.						
	Supporting ongoing implementation of strategies and change.						
Review	Supporting measurement, monitoring and evaluation.						
Enabling general	Influencing.						
	Working with complexity and uncertainty.						
	Communication.						
	Innovation, creativity and problem solving.						
	Leadership.						

Table 8 provides a breakdown of the knowledge and application required for each competency level.

Competency Level		Description	
0	Unaware	Knowledge	Has no awareness of the knowledge needed for the competence.
		Application	Has no awareness of the knowledge needed for the competence.
1	Aware	Knowledge	Has an awareness of the knowledge needed for the competence.
		Application	As only awareness is required at this level, no application is expected.
2	Practised	Knowledge	Has a working knowledge of and can describe the competence.
		Application	Applies the competence under supervision, primarily in non-complex situations.
3	Competent	Knowledge	Has a comprehensive knowledge of the competence in situations of limited complexity.
		Application	Applies the competence independently, primarily in situations of limited complexity.
4	Proficient	Knowledge	Has a detailed knowledge of the competence in complex situations and can critically evaluate and adapt as required.
		Application	<p>Applies the competence primarily independently, primarily in complex situations, but may draw on more senior contributions for particularly challenging situations or where hierarchy requires it.</p> <p>May supervise others applying the competence – role dependent.</p> <p>Recognised by non-planning professions as having strategic planning competencies, who is called on by others for those competencies.</p>
5	Expert	Knowledge	<p>Has an in-depth knowledge of the competence in complex situations?</p> <p>Can critically evaluate, adapt or develop new theories and/ or methods if required and educate others.</p>
		Application	<p>Applies the competence independently, primarily in complex situations.</p> <p>Likely to supervise others applying the competence – role dependent.</p> <p>Recognised by other senior strategic planners as an expert, who is called on by those other senior strategic planners for advice on the competence.</p>

# Contact us

For advice or support applying the resource in your team please contact Healthcare Improvement Scotland's Strategic Planning for Redesign team at: [his.transformationalsystemchange@nhs.scot](mailto:his.transformationalsystemchange@nhs.scot)

## Healthcare Improvement Scotland

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