

# Case Study

## Kent and Medway Healthcare Science (KMHCS) Network- Connecting Healthcare Sciences

Better Skills | Better Jobs | Better Health



# Introduction

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Healthcare science underpins 80% of all diagnoses across the NHS.

There are over 50,000 healthcare scientists working in the NHS and public health services. Healthcare scientists cover the whole innovation pathway, from academic and translational research, to patient-centred service transformation.

The healthcare science (HCS) profession is therefore uniquely placed to harness the UK's world class healthcare research base, assist innovation and the NHS to improve patient outcomes. Healthcare scientists work in more than 50 specialisms which can be categorised into the four HCS disciplines of pathology (laboratory) sciences, medical physics and clinical engineering, physiological sciences and bioinformatics.

## What was the issue/problem that needed to be addressed?

There was a need to be able to raise the profile of healthcare science across the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System (ICS) and to have a more strategic approach to networking across the four HCS disciplines.

## What action was taken to address the issue?

The Kent and Medway Healthcare Science Network (KMHCS) was formed in October 2021 as part of a wider HCS programme across the ICS to build relationships, and influence strategy linking with healthcare, education and government providers.

The Network was designed to be accessible and convenient to engage and interact with, is

inclusive and open to anybody with an interest in HCS and brings the four main disciplines together online under a single umbrella each having its own zone for material.

The Network was developed on the Futures NHS platform managed by NHS England which helps the health and social care community connect and collaborate safely and securely online. It is straightforward to use, develop and load content without any existing design training or experience and there has been minimal designed content required.

The Network continues to attract new members and there are now over 200 individuals and organisations signed up including HCS staff, employers, universities, schools, colleges and government bodies, with new members joining daily. The platform received 8,000 hits between May 2022 and January 2023.



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## Network Content

The Network's extensive and growing HCS content includes:

- **Continuing Professional Development resources (CPD)** - over 120 healthcare science resources are available, and this is the most searched area on the Network by members.
- **Discussion forum** - individuals can use the forum to share ideas, ask questions and request assistance. For example, a member asked if anyone had any job descriptions they could share for a role they were developing and had received 5 by the end of the day from other members.
- **Workspace** - for members to upload and share files.
- **Workforce development, education and training in HCS** - including information on career and training pathways, the Scientist Training Programme, apprenticeships and advanced clinical practice.
- **Mentoring** - Network members benefit from having ready access to mentors and coaches to support them and there are plans to include working professionals from a variety of sectors, including frontline healthcare, finance and business and the Network to enhance the offer to HCS leaders and managers.
- **Research hub** – this is a dedicated section where members can register to receive information about newly identified funding streams and research opportunities as they are posted on the Network. Members are also able to reach out via the discussion forum to search for collaborators to build a research team for a project or programme and use the cloud-based facilities on the Network to collaborate on funding applications or other documentation.
- **Designated zones** - aimed at schools, colleges and universities with specific HCS content and material and resources including:
  - Career development information and programmes including HCS placements for local schools and colleges predominantly for students aged 16-19. It is hoped to include placements for the new T-Levels and with Nuffield Research to assist STEM learning.
  - University Students and HCS trainees can even access viva-exam practice via the Network's list of HCS professionals and hear about HCS related engagement events such as lunchtime talks for science students and HCS career events at the local universities. Network members have been encouraged to speak at university inductions and student societies and develop short career videos.

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**Related ICS healthcare science work** across the Kent and Medway region also provides the network with content and support:

- **The Integrated Workforce Development, Education and Training (IWDET) programme** is an ICS related project that maps career progression, education and training pathways in HCS which will enable employers to support workforce development and individuals to plan their own career progression. A potential HCS trainee will be able to see the pathway from initial training through to consultant or fellowship for example, and newer pathways, such as the new T-levels and apprenticeships will be integrated into traditional education and training routes so individuals will be able to see entry routes and career opportunities. Material will be developed to link school topics with HCS careers. Outputs are being made available to members on the platform as they are developed.
- **The Kent and Medway Faculty of Healthcare Science** comprises of 35 senior leaders and directors from HCS services, universities and government bodies. The broad, multi-disciplinary membership has the unique feature of being well positioned to create and implement new programmes reflecting content and feedback from the Network. The Faculty has its own space on the Network.

### **Funding the setting up and running of the Network:**

As the Network was set up via the ICS to support HCS it was able to access the Futures NHS platform which did not incur a direct cost. The time to initially set up and maintain the Network came from Health Education England (HEE) South East funding supporting dedicated time for the part-time Strategic Healthcare Science Lead for Kent and Medway and now also funds a Project Manager. In addition, each of the leads of the four main HCS disciplines have some dedicated time to update their relevant sections on the Network.

The Network has also recruited four student volunteers to promote HCS careers and help improve engagement with university students and young adults. They will assist with the social media and design aspect for approximately 2 hours a week over a 6-month period in return for the experience of working with the NHS and building a professional network. They will receive a certificate at the end of the period which they can cite on future CVs to support potential future job and education applications.

It is anticipated that members themselves will also upload content to broaden the range of material.





## What difficulties and barriers needed to be overcome to implement the Network?

There were very few barriers to setting up the Network as there was already an established and identified need across the Kent and Medway ICS for the Network. The set up of the Network was funded by HEE South East and facilitated by the NHS Futures platform.

## What benefits have resulted from the Network?

The Network has many benefits in making HCS information available in one place for members who can locate material, ask questions, and even find a mentor. HCS staff can find CPD and up to date information about the sector.

For employers the benefits are numerous in raising the profile of HCS which in turn will potentially increase the interest in HCS and related careers, and allow users to share good practice, find out about available funding and set up a project team from across the Network member organisations.

Much of the content is applicable and useful to members outside the Kent and Medway ICS region so the Network has a wider appeal and draw.

The Faculty of HCS, as an active leadership forum, enables things to happen based on feedback and topics on the Network and is a unique related enhancement.

Local universities, colleges and the 200-plus secondary schools in Kent and Medway are being invited to join. It is hoped that it will raise the profile of HCS careers and resources to young people.

As the Network is part of a number of initiatives across the Kent and Medway ICS to raise the profile of HCS in the region, which includes IWDET career mapping and the Faculty of HCS, all work can mutually benefit the Network and vice versa.

## Would you like to join the Network?

The Network is open to all who are interested in HCS to join and members don't have to be based in the Kent and Medway region.

Sign up via the Future NHS website:

<https://future.nhs.uk/KentMedwayHealthScience/grouphome>

*"The Kent and Medway Healthcare Science Network connects people and healthcare sciences by offering updated information, resources and networking opportunities, enabling engagement, collaboration and empowerment in raising the profile of healthcare science and related careers both currently and into the future and its potential is endless."*

Mark Knight, Chief Healthcare Scientist  
NHS Kent and Medway

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### About Skills for Health

Skills for Health is a not-for-profit organisation committed to the development of an improved and sustainable healthcare workforce across the UK. Established in 2002 as the Sector Skills Council for Health for the UK health sector, it is the authoritative voice on workforce skills issues and offers proven solutions and tools, with the expertise and experience to use them effectively.