INTERVIEW INTELLIGENCE GUIDE | APRIL 2026

NHS Band 7 Project Manager

Interview Preparation Guide

What NHS interview panels are actually looking for

Drawn from 32 Band 7 Project Manager job packs across NHS Trusts.

Domain: Project Programme Management

32	20	4	17
Job packs	Questions	Question types	Skills mapped

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

What Panels Are Actually Looking For

This guide is built from 32 Band 7 Project Manager job packs extracted across NHS Trusts. Every question in this guide reflects what NHS panels have actually asked for in their person specifications and essential criteria. Every keyword has been frequency-weighted against real job pack language. This is not generic interview advice.

The guide is organised into four question types: values-based, competency, scenario and technical. For each question you will find what the panel is actually probing beneath the surface, and the specific words and phrases that signal credibility to an NHS shortlisting panel. Model answers are not provided. Panels can identify rehearsed answers. Your own experience, structured clearly, will always outperform a script.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read the "What the panel is probing" section before preparing your answer. Then structure your response using the STAR framework: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Check your answer contains at least three of the listed credibility keywords. At Band 7, panels expect specificity. Vague answers about teamwork and communication do not score. Named projects, quantified outcomes and honest reflection on what you would do differently do.

WHAT PANELS ARE LOOKING FOR AT BAND 7

Four Competency Clusters

Portfolio management under pressure

Managing concurrent projects with competing deadlines, without a large team beneath you. Panels want evidence you have a system, not just good intentions. Stakeholder management (84%) and project management (81%) are the top two skills across 32 job packs.

Communication across levels

Translating complex project information for executive audiences while remaining accessible to frontline clinical staff. Report writing, presentation skills and communication appear in over 70% of job packs at this band.

Risk, governance and accountability

Proactive risk identification, live risk registers, escalation judgement and financial tracking. At Band 7 you are accountable for governance documentation, not just producing it. Risk management and budget management appear in over 38% of job packs.

Influence without authority

Most NHS PM roles give you accountability without line management authority over the people you depend on. Panels look for relationship-led approaches, clear governance structures and evidence of getting outcomes across organisational boundaries.

SECTION 01

Values-Based Questions

Values-based questions assess whether your professional behaviour aligns with the NHS Constitution. Every NHS interview at Band 7 and above will include at least two. Panels are not looking for perfect outcomes. They are looking for honest reflection, appropriate escalation and evidence that you act with integrity under pressure.

1

Tell us about a time you had to deliver difficult or unwelcome news to a clinical team or senior stakeholder. How did you approach it and what was the outcome?

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Professional courage, honesty and compassion in a professional context. At Band 7 you are expected to deliver contentious information sensitively to clinical and executive audiences. This appears directly in the common challenges section across 13 authoritative job pack extractions.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Raised it early, chose the right moment and setting, focused on the impact not the blame, kept the relationship intact, followed up in writing

2

Describe a situation where something was going wrong on a project that was not directly your responsibility. What did you do?

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Accountability and duty of candour mindset. NHS panels want to see you speak up across organisational boundaries rather than waiting for someone else to act. This tests whether your sense of accountability extends beyond your job description.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Flagged it early rather than waiting, did not assume someone else would deal with it, documented what I observed, escalated to the right person, offered to help rather than just reporting the problem

3

Give an example of how you adapted your working approach to be more inclusive of a colleague or service user whose communication style or needs were different from your own.

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

NHS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion values. Panels are checking whether inclusion is something you practise in day-to-day interactions, not just something you reference in applications.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Adjusted my communication approach, took time to understand their perspective, did not assume, checked understanding, created space for them to contribute

4

Tell us about a time when you disagreed with a decision made by a more senior colleague. How did you handle it?

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Respectful challenge and professional courage. Panels want to see you can push back constructively without undermining. They also want to see you can accept a final decision and commit to it. Both halves matter equally.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Raised my concern through the appropriate channel, presented evidence not just opinion, was transparent about my position, accepted the final decision and committed to it, documented my concern for the record

5

Describe a time when you recognised that you or your team were under unsustainable pressure. What did you do about it?

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Self-awareness, people management and sustainable performance. Band 7 PPM roles carry broad portfolios with minimal administrative support. Panels want to know you will not quietly absorb unsustainable workload or allow your team to do so.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Was honest with my manager about capacity, re-prioritised with evidence, checked in with the team proactively, did not just absorb the pressure, put a workload plan in place

SECTION 02

Competency Questions

Competency questions ask you to evidence specific skills through past experience. Use the STAR framework for each answer: Situation, Task, Action, Result. At Band 7 the panel expects detail. The skills below appear in over 34% of job packs in this dataset.

6

Describe a time when you managed multiple concurrent projects with competing deadlines. How did you maintain oversight and ensure nothing fell through the gaps?

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Portfolio management under pressure. Stakeholder management (84%) and time management (22%) are both tested here. This directly mirrors the typical day narrative across 13 authoritative extractions: context-switching between strategic planning and hands-on coordination with minimal support.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Maintained a single portfolio view, RAG status updated weekly, clear escalation thresholds defined upfront, communicated proactively when something was at risk, used a risk register not just a project plan

7

Tell us about a complex piece of information you had to present to an executive or board-level audience. How did you prepare and how did you tailor your approach?

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Communication (78%) and presentation skills (34%). Presenting complex information to multi-disciplinary teams and senior stakeholders is an explicit responsibility across the majority of Band 7 PM job packs. Panels want to see audience awareness, not just confidence.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Started with the so what not the detail, plain English not jargon, anticipated the questions they would ask, used data to support the narrative, read the room and adjusted

8

Give an example of a risk you identified on a project before it became a problem. How did you manage it and what was the outcome?

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Risk management (41%) and problem solving (47%). Proactive risk identification distinguishes Band 7 from more junior project support roles. Panels look for a systematic approach, not a story about firefighting.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Spotted it early through horizon scanning, added to the risk register with a named owner, developed a mitigation plan before it escalated, escalated when the risk rating increased, documented the decision trail

9

Describe a time when you had to bring together stakeholders from different organisations or teams with conflicting priorities. How did you get them aligned?

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Stakeholder management (84%) and negotiation (44%). Cross-boundary working is central to NHS PPM. Many roles involve ICS partners, academic institutions, digital suppliers and clinical teams simultaneously, without direct authority over any of them.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Mapped stakeholders and their interests at the start, found the common ground, established a governance structure everyone agreed to, kept decisions documented and shared, managed upward when alignment broke down

10

Tell us about a project where you were responsible for budget management or financial tracking. What was your approach and what challenges did you face?

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Budget management (38%) and financial management (13%). Financial tracking appears as an explicit responsibility across the majority of Band 7 PM job packs. Panels look for evidence you understand the difference between committed and actual spend.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Maintained a budget tracker updated monthly, flagged variance early rather than at year end, understood committed versus actual spend, escalated overspend with a recovery plan attached, maintained an audit trail

11

Give an example of a time you deputised for a more senior colleague. What decisions did you make and what did you escalate?

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Leadership (34%) and progression readiness. Deputising for senior leaders is an explicit responsibility in the majority of Band 7 PM job packs. Panels want to see good judgement about the boundary of your authority, not just evidence you stepped up.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Was clear about what was within my remit to decide, escalated anything that was not, kept my manager informed throughout, maintained the team's confidence, fed back what happened when they returned

SECTION 03

Scenario Questions

Scenario questions present a hypothetical situation and ask what you would do. There is no past experience to draw on. Panels are testing your judgement, prioritisation and composure. Think out loud. Structure your answer. Show you can triage before you act.

12

You are managing three concurrent projects. Two have the same board reporting deadline on Friday. One project lead has not responded to your last three messages. A key stakeholder has just raised a serious concern about scope on the third project. It is Thursday afternoon. Walk us through what you do.

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Prioritisation under pressure, escalation judgement and composure. This mirrors the real daily experience described in the typical day narrative across 13 job pack extractions. The scope concern is the highest risk item and must be addressed first. The unresponsive project lead requires escalation, not another message.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Triage immediately, scope concern is highest risk so address that first, escalate the unresponsive lead to their manager not keep messaging, transparent with the board about what will and will not be complete, document every decision made in the next 24 hours

13

Midway through a project, the clinician chairing your steering group tells you privately that they think the project is heading in the wrong direction and are considering withdrawing their support. The next steering group meeting is in two weeks. What do you do?

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Political awareness and early intervention. Losing clinical buy-in is one of the most significant risks in NHS project delivery. Panels want to see you act immediately, understand the concern fully before responding, and involve your sponsor rather than managing it alone.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Do not wait two weeks, arrange a conversation within 48 hours, understand their specific concerns before responding, bring in your programme sponsor, document the conversation, consider whether the steering group meeting needs to be brought forward

14

You have been asked to produce a business case for a project you believe is unlikely to deliver the benefits being claimed by the requesting team. What do you do?

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Integrity and professional courage. Panels are testing whether you will produce a document that says what is convenient rather than what is accurate. At Band 7 you are accountable for the quality of your analysis, not just the task of completing it.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Raise the concern early with evidence not just instinct, document your position in writing, produce the business case objectively and flag the assumptions clearly, do not inflate numbers, let decision makers decide with accurate information

15

A project you are managing falls significantly behind schedule due to factors outside your control. Your programme director wants a recovery plan by end of week. How do you approach this?

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Problem solving (47%), resilience and accountability under pressure. Panels want a structured approach, not reassurance. The distinction between what is and is not recoverable, and the honesty to say so, separates Band 7 candidates from Band 6.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Root cause analysis first, revised timeline with evidence not guesswork, present options not just one plan, honest about what is and is not recoverable, identify what additional resource or decisions are needed and from whom

SECTION 04

Technical Questions

Technical questions test your working knowledge of project management practice in an NHS context. Panels are not expecting textbook answers. They want to hear how you apply methodology to the realities of NHS delivery, including resource constraints, clinical priorities and governance requirements.

16

What project management methodology or framework do you use day to day and how do you adapt it to work within NHS environments?

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Project management knowledge (81%) and agile PM (present in 15% of job packs). NHS trusts use a mix of PRINCE2, MSP, Agile and hybrid approaches. Panels look for methodological awareness and the ability to flex, not rigid adherence to a single framework.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

PRINCE2 or MSP for governance-heavy programmes, Agile or hybrid for digital or transformation work, adapted to the governance requirements of the trust, methodology serves the project not the other way around, know when to be flexible

17

Walk us through how you would set up a risk register for a new project from scratch.

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Risk management (41%) and governance documentation. This tests whether you actually do this systematically or just reference it in applications. Panels want to hear the steps, not a definition of what a risk register is.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Start with a risk identification workshop with the team, score by likelihood and impact, named owner for each risk, agreed review cadence, escalation threshold defined upfront, linked to the project plan not sitting separately

18

How do you make sure your project reports are useful to senior stakeholders rather than just comprehensive?

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Communication (78%) and report writing (25%). Report writing is an explicit responsibility across a quarter of Band 7 PM job packs. Panels want to see audience awareness and the ability to produce exception-based reporting rather than activity logs.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Exception reporting, RAG status with clear rationale, executive summary first, action-oriented and what do I need from you, asked stakeholders what they actually want to see before building the template

19

Describe your approach to managing a project where you have no direct authority over the people doing the work.

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Stakeholder management (84%) and leadership (34%). Influence without authority is the defining challenge of the NHS PM role at any band. The typical team structure for Band 7 involves working across multidisciplinary teams with no formal line management authority.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Relationship-led from day one, clear RACI agreed upfront, escalation route agreed before it is needed, regular one-to-ones not just formal meetings, made it easy for people to raise problems early

20

How do you approach tracking and reporting on project benefits, particularly in an NHS context where outcomes can be difficult to measure?

WHAT THE PANEL IS PROBING

Benefits realisation and data analysis (56%). This separates experienced NHS PMs from those new to the sector. Panels look for evidence that you establish baselines, agree metrics upfront and build post-project review into the plan from the start.

KEYWORDS THAT SIGNAL CREDIBILITY

Baseline established before the project starts not after, agreed metrics with the sponsor upfront, mix of quantitative and qualitative measures, named benefits owner who is not the PM, built a post-project review into the plan from day one

SECTION 05

Skills NHS Trusts Are Actually Looking For

The table below is drawn from 32 Band 7 Project Manager job packs extracted across NHS Trusts. The frequency column shows what percentage of those job packs listed each skill. Use this to sense-check your CV and supporting statement before you apply.

Skill	Frequency	What it means in practice
Stakeholder Management	84%	Building and maintaining productive relationships with clinical leads, executives, IT teams and external partners, often simultaneously and without direct authority over any of them
Project Management	81%	Formal delivery methodology: PRINCE2, MSP or hybrid. Panels expect you to name your approach and explain how you adapt it to NHS governance requirements
Communication	78%	Both written and verbal, from board-level reports to frontline staff briefings. The ability to translate complex information for different audiences is what panels are testing, not confidence alone
Data Analysis	56%	Interpreting project performance data, workforce data or financial tracking information to support decision-making. Proficiency in Excel is assumed at this level
Problem Solving	47%	Identifying blockers and finding workable solutions within NHS constraints: budget, procurement timelines, clinical priorities, without escalating everything upward
Negotiation	44%	Reaching workable agreements across teams and organisations with conflicting priorities. Most NHS PM negotiation happens informally, in meetings, without a formal mandate
Change Management	44%	Structured approach to implementing and embedding change in clinical or operational settings. Panels look for awareness of resistance and how you manage it
Risk Management	41%	Proactive identification, scoring, ownership and mitigation of project risks. Maintaining a live risk register, not just creating one at the start, is the standard expected
Microsoft Office	41%	Excel for tracking and analysis, PowerPoint for board reporting, Word for governance documentation. Microsoft Project appears in 13% of roles
Budget Management	38%	Tracking project spend against plan, flagging variance early and understanding the difference between committed and actual spend
Leadership	34%	Leading project teams, chairing meetings and maintaining momentum, often without line management authority over the people you are depending on
Presentation Skills	34%	Presenting to steering groups, boards and executive teams. Panels look for confidence presenting data, managing questions and holding a room
Staff Management	25%	Line management of project support officers or administrators, and deputising for senior leaders. A signal that Band 7 carries real people accountability

Skill	Frequency	What it means in practice
Report Writing	25%	Producing project highlight reports, exception reports and board papers. Writing for a senior audience, clear, concise and action-oriented, is what distinguishes good from average
Time Management	22%	Managing a broad portfolio without a large team beneath you. Panels are testing whether you have a system, not just good intentions
Influencing	19%	Achieving outcomes through persuasion rather than authority. Particularly important in matrix environments where you depend on colleagues who do not report to you
Partnership Working	9%	Collaborating across organisational boundaries: ICS partners, external suppliers, academic institutions. More common in transformation and research-adjacent roles

Note: Welsh Language appears in 18% of job packs. This reflects roles advertised by NHS Wales organisations and is a location-specific requirement, not a core competency for the role nationally. Frequencies will update as new job packs are processed.

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