# The Skills NHS Project Managers Need Right Now

*Career Intelligence Brief · March 2026*

| 14 | 3 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|
| SKILLS TRACKED | ESSENTIAL SKILLS | DESIRABLE SKILLS | EMERGING SIGNALS |

## WHAT'S INSIDE

- Why these 14 skills define NHS project management hiring
- Essential vs desirable breakdown. what employers demand first
- Emerging signals. the skills appearing in job packs right now
- Career implications and actionable next steps

INTRODUCTION

# What the Data Tells Us

Project and Programme Management is the single largest non-clinical domain in NHS digital hiring. It accounts for more roles than any other domain we track. and yet the skills employers actually ask for are rarely discussed in career advice circles.

This brief draws on Career Co-Pilot's NHS job pack analysis pipeline, which extracts skill requirements directly from live NHS job postings. The 14 skills in this report are not drawn from industry surveys or published frameworks. They come from the actual language employers use when writing job packs. the specification documents that sit behind every NHS job advert.

> *"These are the skills that appear in NHS project management job packs right now. Not the skills consultants say you need. The skills hiring managers are actually asking for."*

One important caveat: our pipeline is still in its early stages. The frequencies in this report reflect the job packs we have analysed to date. a growing but not yet exhaustive dataset. As we ingest more job packs each month, the picture will sharpen. What you see here is directionally accurate and practically useful, but treat it as a first-look intelligence brief rather than a definitive study.

SKILLS BREAKDOWN

# 14 Skills Observed in PPM Job Packs

Skills are classified into three tiers based on how they appear in job pack language. Essential skills are explicitly required. Desirable skills are listed as preferred or advantageous. Emerging skills are appearing in job packs without a formal essential/desirable tag. a signal worth tracking.

| Skill | Classification | Signal |
|---|---|---|
| Project Planning | ESSENTIAL | Must have for most roles |
| Communication | ESSENTIAL | Must have for most roles |
| Oral Communication | ESSENTIAL | Must have for most roles |
| Financial Management | DESIRABLE | Strengthens your application |
| PRINCE2 Methodology | DESIRABLE | Strengthens your application |
| Clinical Collaboration | DESIRABLE | Strengthens your application |
| Bid Writing | DESIRABLE | Strengthens your application |
| PFI Contract Management | DESIRABLE | Strengthens your application |
| Advanced IT Skills | DESIRABLE | Strengthens your application |
| Training/Rollout Planning | EMERGING | Appearing in job packs. build now |
| Communication Planning | EMERGING | Appearing in job packs. build now |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| RAID Log Management | EMERGING | Appearing in job packs. build now |
| Post-Implementation Review | EMERGING | Appearing in job packs. build now |
| MSP | EMERGING | Appearing in job packs. build now |

ESSENTIAL SKILLS

## What Employers Demand First

Three skills are classified as essential in the job packs we have analysed: Project Planning, Communication, and Oral Communication. These are non-negotiable. If you cannot demonstrate all three clearly on your CV and at interview, your application will not progress regardless of what else you bring.

### Project Planning

The foundational skill of the domain. NHS project managers are expected to own the plan. not contribute to it. This means building schedules, managing dependencies, maintaining the baseline, and communicating progress against it. PRINCE2 and MSP provide a framework, but the underlying ability to construct and hold a plan is what employers are asking for here.

### Communication

NHS project environments are stakeholder-heavy. Clinical staff, executive sponsors, digital teams, and external suppliers often sit around the same programme board. The ability to communicate clearly across these groups. adjusting language and detail level for each audience. is listed as essential because it directly determines whether a project succeeds or stalls. Written communication is implied; verbal communication is explicitly required.

### Oral Communication

Listed separately from Communication in several job packs, suggesting employers are specifically looking for confidence in meetings, presentations, and stakeholder briefings. If you are applying at Band 7 or above, you should expect to be tested on this at interview. either through a presentation exercise or scenario-based questions.

DESIRABLE SKILLS

## The Skills That Differentiate Applications

Five skills appear as desirable across the PPM job packs we reviewed. These are the skills that separate a strong application from a competitive one. Candidates who can demonstrate desirable skills alongside essential ones are significantly more likely to reach interview.

### Financial Management

NHS project managers frequently hold delegated budgets. The ability to track spend, manage purchase orders, and report on financial position to senior stakeholders is listed as desirable across multiple job packs. particularly at Band 7 and Band 8A. This is not a finance qualification requirement; it is practical budget stewardship.

### PRINCE2 Methodology

PRINCE2 appears as desirable rather than essential. a useful distinction. Employers want project managers who can work within structured methodologies, but they are not filtering purely on certification. Practitioners who understand PRINCE2 principles and can apply them proportionately will be more competitive than those who cannot, but the qualification alone is not sufficient without demonstrated application.

### Clinical Collaboration

This skill reflects the NHS context. Project managers in health settings must be able to work with clinical teams. understanding their constraints, earning their trust, and navigating the operational pressures that clinical environments operate under. This is not a clinical skill; it is an interpersonal and contextual skill specific to NHS project delivery.

### Bid Writing

Appearing in job packs for roles that sit closer to programme development and business development functions. The ability to write compelling bids for funding or contracts adds commercial value to a project manager profile. particularly relevant for ICB and NHS England roles.

### PFI Contract Management

A specialist skill appearing in roles connected to Private Finance Initiative estate and service contracts. Relevant for project managers working in trusts with legacy PFI arrangements. Not universally required, but a strong differentiator in the right roles.

EMERGING SIGNALS

## Skills Appearing Without Formal Classification

Six skills appear in PPM job packs without being formally classified as essential or desirable. In our pipeline, these are logged as emerging signals. skills that employers are beginning to include in job specifications, often in the person specification or role context sections, without yet elevating them to formal criteria. Historically, skills that appear as emerging signals in early datasets transition to desirable, and then to essential, as market expectations shift.

### Training/Rollout Planning

As NHS digital transformation programmes move from build to deployment, the ability to plan and manage training rollouts is appearing with increasing frequency. EPR implementations in particular require structured training programmes across large clinical workforces.

### Communication Planning

Distinct from general communication skill, communication planning refers to the structured approach to stakeholder engagement. identifying audiences, messaging, channels, and timing. This is appearing in more senior PPM roles as programmes grow in complexity and political sensitivity.

### RAID Log Management

The practical management of risks, assumptions, issues, and dependencies in a structured log. Standard in PRINCE2-aligned environments but increasingly appearing as an explicit skill requirement rather than an implied competency. Candidates who can speak confidently about RAID management in interview will stand out.

### Post-Implementation Review

The ability to conduct structured reviews after project closure. capturing lessons learned, measuring benefit realisation, and feeding findings back into the organisation. NHS organisations are under increasing pressure to demonstrate return on digital investment, which makes this skill more valuable than it has historically been.

### MSP (Managing Successful Programmes)

The programme-level equivalent of PRINCE2. Appearing in job packs for roles that sit above project management and into programme management. particularly at Band 8A and above. If you are targeting senior PPM roles, MSP is worth adding to your development plan.

CAREER IMPLICATIONS

# What to Do With This Intelligence

### If you are at Band 5 or 6. build the essentials first

Project Planning, Communication, and Oral Communication are your foundation. Before pursuing PRINCE2 or any other qualification, make sure you can demonstrate all three with specific examples from real projects. A candidate who can articulate how they built and managed a plan will outperform a PRINCE2 practitioner who cannot.

### If you are targeting Band 7. add Financial Management and PRINCE2

Band 7 PPM roles in the NHS almost universally expect budget management experience and some form of structured methodology knowledge. PRINCE2 Practitioner is the standard benchmark. If you do not have it, a foundation-level qualification combined with demonstrated project delivery experience is a credible alternative.

### If you are targeting Band 8A and above. MSP and Communication Planning become critical

At programme director level, your value is in orchestrating multiple workstreams, managing complex stakeholder landscapes, and communicating programme status to executive audiences. MSP, structured communication planning, and post-implementation review capability are the skills that differentiate senior candidates in this market.

### Watch the emerging signals

Training/Rollout Planning and Post-Implementation Review are appearing now. In twelve months, they are likely to be listed as desirable. In two years, some roles will list them as essential. The professionals who build these capabilities now will have a material advantage when that shift happens.

> *"The gap between a good NHS project manager and a great one is rarely technical. It is the ability to communicate clearly, plan rigorously, and earn the trust of clinical colleagues who did not choose to work on your project."*

METHODOLOGY

Skills in this report are extracted from NHS job packs for Project and Programme Management roles using Career Co-Pilot's automated job pack analysis pipeline. Skill classification (essential, desirable, emerging) reflects the language used in the original job pack documents. not inferred by our system. This report covers job packs analysed to date; it is a cumulative dataset and is not restricted to a specific time window. As the pipeline ingests more job packs, frequency data and classifications will be updated in future editions.