# Talking about potential

A guide to using the Maximising Potential Conversation Tool

This document complements the **Talking About Talent** guide and focuses more generally on potential. It is designed to help our valued people have great conversations about the possibilities for their careers. It's written with both managers and staff in mind, with an appendix containing further information for managers.
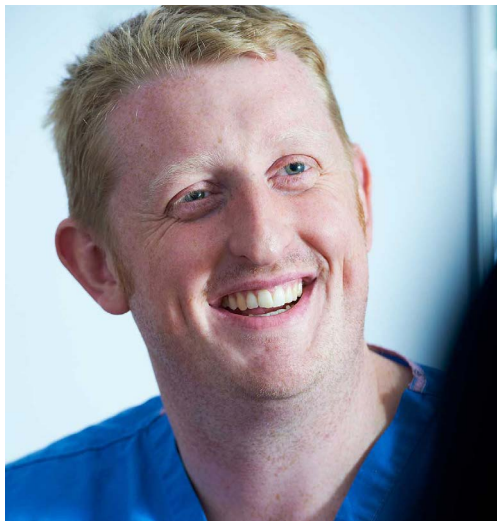
How are you doing and what next?

Use this tool to talk about your role in the NHS.

Think of it as a map you can use to plot your position and direction:

- Where are you right now?
- Where do you need to be?
- What will it take to get there?

We all naturally move around on this map during our careers. When you start to move away from the centre, it may mean you're ready for a new stage in your career.
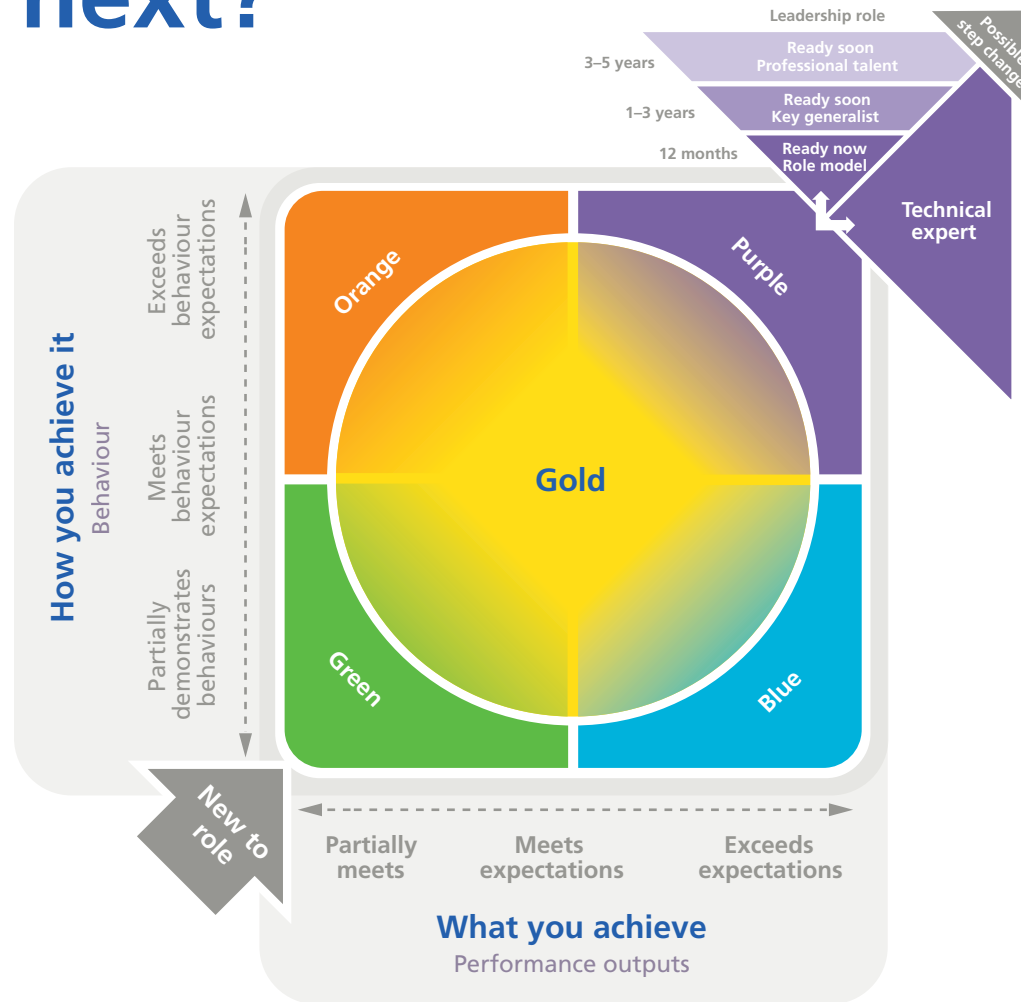
This is a great chance to share with your manager your reflections about the difference you're making now, what you do best, what's holding you back, where you want to be and what can help you get there.

Leadership role

3–5 years — Ready soon Professional talent

1–3 years — Ready soon Key generalist

12 months — Ready now Role model

Possible step change

Technical expert

How you achieve it Behaviour

Exceeds behaviour expectations

Meets behaviour expectations

Partially demonstrates behaviours

Orange

Purple

Gold

Green

Blue

New to role

Partially meets

Meets expectations

Exceeds expectations

What you achieve Performance outputs

Towards better ways of working →

Orange
Chance to shine

You're a great, committed, hardworking team member, waiting to prove what you're capable of.

Now you need some help to focus where your strengths lie, so that you can turn your energies fully into great results.

Purple
Towards Leadership

You're making your mark as expert, high performer and role model in the work you do. So what next?

Ready now
You already stand out as a role model and increasingly find yourself called on to lead. Taking a leadership role is a natural progression from here.

Ready soon
You're achieving highly and people are increasingly looking to you. You're starting to think more about your next move, and considering a role as a leader within the next three years.

Professional talent
Your role is well matched to your strengths and still offers scope to demonstrate your talent, but in three to five years it's likely you'll be ready for a new chapter.

Technical expert
You're not looking to be a leader because you have other goals: to focus fully on the technical work you're doing, to excel further and continue to pursue your vocation as an authority in your field.

Gold
Right on track

You're achieving the right outcomes in the right way.

You are one of those many key people that the NHS depends on to keep going.

Green
Chance to grow

Your job isn't working out as well as it could for you yet.

Maybe you're not getting the support you need, or perhaps the role just isn't right for you.

So let's talk about what we can do to make your role work better for you.

New to role
You've been in your job for 12 months or less. It's an exciting time, full of possibility, and a great chance to prove yourself.

Blue
Chance to connect

You're getting good (maybe great) results but it feels like you're going against the flow — things don't quite click with those around you.

This gives you a different kind of challenge — finding your own comfortable place as part of our shared working culture.

Towards better results from your work →

What to expect

Sitting down with your manager and using this tool in your conversation is an important step in a continuing journey to discover and maximise your potential.

It's worth taking time to prepare for the conversation, so that you come away with a clear sense of direction, and your manager is able to give you the right support over time. Here's what you can expect to happen:

You or your manager arranges the first conversation.

▼

Prepare by reading through these guidelines and thinking about examples of your work that will help place you on the model. It might be good to jot these down.

▼

Expect it to be positive, friendly, open and encouraging.

▼

Your manager may follow up by signposting you towards suitable development opportunities, or you may identify these yourself.

▼

You both continue this conversation over time. Keep talking with your manager, who can provide ongoing support, advice and feedback.

"There are no right or wrong places to be on the model — the most important thing is the quality of the conversation, in helping you understand and maximise your potential."

Finding your place on the model

During the talent conversation your manager will help you decide where you're placed, by agreeing a score on the horizontal scale for performance (towards better results) and the vertical scale for behaviour (towards better ways of working).

How to rate performance

Use the descriptions below to decide the level which most closely reflects your current performance:

Rating	What does it look like?
Partly meets expectations	You can show evidence that you've met some, but not all of the objectives, tasks or responsibilities you've been set.
Meets expectations	You can give clear evidence of how you are meeting the objectives, tasks and responsibilities set for your role — for example, completing a project or providing a service. You're able to deliver tasks and meet objectives and responsibilities with little, if any supervision. You sometimes go unnoticed in doing this, but you are recognised among your colleagues as a reliable person who will get things done.
Exceeds expectations	You can give clear evidence of how you are not only meeting the objectives, tasks and responsibilities set for your role, but going further, achieving more and adding your own individual touch. You only need to be given the vision or expectations of what needs to be achieved, and you do the rest. You're one of the high-impact people that others go to when they need something achieved with creative flare and added value.

How to rate behaviour

This may feel a little less clear-cut than measuring performance. You'll need to make a balanced assessment of how you act e.g. based on your organisation's agreed values and associated behaviours. Your manager will help by sharing their observations.

The two most common approaches for this are:

A review as part of your conversation

Talk through and seek mutual agreement on the level that most closely matches your current attainment

A review using a 360 degree feedback tool

i.e. the Healthcare Leadership Model
You can find out more about the model at

leadershipacademy.nhs.uk/leadershipmodel

Your manager will explain the chosen approach and work through it with you.

NOTE FOR MANAGERS

Please refer to the Appendix for further guidance on how to rate employees' behaviours.

Appendix

Notes for managers

Here you'll find practical advice on how to make sure you and your staff get the most out of the conversation, and what you can do to support them in pursuing their potential.

Making the most of the conversation

1. Create the right environment from the start

Create a sense of occasion - this is a really positive way to help bring out the best in everyone in your team.

Agree the aims of conversation — to maximise performance by having open honest dialogue about performance, behaviours and aspirations.

Agree precisely what you both want to achieve by the end of the conversation e.g. to identify a pathway to leadership, or clear steps for development.

Reaffirm that this is a two-way process.

2. Enable understanding and insight

Value and respect the different approaches, ideas and perspectives your team member brings.

Use coaching questions to encourage knowledge and values to surface. Give time to reflect.

3. Reach conclusions and finish in agreement

Acknowledge the insights and conclusions you've gained together.

Summarise and agree specific actions.

Close the conversation on a positive note.

Appendix: notes for managers

Coaching questions to support the conversation

Before the conversation, identify where you think the person you're talking to may be placed on the tool.
You can choose relevant coaching questions from the list below to help shape the conversation:

Question						
What made you make the move to this job? How does it fit into your career path?	●		●	●	●	●
What strengths and experience do you have and how do they align to this role?	●	●	●	●	●	●
What have you achieved to date that we need to celebrate?	●	●	●	●	●	●
Can you describe any feedback you have had since starting in post? What does this tell us?	●		●	●	●	●
What do you like about the current job you do? What don't you like about the job you do? Why?	●	●	●	●	●	●
What motivates you and keeps you engaged? What do we have to do to make you feel valued?	●	●	●	●	●	●
How are other people describing working with you?	●	●	●	●	●	●
What innovative ideas and opportunities have you identified to make your role even better / add value? How can we develop these further?	●	●	●	●	●	●
What gaps have you identified in relation to being able to perform / behave to your maximum potential in the role?	●	●	●	●	●	●
What support do you need from me, the team or organisation to help you reach your full potential in role?	●	●	●	●	●	●
Can you describe any barriers you have identified that could stop you reaching your full potential in this role? How could we overcome these?	●	●	●	●	●	●
Who has been helping you out and supporting you since you started in role? How has it helped? Who else can help?	●				●	
Where do you want to be in 3 years time? What are your aspirations? What would it look and feel like? What would you hear? (how do we get you there?)	●	●	●	●	●	●
How best can we use your skills & expertise to deliver what our team needs to achieve? How do you see your role delivering our organisational ambitions?	●	●	●	●	●	●
How do we maintain your professional development in your current role? Describe the development you need?		●	●	●	●	●
What could be the barriers to continuing good performance/behaviours, and how can we overcome these?		●	●	●	●	●
What would it take to stretch you a little outside your comfort zone? Offer you a little more challenge?		●	●	●	●	●
What can you offer back? Can you develop others? How can you share and pass on your knowledge, skills and expertise?			●	●	●	●
What happens to our team if you leave? What do we need to do to fill any gap you may leave?			●		●	
What appeals to you more – a leadership role, or deeper development into your technical expertise?			●	●	●	●
What could be the barriers to achieving your aspirations, and how can we overcome these?	●		●	●	●	●
How do you feel about your current performance and behaviours in role? How would you rate your performance/behaviour at present?	●	●	●	●	●	●
What do you like about your job? What don't you like about the job? Why? Has anything happened that could affect how you perform/behave at work?			●	●	●	●
How can we support you to improve your performance and/or behaviours?			●	●	●	●
Give me some examples of how you behave when working that link to our values? Is this consistent?			●	●	●	●

Things to be aware of

✓ Do:

Use a coaching-style conversation drawing on listening and empathy skills to explore the bigger picture and aspirations.

Use factual observations not judgements. Consider evidence available e.g. 360 feedback, wider feedback and evidence of performance, outcomes, and competency achievements to give you a rounded picture.

Be honest, transparent, constructive and clear. Be respectful and supportive too.

Actively listen, observing body language, tone and also what the person is not saying.

Be constructive, building on ideas and perspectives that come up in conversation.

Identify their key strengths and how to draw on these in their current role, or their next.

See any development areas as a positive way to reach full potential.

Think about behaviour just as much as skills and performance – it's not just what we achieve but how we do it.

Summarise the discussion, agree action points and finish positively.

Make sure you hold talent conversations with all your team, regardless of role.

Respect and value the different ways your team members may approach things.

Use this time to appreciate their strengths and unlock hidden talents.

✗ Don't:

Do all the talking

Make personal judgements or assumptions

Use this as an opportunity to blame

Force your views onto the individual

Become emotional or aggressive

Only focus on weakness

See development areas as failure

Rush the conversation

Avoid difficult topics

Using evidence-based options for rating behaviour

1. Behavioural Framework - your organisation may already have a framework to help your team members explore how they behave. Alternatively, you could create one, which could look like this:

Organisational behaviours	Rating 1 - Partially meets 2 - Meets 3 - Exceeds	Comments and examples (Individual, peers, reports, manager, others)
e.g. Treating colleagues with respect	2	Demonstrates consistent behaviour in treating colleagues with respect and support

2. Another option is to undertake a 360 degree review. You can find further information here or on page 14 of our Guidelines for using the Healthcare Leadership Model.

After the conversation

Use confidential spaces such as senior team meetings to discuss the process and their outcomes and why you both reached these conclusions. This will help give consistency in how all individuals in the team are rated. It also allows open and transparent discussions around maximising potential, linking to talent activities such as succession planning.

If you're undertaking Maximising Potential Discussions for whole teams, it is good practice to discuss and de-brief the discussions and outcome against those with other peers/managers. This helps to remove any bias and ensure everyone in the team is treated equitably, and also allows peer support between managers when applying the MPC tool consistently.

Development interventions

Use the table below to identify specific ways in which you can support individuals as part of an ongoing development plan:

Develop into role

- A formal and structured induction / **preceptorship** period and plan. Setting clear objectives (performance and developmental)
- Set clear expectations and timescales on what to achieve, how to achieve it, and support
- **Time**, **encouragement** and **attention** to help enhance work, keep on track and make them feel valued. Frequent formal and informal content time.
- Possibly some **career diagnosis** – is this role right for them? If not, what would be? How do you get there?
- Ongoing **feedback** and support **using the MPC-T tool**, so they know when they're doing well and when they need to improve performance / behaviour

Technical skills to do the job

- Formal **technical training and development** - skills / knowledge / competencies
- Encouragement in getting **on the job experience** to master it
- On the job **mentoring** support from others who are more experienced

Self-insight and feedback

- Self-development opportunities to **better understand self** / self-growth / deeper insight
- **Development centre** to impartially understand self, aspirations and development needs
- **Psychometrics** and **profiling tools** (e.g. Myers Briggs, Belbin, 16PF, Strengths etc) that allow the individual to understand their key drivers and explore how their job / career fits their motivators
- Encouragement to **get feedback** from others (e.g. what's it like working with me, what are my strengths and how can I improve?)
- **Coaching** to explore challenges / career ambitions / understand self / plan how to get there
- **Counselling** if personal challenges are affecting work

Maintaining performance

- On-going education, training and Continuing Professional Development (**CPD**) to **maintain current performance**
- **Reward, value and motivate** – thanking them for doing a good job, understand their motivators and show you value them

Stretch

- **Stretch opportunities** – keeping motivated and challenged in role, trying new things, stretch projects and stretch objectives
- **Secondments** and **stretch assignments** (internal and external)
- Review **career options** may be appropriate e.g. career coaching
- Opportunities to **raise profile / exposure**

Developing others

- **Developing** and **training others** in their skills/areas of expertise – 'give back' opportunities
- **Mentoring** others more junior in team