Background
The National Services Division (NSD) has devolved authority from the Scottish Government to commission specialist services, national screening programmes and risk sharing arrangements. Funding is top-sliced from NHS Boards and that money is used to commission very high cost, low volume services such as liver transplants, cardiac transplant services and national screening programmes, including breast screening.

Belinda Henshaw, Programme Manager, works within the boundaries of a commissioning framework, performance monitoring and managing services within her remit. Part of this process is ensuring that services deliver to a high quality standard within an allocated budget:

NHS Services (Scotland): using National Occupational Standards (NOS) to assist in delivering high cost medical screening in Scotland
“NSD commissions high quality specialist services and screening programmes for the population of Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government and NHS Territorial Health Boards. This mechanism insures that services remain sustainable and high quality whilst reducing the risk of unplanned highly expensive care destabilising a local Board’s own budget. It ensures that there is equity of access to highly specialised services for the entire population.”

Using National Occupational Standards (NOS) for screening programmes

Belinda began using NOS in the context of the Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Screening Programmes (AAA Screening) in 2009, a year after the Scottish Cabinet Secretary had announced that AAA Screening would be available for men who were 65 years old in Scotland. Once this announcement had been made NSD were instructed to develop and implement the screening programme. Belinda set about developing a programme structure which included a multitude of working groups to look at specific components of the screening programme. One of the working groups was convened to look at workforce issues relating to the programme and develop all components necessary to configure a screening workforce. Lorna Hunter, from Skills for Health, was invited onto the group which recognised the need to assess the viability of NOS in this project.

“We were looking at NOS because we realised that the workforce would have to deliver the screening programme to a certain standard of quality right across the board,” said Belinda.

“The benefits of NOS

For Belinda, NOS have been a really beneficial tool because, although she is using NOS for preparation (prior to the launch of AAA screening programme), it has also allowed her to map out how the programme plans to train personnel, the content of the training and the competencies required for the entire workforce.

“Our objective,” stresses Belinda, “is that every man in Scotland receives an opportunity for screening, and that the screening episode is delivered to a high quality in a safe, effective way. People are working to their utmost competencies here, and at a competency that is expected of them, to deliver this quality.”

Another benefit of NOS that is apparent in the National Services Division (Scotland) is that ultimately it will allow Boards to configure screening in a way that means that their local screening programmes are viable, sustainable and consistent.

Intelligence>Investment>Impact

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills is a Non-Departmental Public Body providing strategic leadership on skills and employment issues in the four nations of the UK. Together, our Commissioners comprise a social partnership that includes CEOs of large and small employers across a wide range of sectors; trade unions and representatives from the Devolved Administrations. Our mission is to work with and through our partners to secure a greater commitment to invest in the skills of people to drive, enterprise, jobs and growth.