

How to Improve ESR Data Quality

By following the best practices outlined in this guidance, organisations can uphold data quality, drive continuous improvement, and maximise the value of ESR for both employees and the wider healthcare systems.

Best Practice

ESR promotes good data quality practices by using standardised values such as Job Roles, Sickness Absence Reasons, and Occupational Codes that align with the NHS National Workforce Dataset (NWD). This ensures consistent reporting across the NHS and all workforce systems. To maintain and improve data quality, organisations and users must take ownership of data accuracy from the creation of an employee record through to termination. While some fields are mandatory, non-mandatory and missing values within ESR must also be addressed to ensure completeness.

The following high priority actions, recommended practices and strategic improvement practices support users in managing and improving data quality

High Priority Actions:

The actions are essential for ensuring compliance, financial accuracy, and the integrity of workforce data. Organisations should review the recommended actions and suggested frequencies as best practice guidance, to support effective embedding into operational processes:

Fortnightly Actions

1. Run and review the NHS Data Quality Dashboard:

Organisations should routinely run the [NHS Data Quality Dashboard](#) to identify any new validation errors to support continuous improvement in data quality and address issues before they build up:

- Run the Dashboard and promptly correct missing or inaccurate data.
- If recurring issues are identified (e.g., missing ethnicity or destination on leaving) then assess and update local processes to prevent future occurrences and address the cause of the errors at source.

2. Review Missing Data for New Starters:

The most efficient and effective way to collect relevant data on an individual is at the point of the recruitment. Organisations should have monitoring in place to make certain that new starters joining the organisation have a 'complete' employment record from day one.

- Run the 'Missing Information' tab of the [Recruitment Dashboard](#) in ESR BI to identify any records where there are gaps.
- Simplify the process for new starters to update their information by providing access to the Applicant Dashboard.

- If recurring issues are identified (e.g., the same fields are regularly blank) then assess and update local processes to prevent future occurrences.

Monthly Actions

1. Monitoring Payment Inaccuracies:

Common causes of payment inaccuracies include delays in processing terminations and contract changes, incorrect salary banding, and late updates to sickness or maternity leave records, this can lead to under payments, over payments and no payments. To prevent payment inaccuracies and ensure financial efficiency:

- Implement Manager Self Service, enabling managers to take responsibility for changes within their team and submit relevant changes directly to the system in advance of payroll deadlines.
- Where payment inaccuracies have occurred, use BI to analyse the data and identify any areas for intervention and improvement.
- Use the [Payroll Run Analysis Dashboard](#) to identify anomalies in net pay, employer's charges, and earnings.
- Use the [Data Quality Dashboard](#) to analyse Open Ended Absences.

2. Monitor Inter Authority Transfer Process:

Enabling data to move around the NHS seamlessly and efficiently is key to maintaining and improving data quality, as well as reducing duplication and potential for error. Organisations should already have established processes in place to ensure all new starters internal to the NHS have an IAT completed, but to validate that these processes are working as intended, you should:

- Use the [IAT Dashboard](#) to provide assurances that IATs are being completed.
- Monitor the status of IATs to identify any instances whereby the IAT has not reached conclusion.

3. Monitor Professional Registrations & Unique ID issues:

Maintaining accurate professional registration data is essential for compliance and workforce assurance. Additionally, accurate personal data is vital to ensure employment records across multiple organisations are joined accurately via a Unique Identifier. This process is integral to accurate national reporting. To support this:

- Ensure you have a nominated contact within your organisation to receive monthly reports from the ESR Data Team.
- Regularly review monthly reports for NMC, GMC, HCPC, and Unique ID.
- Use the [Professional Registration Dashboard](#) in ESR BI to identify mismatches or duplicate registration numbers.
- Refer to the [HR Best Practice Guide](#) on the ESR Hub for further guidance.

4. Audit Open Sickness Absences:

Unclosed sickness absences can negatively impact payroll accuracy, sick pay entitlement, and absence reporting. To maintain accurate records:

- Use the [Absence Dashboard](#) in ESR BI to regularly audit and close open absences.
- Ensure timely updates to support workforce reporting.

5. Review Unpaid Employee Records:

To Improve data accuracy and system performance:

- Regularly review employee records that have not been paid for 12 months or more.
- Use the [Payroll Run Analysis Dashboard](#) in ESR BI to identify these records.
- Use the [Data Quality Dashboard](#) in ESR BI to identify Bank Assignments with a status of Inactive Not worked.
- Remove inactive records to reduce inflated headcount figures and streamline administrative processes.

6. Validate Job Roles, Pay Bands and Occupational Codes:

Accurate job role and occupational code data supports regulatory compliance and effective workforce planning. To ensure data integrity:

- Use [Workforce Information Verifier Dashboard](#) to identify invalid combinations.
- Update records following confirmed changes to avoid misrepresentation of staffing levels.

7. Close Vacancies and Update Applicant Statuses:

At the end of each recruitment cycle:

- Close Vacancies
- Update unsuccessful applicants to “Terminate Application”.
- Use the [Recruitment Dashboard](#) to support regular reviews and maintain accurate applicant records.

8. Improve Leaver Data Quality

Organisations should regularly review the [Leaver Data Quality Tab](#) within the NHS [Management Overview Dashboard](#) to ensure accurate records before employees leave. Regular checks improve reporting, reduce data gaps, and support compliance with national standards. The Leaver Data Quality page focuses on four key areas:

- Contact Details
- DOB/NI validations
- Protected Characteristics
- Employer/Leaver information

Recommended Operational Practices:

These practices contribute to enhanced operational efficiency, a better user experience, and more complete, reliable data. Organisations are encouraged to review and integrate these actions into their regular monthly workflows to support ongoing data quality improvement:

1. Assign Role Holders for Key Notifications:

To ensure timely action and compliance designate appropriate role holders to receive ESR notifications related to:

- Assignment changes.
- Mandatory training Compliance
- Right to work expiry.
- Professional Registration alerts.

2. Use the NHS Employment Checklist Dashboard:

Run the [NHS Employment Checklist Dashboard](#) to regularly monitor key employee data,

including:

- Recruitment Source.
- Equality and Diversity (E&D) data.
- Via Status and Right to Work (RTW) checks.

The NHS Employment Checklist Dashboard can also be used to maintain accurate employment history (start/end dates, job titles, role changes) to support:

- Career tracking.
- Leave entitlement calculations.
- Performance evaluations.

3. Support Staff Retention Through Exit Interviews:

- Ensure the ESR Exit interview Questionnaire is completed for all leavers.
- Use insights to inform retention strategies and improve employee experience, in line with the NHS People Plan.

4. Ensure Valid Email Addresses for Employees:

Maintain up to date email addresses in ESR to:

- Ensure employees are in receipt of key workflow notifications
- Support NHS Staff Survey distribution
- Maximise participation and response rates

Strategic Improvements:

These are long term initiatives that support sustained data quality and system optimisation.

1. Implement Regular Data Cleansing

Organisations should routinely conduct audits to identify:

- Inconsistences
- Errors
- Missing information

Where possible, organisations should aim to undertake cleansing of these identified areas as small ad-hoc projects which can be spread out over time.

e.g. Undertake a project to review and cleanse redundant open applicant records.

2. Subscribe to BI Alerts

Organisations should subscribe to BI Alerts to support improvements in data quality, operational efficiency, compliance, and workforce planning. These alerts enable proactive management by automatically flagging critical issues, helping teams take timely action and reduce the risk of oversight.

Highlighted alerts include:

- Employee Termination Data Quality
- Outstanding Elements (Payment Inaccuracies)

- Missing Information

Summary:

When these actions are fully embedded into day-to-day operational workflows rather than handled sporadically, they will help to transform your organisations data from being merely functional into a strategic asset. At a local level, this will provide significant analytical benefit to enable key decision making, as well as ensure readiness for migration to the Future Workforce Solution. At a national level it ensures that ESR can continue to support effective workforce management, policy-making, and transformation aligned to the NHS's long-term goals.

