

Unit Three

Competence from a general practice employer's perspective

Key messages

Reading this unit will:

- provide you with an understanding of the benefits to general practice of taking the competence management approach
- set out the three steps to successfully implementing competence management in general practice.

Making the best use of the general practice workforce will help to develop capacity, to achieve targets and to improve quality. As for all staff, it is important for your practice that you can demonstrate that the health care assistants (HCAs) employed in your practice have the right skills, knowledge and experience to carry out their role. This can be achieved by implementing a competence management approach. A competence management approach will help you to:

- manage risk
- deliver high-quality care
- support practice management business planning
- assess the education and training needs of your HCAs.

What is a competence?

Skills for Health is the Sector Skills Council for the healthcare sector (<http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk>).

Skills for Health describe competences as:

Descriptors of the performance criteria, knowledge and understanding that are required to undertake work activities. They describe what individuals need to do and to know to carry out the activity – regardless of who performs it.

One of their roles is to write the competences for the healthcare workforce. Developing a competence management approach requires three steps.

- Step 1: Setting the infrastructure.
- Step 2: Operation and implementation.
- Step 3: Quality monitoring and evaluation.

Step 1: Setting the infrastructure

In order to successfully implement a competence management approach, you will need to:

- *develop or update the HCA job description and role profile (see [Tool – Job Description for an HCA](#))*
- *identify the competences associated with the role (see below)*
- *have an induction programme in place (see [Tool – Health care assistant induction timetable](#))*
- *identify the method and process to be used to assess competences*
- *have a mentorship scheme in place*
- *ensure resources are available for training and development.*

This unit sets out a process that may help you to develop a competence management approach. It contains template documentation and tools that will support you with adopting this approach. You can also find an example role profile on the Skills for Health website that can be used as a starting point for drawing together the competences that you would like your HCA to demonstrate.

A mentor for day-to-day supervision will be required. The mentor will need to be an experienced practitioner and should ideally be available to work alongside the HCA in the initial stages of employment. In the longer term, the mentor plays a supportive, supervisory and assessor role. Regular meetings between the mentor and the HCA will be needed to ensure this happens.

It is essential for the practice to ensure that sufficient protected time is provided to mentors for the appropriate supervision and guidance of HCAs.

The mentor will usually be a registered nurse from within the practice. In some areas, practices have been able to obtain support from their PCT in the form of a clinical nurse trainer (CNT) or someone operating in a similar role.

Example: PCT supported clinical nurse trainers

Croydon PCT has provided core development funding for HCAs in their area and has also appointed CNTs who allocate dedicated time to the GP practice. The CNT helps by comparing existing resource with up-coming need, identifying required skills, developing personal plans/action plans, and conducting assessments (see [Tool – Role narrative for a clinical nurse trainer](#)).

Where the PCT is unable to provide specific support, general practices might group together to share the resources of a mentor between them. Grouping together and collaboration for service development activities has been successful in social enterprise, and is likely to be a future model in practice-based commissioning.

Step 2: Operation and implementation

There are three stages to assessing an HCA's competences:

1. identifying the competences that apply to the role
2. assessing the performance of the individual against these competences
3. identifying the gaps and taking action to fill the gaps identified.

1. Identifying the competences that apply to the role

- A. Having identified a mentor to work with the HCA, the mentor/supervisor and the HCA will look at the HCA job description and pick out the key tasks that make up the job, eg taking blood, updating records or stocking clinic rooms (see [Tool – Job Description – Health Care Assistant](#) and [Tool – Job Description – Senior Health Care Assistant](#))).
- B. Go to the Skills for Health website (<http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk>) to find the national competences that are relevant to the HCA role in your practice.

This site provides a database of nationally agreed competences for you to choose from. There are electronic tools that will help you to find relevant competences for the HCA role in your practice.

It is important to view the interactive guides that are on the site. These guides will help you to understand the benefits of each tool. There are also step-by-step guides to using the tools available on the site.

- C. As an extra source of help, samples of two HCA role profiles have been set up. The login details needed to access these profiles are detailed below. It is recommended that the mentor/supervisor and the HCA look at these profiles together and choose the one that is the most similar to the HCA role in your practice. They can then import it into their own login area. Once there, they can edit the profile by deleting competences that are not part of the role and adding those that are relevant.

- Go to <http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk>
- If you are not already registered, register as a new user.
- Once registered – login using your new details.
- Click on the orange box on the right hand side entitled 'Competence Application Tools':



- View interactive guides



Interactive guide



Step-by-step instructions



Use this tool

- Once you are familiar with the site return to the homepage.
- To access the WiPP sample HCA role profiles, login as:
 - username: **wipp**
 - password: **hcaproject**.

- Click on the orange box on the right hand side entitled 'Competence Application Tools'



- Click on 'Use this tool'
Role profiles are lists of competences that have been compiled to describe particular job roles.



Interactive guide



Step-by-step instructions



Use this tool

- From here you will be able to view the 2 sample profiles:
 - general HCA (GP practice)
 - senior HCA – general practice.
- From this page you can:
 - click on the profile closest to your role and look at the competences associate with it
 - click on the send button and email the profile to yourself.
- Send the profile closest to your role to yourself by email.
- Open your email and follow the instructions for accepting this into your own login area.
- Once the role profile has been accepted into your login area, you can edit it using the step by step guides.

Within your general practice, there may be some existing competences or standards that are used locally for assessment and/or appraisal. You may wish to check these against the national competences and ensure that they align with them. You can replace local competences with the national standards from the Skills for Health website.

For general practice employers who have moved to Agenda for Change,¹ we have also provided a sample overview of a *Knowledge and Skills Framework* outline for a senior HCA (NVQ Level 3 or equivalent) and a general HCA in general practice

(see [Tool – Competences framework for a senior health care assistant](#) and [Tool – Competences framework for a health care assistant](#)).

2. Assessing the performance of the individual against these competences

There are a number of ways that you can assess the performance of your HCA against the competences. These include:

- self assessment
- direct observation
- question-and-answer sessions
- reflective discussions
- testimony from other key staff
- learning-log evidence.

Self assessment

If you have developed a role profile on the Skills for Health website, you can encourage your HCA to use the self-assessment tool they provide to assess their performance against each of the competences in the role profile. This can then be used as a basis for discussion when the HCA meets with their mentor.

If you do not have access to the Skills for Health website, see [Tool – Self assessment competence](#).

Alternatively, your general practice may have an assessment process in place. If this is the case, you could print a list of competences required for the HCA role from the Skills for Health website and use the assessment process used in your practice.

Regardless of the method that you choose, the process will be the same. This consists of making some form of judgment about how well the HCA performs against each of the competences. The assessment scale that is used on the Skills for Health website is:

- A. I do not know the knowledge and skills required
- B. I know the knowledge and skills required, but I don't have them
- C. I know and am I developing the knowledge and skills
- D. I have the knowledge and skills, but I don't use them
- E. I have the knowledge and skills, and I use them regularly.

The mentor/supervisor and the HCA can choose to make the judgments together, discussing each of the competences and agreeing how well the HCA performs against them. Alternatively, they could make the judgments separately and then bring them together to use as a basis for discussion.

The outcome of the discussion will be the identification of competences that they agree the HCA is performing to the national standard, as well as areas where there is a gap in the HCA's knowledge or skill. The mentor/supervisor should make their assessment/judgment based upon their previous observations of the HCA performing the tasks. They may also use feedback from colleagues who work with the HCA and/or patients for whom the HCA cares. Where there is uncertainty about whether or not they perform to the national standard, you will need to plan a course of action that will enable them to learn the skill and subsequently be assessed against it. This is covered in the next step.

Documenting assessment

It is important to document competence assessment and the evidence gathered to demonstrate that competence. Amongst other things, the documentation can be used to:

- *demonstrate HCA competence to patients and staff*
- *reduce the risk of inappropriate delegation of work*
- *support the practice to demonstrate that it met the clinical governance agenda*
- *support a risk-management strategy*
- *support the personal and professional development of HCAs.*

You may have a system in place in your practice to assess competence. Alternatively, see [Tool – Template for competence assessment](#) and [Tool – Competence assessment – obtain blood samples](#) for examples.

Accreditation of assessment

If the practice supports HCAs to undertake NVQs, competences will be assessed by an accredited NVQ assessor. This may be a member of your practice team or an external person.

3. Identifying the gaps and taking action to fill the gaps identified

Having undertaken an assessment of the HCA competences, you should have been able to identify:

- *things that the HCA is currently doing well*
- *areas where they need to develop further*
- *new skills that you would need them to gain.*

A personal development plan (PDP) should be drawn up that documents areas for development and generates a list of learning activities required to help fill any gaps identified in their knowledge and skills. A PDP is an agreement between the mentor/supervisor and the HCA. It provides a useful way of planning the learning activities needed to meet the competences within the role and encourages the HCA to be an active part of the learning process.

See **Tool – Drafting your personal development plan as a health care assistant**.

The PDP will show the areas where you need to support your HCA with developing their experience. It will also identify the training they need to achieve the competences required to enable them to carry out their role. The plan will state how this will be completed and who will help support them.

It is important to remember that competence has been shown to decrease over time in some tasks, especially when they are practised infrequently. To help your HCA maintain their competence, provide them with feedback regularly. It is recommended that competences are reviewed on an annual basis, or earlier should any concerns arise.

Step 3: Quality monitoring and evaluation

Successful implementation of the competence management approach will help the practice to achieve its aspirations, to maximise its performance under the *new General Medical Services contract*,² and to meet The Healthcare Commission³ requirements for training and development.

Summary

- *The competence management approach ensures individual members of the practice team are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, characteristics and experience to undertake their role.*
- *The competence management approach supports more efficient, effective and focused work in the practice.*
- *To implement the competence management approach, you will need to:*
 - *identify what competences your HCA requires*
 - *identify a mentor to support, supervise and assess the HCA.*
- *You may get support from your PCT or by collaborating with other practices employing HCAs.*

References

1. Royal College of Nursing. *Agenda for Change – A Guide to the New Pay, Terms and Conditions in the NHS*. London: Royal College of Nursing; 2005. <http://www.rcn.org.uk/agendaforchange/downloads/AFC-GuideToNewPayTermsConditionsNHS.pdf>
2. Department of Health. *Investing in General Practice: The New General Medical Services Contract*. London: Department of Health; 2003 http://www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidanceArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4071966&chk=YplDde
3. Department of Health. *Standards for Better Health*. London: Department of Health; 2006 http://www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidanceArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4086665&chk=jXDWU6