

# Unit Three

## Competence from an HCA's perspective

### Key messages

Reading this unit will:

- help you to understand what a competence is and why it is important to regularly assess your performance
- help you to understand the process that you need to go through to get started
- provide you and your mentor with tools and resources developed and used by others.

As a health care assistant (HCA), you make an important contribution to the care of patients and are a valued member of the practice team.<sup>1</sup> It is important for you, your practice and the patients that you care for that you can demonstrate you have the right skills, knowledge and experience to do your job. Your job description sets out your role and responsibilities. These responsibilities link to national standards drawn up to describe the performance level that is expected of someone doing a particular task, eg taking a blood sample. These standards are called competences and this unit tells you how competences work.

### What is a competence?

Skills for Health is the Sector Skills Council for the healthcare sector (<http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk>). One of their roles is to write the competences for the healthcare workforce.

Skills for Health describe competences as:

The 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.

### Setting the infrastructure and developing your role as an HCA

Your job description and person specification give details of what is expected of you as an HCA in general practice. As part of your employment and career progression, you should be expected to complete:

- an induction programme (see **Tool – Health care assistant induction timetable**)
- an assessment of your competence (see below)
- ongoing appraisals (see **Unit 4: Personal and professional development**)
- training programmes to meet your learning needs (see **Unit 5: Education and training**).

Competences describe how tasks are carried out safely in your practice and competence assessments ensure you are performing to that safe standard.

Good practice would dictate that you have your competence assessed when you start in your role or when you undertake new tasks within your role. There should be ongoing monitoring to ensure that you maintain your competence and discussion about this will normally take place through the appraisal process.

You should have a mentor who assesses and monitors your work in the practice; this is usually the nurse who delegates work to you and ensures that you are capable of working on your own.

## Operation and implementation

There are three stages to having your competence assessed:

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

### 1. Identifying the competences that apply to your role

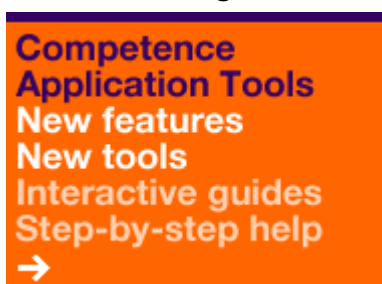
- A. Working with your mentor/supervisor, look at your job description and pick out the key tasks that make up your job, eg taking blood, updating records or stocking clinic rooms.
- B. Go to the Skills for Health website (<http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk>) to find the national competences that are relevant to your job.

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 and put them into a role profile.

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 you and your mentor/supervisor look at these profiles together and choose the one that is the most similar to your own role. You can then send this to yourself by email and import it into your own login area. Once there, you can then edit the profile by deleting competences that are not part of your 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:



- Once you are familiar with the site return to the homepage.
- To access the WiPP sample HCA role profiles, login as:
  - i. username: **wipp**
  - ii. 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:
  - i. general HCA (GP practice)
  - ii. senior HCA – general practice.
- From this page you can:
  - i. click on the profile closest to your role and look at the competences associate with it
  - ii. 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.

## 2. Assessing your performance against these competences

There are a number of ways that you and your mentor/supervisor can assess your performance 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 use the self-assessment tool they provide to assess your performance against each of the competences in your role profile.

If you do not have access to the Skills for Health website, see [Tool – Self assessment of 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 your 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 you perform 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 I am 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.

You and your mentor/supervisor can choose to make the judgments together, discussing each of the competences and agreeing how well you perform against them. Alternatively, you 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 you agree that you are performing to the national standard, as well as areas where there is a gap in your knowledge or skill. Your mentor/supervisor should make their assessment/judgment based upon their previous observations of you performing the tasks. They may also use feedback from colleagues who you work with and/or patients for whom you care. Where there is uncertainty about whether or not you do perform to the national standard – perhaps because you are new in post, or perhaps because you have identified new competences that are required in your role – you will need to plan a course of action that will enable you to learn the skill and subsequently be assessed against it. This is covered in the next step.

### Documenting assessment

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

- *demonstrate your 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 your personal and professional development.*

You may have a system in place in your practice to assess your competence. If this does not exist, we have provided you with an example of a competence assessment for venous blood sampling and a template for you to record other competence assessments you undertake (see [Tool – Competence assessment – obtaining a venous blood samples](#) and [Tool – Template for competence assessment](#)).

### Accreditation of assessment

If there is support in your practice to undertake NVQs, your 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 a self assessment and a mentor/supervisor assessment, you should have been able to identify:

- *things you are currently doing well*
- *areas where you need to develop further*
- *new skills that you need 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 you fill any gaps you have encountered.

See [Tool – Drafting your personal development plan as a health care assistant](#). This is your own personal record for you to keep.

Your PDP is an agreement between your mentor/supervisor and yourself. It provides a useful way of planning the learning activities needed to meet the competences within your role and makes you an active part of the learning process.

When you have your PDP in place, the next step will be to identify the most appropriate people to help you implement it and to set target dates for completion of the activities (as agreed by your mentor).

The PDP will show the areas where you need experience and training, how this will be completed and who will help you.

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 you maintain your competence, ask for feedback regularly from colleagues and your mentor/supervisor. It is recommended that competences are reviewed on an annual basis, or earlier should any concerns arise.

## Start again

As your role develops, you may find that the list of tasks you undertake and your responsibilities in the practice grow. You will need to revisit your list of competences as changes happen so that it is up to date.

### Summary

- *It is important for you, your practice and the patients that you care for that you can demonstrate you have the right skills, knowledge and experience to do your job.*
- *Competence assessments will help you to know the expectations your employer has of you and how well you are doing your job.*
- *You should work with your mentor to prepare a list of competences that match your role using the tools provided.*
- *Your assessment should tell you where you are doing well and where you need to fill gaps through learning and experience.*

### Reference

1. Edwards M. The Nurses Aid: Past & Future Necessity. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. 1997; 26(2):237–245.