



Corporate Health and Safety Guidance Document

GD 21 - Ensuring Competence : A Manager's Guide

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Competence

The Health and Safety Executive have defined competence as the ability to undertake responsibilities and perform activities to a recognised standard on a regular basis. It is a combination of skills, experience and knowledge. Competence issues have been identified as root causes in many major accidents. It is with this in mind and the desire to maintain a healthy workforce that this guidance is given to managers that are undertaking employee reviews, performance reviews or similar.

Every manager/supervisor must ensure that those undertaking work tasks are skilled to an appropriate level to undertake the job properly. The performance review system is a useful tool in ensuring the assessment of health and safety competence is being undertaken and recorded.

The issue of competence relates to the whole role, not just the health and safety elements of the role being undertaken, thus managers/supervisors will need to ensure all skill areas are considered

Key principles

1. Competence assurance should be linked to key responsibilities and activities identified in the role description and the risk assessments that exist for the work activities.
2. Competency assurance systems should aim to establish and maintain competency for *all* those involved in the work activity, including managers.
3. S/NVQs should include site specific aspects, and be linked to the identified hazards.
4. 'On the job' training should be structured and supported by other forms of training.
5. Training should be *validated* ('Did it deliver what it was supposed to?'), and *evaluated* ('Is this the *right* kind of training for our needs?') and *recorded*.
6. There should be refresher training for infrequent or critical safety tasks.
7. Link to procedures – the format and content of procedures should be influenced by staff competence.

Process

Competence assessment is an ongoing process and can best be described in 4 stages:

1) Review

Whilst undertaking the performance review, the manager/supervisor needs to discuss with the employee concerned the specific work activities that are associated with the role, or are about to be associated with the role.

The health and safety implications of such work activities must be identified during this stage

2) Appraise Skills

This stage is about determining the level of competence that already exists within the employee. This can be as simple as noting relevant certification that exists, eg PCV driving licence, Construction Skills Card, membership certificate for professional body etc.

Other considerations will be internal training courses, other training courses, experience of task and work activity.

Each work activity and/or item of work equipment will be associated with a level of competence that will allow work to take place safely.

3) Discuss

Discussions will then take place to ensure that council standards are being met, where this is not the case then a gap has been identified and the manager/supervisor will need to identify an development plan that can fill the gap.

It is important to recognise that work activities requiring a specific level of competence should not be undertaken until by the employee has reached that level of competence or is being supervised by somebody with that level of competence.

4) Adequately Prepare

The next stage is about making sure the employee is adequately prepared for the work tasks ahead, this might mean job shadowing, supervised work over an agreed timescale or attendance at a specific training course.

It should be noted that just because someone has attended a training course it does not mean they are competent. For example, someone holding a driving licence may never have driven on a motorway, thus although they have attended a training course on driving and passed a driving test, they are not competent to drive on a motorway and there should be no expectation from the manager that they will do so on behalf of the council.

Regular update training should also be taking place.

All training and development activities must be recorded on RTIX through your Service co-ordinator.

5) Repeat

This process needs to be repeated on an regular basis, normally every 6 months, or sooner where there is a change to the work activity, a new activity is introduced or there is a change in personal circumstance for the employee e.g. illness

This process can be best summarised in figure 1 "RADAR, a competence assessment model"



Figure 1 - "RADAR, a competence assessment model"

Like a RADAR, the whole process is about looking forward to see what is coming and ensuring the appropriate employees have the correct skills and experience to allow the tasks to be undertaken safely.

Appendix 1 provides a checklist aimed at helping managers to prepare for a performance review and give appropriate consideration to the health and safety matters.

Further guidance is given within appendix 2 on the main health and safety issues that may come up during a review meeting, it is not an exhaustive list and managers are advised to take the main lead from their risk assessment covering the work activities of the employee involved in the review.

Manager Checklist

In order to assist managers/supervisors prepare for the RADAR process, the following questions can help set a foundation for the performance review meeting.

Know all hazards that could arise in every task (including normal operational, maintenance and emergency tasks)	
Have a good selection process to identify suitable employees or contractors for those tasks	
Know the exact type of person to assign to each task	
Be able to always put the right person onto a particular job	
Identify any gaps in a person's skill or knowledge or experience (competence)	
Know the best way of providing the skills and knowledge that people need (e.g. training, including on the job)	
Have access to the best training resources (training facilities, trainers and equipment)	
Make it easy for people to get the training they need	
Always use actual work instructions/procedures/ localised risk assessments in the training	
Continually improve own as well as employee competence	
Take steps to ensure employee does not do a job they're not competent to do	
Assess whether training has worked	
Consider if retraining of some people may be required	
Keep good records so that we know what training/experience each person has had and what they need next	
Change the selection, training and assessment system if it isn't working	

Aide Memoir: Health and Safety Topics

The following list outlines some of the main health and safety topics that feature within the work activities of council services, if an employee is to be expected to deal with the topic in some way then their competence must be assessed.

A scoring mechanism is provided to aid, if required, in the overall assessment of an employee.

Topic	Notes	Category
Asbestos	Most employees need only know where it might be in the workplaces they use and the action to be taken when damaged asbestos is identified. Online training is available to assist with this area. Those involved in managing properties may need more detailed training.	
Blood borne Viruses	Those employees who will be expected to deal with body fluids of any kind must be made aware of the issues and given adequate instruction or training on how to deal with body fluids safely.	
Confined Spaces	People expected to enter spaces that fall within the definition of a confined space need to be made aware of the risks and be able to undertake specific risk assessments for these work areas, this can include attic spaces, solum areas, storage areas etc.	
Hazardous Substances	Substances that are regarded as hazardous to health need to be formally assessed, part of the overall findings will require employees using such substances to be competent in their use.	
Display Screen Equipment	Employees using display screen equipment such as computers will need to have been made aware of the health and safety issues associated with the work activity. AN online training module exists to help improve the competence of those using DSE. The online training module does not address the competence issues surrounding software or peripherals.	
Foreseeable Emergencies	Employees need to be competent to follow the expected actions in the event of an emergency. For many this may simply be regular involvement in the evacuation process for a building. Others with more specific duties or exposure to other foreseeable emergencies will need additional training and assessment of competence.	
First Aid	Those employees expected to provide first aid on behalf of the employer will require a degree of competence to deliver this service. Accordingly some training and/or assessment of competence must be delivered to relevant employees.	

Topic	Notes	Category
Manual Handling	Employees that are expected to move or handle items or people will need to develop a level of competence in this field. Manual Handling is one of the main causes of injury and work related absence and therefore merits proper consideration. A number of training options exist for this topic.	
Noise	If working in an environment where noise can be an issue, have employees been advised of the outcome of the noise risk assessment? Are they able to utilise the control mechanisms effectively to control the noise, and have then received instruction and training on the use of any personal protective equipment provided. Do those in the work area understand the health risks associated with noise	
Vibration	Employees are expected to understand the dangers associated with vibration. Steps need to be taken to ensure they understand the safe systems of work and can use the various items of work equipment effectively.	
Occupational Driving	If an employee is driving a vehicle of any type on behalf of the council, there is a need to ensure they are competent to undertake that driving task. Simply holding a driving licence does not constitute competence in all aspects of driving, for example driving a vehicle larger than normal, motorway driving, driving in the dark poor weather. Steps need to be taken to ensure staff are only asked to undertake driving duties they are competent to do.	
Pressure Systems	If an employee is working with equipment that has air or liquid under pressure, then there is a need to ensure relevant employees are fully aware of the dangers associated with the pressurised system. Employees must be fully aware of the safe system of work	
Work Equipment	The law requires that employees use only work equipment that they are competent to use. With this in mind managers need to be comfortable that employees are fully aware of the significant risks, to themselves and others, associated with the work equipment being used. There is an expectation that a written document will exist showing all those that deemed competent to use various items of work equipment	
Construction Site, Structures and Excavations	If there is an expectation that an employee will visit a construction site, then steps must be taken to ensure they have an understanding of the risk associated with the various types of sites visited, use of an assessment scheme such as CSCS should be considered.	

Topic	Notes	Category
Risk Assessment	Any employee undertaking risk assessments of any type need to be competent to do so. This is normally achieved by attendance at a recognised training course.	
Violence and Lone Working	Working is circumstances where there is risk of violence or there is vulnerability because of lone working will require a degree of information, instruction and training. Employees need to be fully aware of the systems in place to protect their safety and competent to use the control measures offered.	
Lifting Operations and Equipment	Where a work activity is taking place that is linked to, or associated with, equipment that moves people or objects then there is a need to ensure employees are fully aware of how to use the equipment and the actions to be taken to maintain it ir deal with faults.	
Pesticides	Employees using pesticides of any type must have attended a relevant training course, or have documented evidence of being assessed as competent in its use	
Radiation	If employees are expected to use equipment that contains a radiation source, then steps must be take to ensure their competence in its use, maintenance and disposal.	
Biological agents	Employees involved in the use of biological agents must undergo a specific assessment of their competence to handling such materials.	
Lead	Employees working with lead must be made aware of the dangers associated with the material and be fully aware of the precautions that must be taken when using or disposing of the material.	
Work at height	Falling from height is one of the main reasons for work related fatalities, with this in mind, managers need to ensure that where the work cannot be undertake on the ground instead, employees working at any height above the ground are fully aware of how to use the required access equipment, and are fully aware of the relevant risk assessment procedures and safe systems of work.	
Electrical Safety	Those employees involved in the installation of, testing or or maintenance of electrical equipment or systems must be certificated as competent to undertake the work, this must include and appreciation of the limits to the work they are authorised to undertake.	

Topic	Notes	Category
Fire, Bombs and Explosions	Staff expected to undertake any actions in response to a fire, bomb or explosion etc must be competent to undertake the role they have been nominated for. This could include, a simply evacuating a building, helping to evacuate others, fire warden duties or acting and a first responder to an emergency situation.	
LPG	Employees expected to maintain and inspect LPG systems need to be fully aware of the limitations of the system and the situations that would render the system unsafe and requiring maintenance.	
Dust, fumes, gases and vapours	Where work is taking place involving atmospheric concentrations of dust, fumes, gases or vapours, employees will need to be aware of the health risks associated wit them and the safe systems of work being used to control the risk. If respiratory protective equipment is being used then there is a also a need to ensure face fit testing takes place for every employee.	
Carcinogens	Specific training must be given to those employees expected to work with materials and substances recognised as carcinogens.	

Category A: Fully competent in area.

Category B: Can demonstrate competence in most elements associated with area.

Category C: Can demonstrate competence in some elements associated with area.

Category D: Unable to offer any evidence of competence in area.

N/A: topic not relevant to work activity at this time