

Understanding Competence – Candidate Guidance

What is competence?

In its simplest form, competence is the ability to do something successfully or efficiently. As such, competence is the possession of the necessary knowledge, skills, behaviours and experience to be able to carry out a particular task to a required standard.

What are competence standards?

For engineers, competence standards are set out in a document called the UK Standards for Professional Engineering Competence (UK-SPEC). These are agreed by all engineers as the standards which are expected for registration as a Chartered Engineer (CEng), an Incorporated Engineer (IEng), or an Engineering Technician (EngTech)

The Society for the Environment set similar competence standards for Chartered Environmentalist (CEnv) and Registered Environmental Practitioner (REnvP).

How long does it take to become competent?

There is no set time limit. It varies from engineer to engineer. Some people have a job which exposes them to relevant development opportunities whereby competence can be developed very quickly. In other cases, it takes more time, particularly if the individual is not able to be exposed to all of the competence requirements. For example, those competences related to the supervision of projects and people often take more time. You should always be realistic and accept that full competence will always take time.

Can I get help?

It is always a good idea to find another professionally registered engineer who is at the same level of registration as you are planning to act as your mentor. They will be a good role model for you and above all, will help you to identify gaps in your competence and challenge you. A good mentor makes all the difference. If you are struggling to find a mentor, please ask for help as there are various IAgRE members who act as mentors.

How do I know when I am competent?

We suggest you adopt a self-assessment approach and use it at your professional reviews with colleagues, mentors and supervisors.

Fundamentally competence is something which you will achieve based upon a wide range of factors. In plain terms, competence is an absolute matter, you are either competent or not. You might use the following criteria in your self-assessment and personal development

- I have no experience against this competence yet
- I am developing skills and experience to meet the requirements of this competence
- I meet the minimum requirements of this competence
- I am very well experienced and confident in this competence

Do I have to be competent against all of the criteria?

Yes, although it is realistic to acknowledge that you will be “just” competent in some, and very well practiced and experienced in others. However you do need to meet the minimum threshold in all areas and be able to prove this to assessors.

How do I demonstrate competence?

The starting point is to read and understand UK-SPEC as it relates to your relevant level of registration. It is likely that your training (at university, college or through work-place learning) will prepare you for demonstrating your competence.

As a starting point, you need to demonstrate your competence by writing down how your work activities meet the various standards set out in UK-SPEC.

Can I use a diverse range of evidence to show my competence?

By all means! The written word is great but if you can enhance this with photographs and diagrams which show case your work that is a very helpful approach.

Is there a word limit?

You should try to be succinct but IAgRE would never limit your ability to celebrate your competence and abilities by limiting the number of words you can write.

How will I be assessed?

Your submission will be assessed by two suitably qualified engineers from the IAgRE Membership Committee. They will look at your work and check that you are able to meet all of the requirements set out in UK-SPEC. If they are happy, this will be reviewed by the full IAgRE Membership Committee before the final decision is reached.

If you are applying for CEng, IEng or CEnv you will be invited for a Professional Review Interview (PRI) where there will be an oral assessment of your competence.

What if I do not meet the requirements?

Constructive feedback is at the heart of the IAgRE professional registration process. It is very important to IAgRE and you that we manage expectations. We would never want to put you into a position where you have false hopes which leads to an unsuccessful outcome – that suits no one.

We always try to provide initial information advice and guidance so that you only submit your work when you are ready. However from time to time, there is a need for you to take a little more time to develop competence and then resubmit your application at a later stage

Initial Professional Development

See our guidance on Initial Professional Development (IPD). This gives you a structured approach to developing your competence.