Quick reference guidance

Using the national practitioner-level competencies framework for radiographers working in CT practice in the UK

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Overview

The Society of Radiographers (SoR) CT Advisory Group (CTAG) has developed these national professional competencies to support the consistent application of theoretical and practical training, and to reduce unwarranted variation in the assessment of competence of radiographers working in CT.

CTAG is an appointed SoR membership committee of recognised expert radiographers from education and the clinical CT workforce.

The *Quality Standard for Imaging* (QSI)[1] requires and *Principles of Safe Staffing for Radiography Leaders*[2] recommends that a competency framework is in place for defining roles and tasks within a service.

The competencies framework defines what adequate training means in relation to working as an operator or practitioner duty holder at radiographer practitioner level in CT and as required by The Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations.[3,4] Alongside formal education it supports duty holders to fulfil the requirements of schedule 3 of The Ionising Radiation (Medical Exposure) Regulations 2017.[3]

The framework is built upon existing research reflecting priorities for technical competencies required during an individual's early career in CT.[5] They align with professional best practice guidance. Alongside the practitioner-level education and qualification requirements and the knowledge, skills and attributes set out in the *Education and Career Framework (ECF) for the Radiography Workforce (fourth edition)*,[6] they reflect the minimum requirements of adequate training, including theoretical knowledge and practical experience for anyone working in CT.

This evidence-based framework complements existing formal education pathways. It represents a benchmark for practical training in CT. It requires employer assessment and agreement that an individual has reached a safe and effective level of skills and knowledge relevant to their specific CT environment and scope of practice.

The competencies framework recognises that radiographers enter CT with a range of prior radiography experience, from minimal pre-registration exposure to post registration radiography experience in other roles. The competencies framework can therefore be used by early career radiographers and experienced radiographers new to CT.

Radiographer duties and responsibilities may vary depending on the scope and complexity of the CT service. The framework facilitates flexibility in assessing competence within a variety of service delivery models, but it is expected that, as a minimum, all radiographers working in CT will have met the practitioner-level outcome measures relevant to the local service. Where specific services are unavailable for assessment, for example interventional CT, individuals would not be expected to demonstrate competence in managing those procedures.

The framework is applicable to services of varying sizes operating a variety of staffing models in both the NHS and independent sector in the United Kingdom. It can be used by chief executive officers and senior managers to understand, plan and deliver safe and effective services, by service leads managing education and training, and by individuals considering their lifelong professional and technical development in CT.

The framework can be used to assure patients and the public by providing *QSI*[1] evidence on the quality and equity of radiographer training in UK CT services. It provides a standardised employer record of the knowledge base of the CT workforce, reduces the potential for training inconsistencies and risk of harm, and supports the delivery of safer high-quality patient outcomes.

Services implementing the competencies framework are encouraged to feedback their experiences to the SoR via a voluntary pilot study which will be established to measure the impact of the framework.

The background and supporting information behind the development of the competencies framework is available in the publication ***Explanatory guidance; Using the national practitioner-level competencies framework for radiographers working in CT practice in the UK***.

How to use the framework

1. For each competency domain, e.g. Radiographic knowledge, the competency statement describes what the individual is expected to be able to do and the knowledge, skills and attributes they are expected to demonstrate.

2. The outcome measure indicates whether the individual has met those expectations. The supporting evidence is used alongside the outcome measure to verify competence. Outcome measures should be assessed using locally agreed methods undertaken by adequately trained staff. Anyone working in CT as an autonomous practitioner (i.e. not a trainee) should, as a minimum, meet the outcome measures relevant to their role.

3. Employers must be satisfied that the individual can perform within each competency domain to the standard expected. It is the individual's and the employer's responsibility to ensure a person's competence is appropriate for the role they undertake.

4. Employers and assessors should ensure adequate evidence of theoretical knowledge and practical experience is recorded prior to an individual being assessed as competent.

5. Examples of the types of evidence that might support assessments are suggested in the 'Radiographic knowledge' domain, but these can be applied across all domains.

Key performance indicators could also be used as evidence. Examples are intended for illustration only. Employers should clearly define what constitutes sufficient proof that the person has been adequately trained.

6. Documented evidence should support and reflect direct observation, assessment and case-based discussions.

7. Evidence should be appropriate to the responsibilities, skills and knowledge relevant to the role as well as the individual's formal professional and educational achievements across the four pillars of radiographic practice.

8. Assessors should be appropriately trained and act fairly, impartially and without bias, discrimination or prejudice. Employers should consider how they assess and document the competence of assessors working in CT.

9. For larger services, a virtually run competency panel could be developed to support on-site technical assessments. The panel should consist of appropriately trained, educated and experienced CT radiographers, medical physics experts, and practice educators. A panel offers a practical solution to busy departments with a high turnover of staff or small or geographically isolated services with fewer appropriately trained staff. Assessment could be integrated into a local preceptorship programme.

10. It is important to note that while capabilities are often transferrable between employers, technical skills require re-assessment to meet the requirements of IR(ME)R. An individual could therefore provide their competency record to a new employer as evidence that they meet a standard for the practice level required but should expect to undertake additional training and assessment on any new or unfamiliar equipment.

11. Individuals should be supported to attain all outcome measures before being expected to undertake the full range of responsibilities of the practitioner role in CT. Where an individual is unable to demonstrate the required competencies to work in the CT environment despite appropriate training and reasonable support, local policies should facilitate more appropriate use of their skills. When things go wrong, reflection by practitioners at all levels should be fundamental to the practice of radiographers. A robust learning and service-improvement process should be mandated by the employer.

The Society of Radiographers recommends use of the National incident learning system for clinical imaging, MRI and nuclear medicine[7] to ensure a systems-based approach to learning from ionising radiation incidents and near misses/good catches.

What is not covered by the framework

While the framework is not specifically designed to represent the competencies required for therapeutic radiographers working in radiotherapy pretreatment or for radiographers and nuclear medicine technologists operating CT scanners, they should be expected, as a minimum, to meet the outcome measures relevant to their roles and responsibilities. It can be adapted to meet any additional outcome measures expected in those areas of practice.

It does not include the training, education, competencies or governance required for the radiographic support and assistant workforce. *The Radiography Support and Assistant Workforce: regulatory compliance, governance arrangements, supervision and delegation*[8] and *Allied Health Professions' Support Worker Competency, Education, and Career Development Framework*[9] provide guidance for the safe and effective employment of support and assistant staff.

Other CT operators such as medical physics experts and radiologists are likely to have a more limited scope of entitlement as CT operators, but they may find the framework helpful as a guide to develop their own training and education record.

Assessment of impact

The SoR believes that assessing the impact of professional guidance is key to the ongoing provision of relevant and dynamic support for the radiographic workforce.

The competencies framework provides an assessment tool which should be used alongside the *ECF*[6] at practitioner level and potentially beyond.

Pilot sites familiar with the *ECF*[6] will be invited through SoR's network of CT Service Leads to work with the Society and College of Radiographers to contribute to the evolution and continuous improvement of the competencies framework. They will influence how the framework is implemented in practice and potentially developed in future to include enhanced, advanced and consultant practice levels in CT. In this way an evaluation of its current and potential impact and effectiveness can be made.

The competencies framework will be reviewed in response to significant professional and technical changes and no later than five years after publication to ensure it continues to meet the needs of our developing workforce and services.

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