

Competent Expert for Health Impact Assessment including Health in Environmental Assessments



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Introduction

1.1 The primary audience for this statement is Human Health Topic Leads producing health assessments, including Health Impact Assessments (HIA) and human health chapters or sections within Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA), Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or Environmental Outcome Reports (EOR), (collectively 'health assessments' hereafter). This statement is written for England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (ROI), although the statement may also be used internationally.

1.2 The Human Health Topic Lead is expected to be the primary competent expert for this subject matter (supported by individual technical specialists as appropriate). The Human Health Topic Lead oversees – and is responsible for producing and quality-assuring – the health assessment. Although not an exhaustive definition, competence relates to ensuring the health assessment is complete, of high quality, robust, proportionate and fit for purpose.

1.3 It is noted that the competence for particular technical expertise required on health assessments varies by sector and the decision-making process it is intended to inform. Institutions regularly undertaking health assessments should have a structured approach to acquiring competent expert capacity.

1.4 As illustration, the current EIA Regulations in the UK (and ROI equivalent) require that:

- In order to ensure the completeness and quality of the Environmental Statement... (a) the developer must ensure that the Environmental Statement is prepared by competent experts; and (b) the Environmental Statement must be accompanied by a statement from the developer outlining the relevant expertise or qualifications of such experts (Example from English EIA Regulations).

1.5 Those involved in other roles in the health assessment should also have a working understanding (directed by the scope of the assessment) of the definitions, terminology and principles, albeit not to the level of a competent expert. Others involved in a health assessment include those commissioning, project managing, contributing to, and externally reviewing health assessments.

1.6 Whether in the public, private or third sector, those undertaking a health assessment for the first few times should be a member of a team that is led by a Human Health Topic Lead. However, it is recognised that this competency statement should not be a barrier to undertaking health assessments where there are no existing competent experts to guide a health assessment from within an organisation. In such circumstances, it is recognised that competency capacity needs to be developed. Such capacity building can be supported by undertaking health assessment training and seeking external review or support from competent experts, as appropriate and proportionate to an organisation's needs.

1.7 This competency statement is accompanied by a framework ([Table 1](#)) that sets out criteria indicative of being a competent expert. Separately, [Table 2](#) of the framework also includes voluntary criteria relevant to other associated roles and progression towards being recognised as a competent expert.

1.8 It is recommended that those commissioning a health assessment request a competency statement be provided. This may be informed by, but need not be limited to, this statement.

1.9 Whereas most IEMA technical competences have long been supported by well-established professional bodies and training programs, historically this has not been the case for health assessments. This competency statement and framework supports a transition towards greater competence recognition in health assessment practice. The current framework includes a reliance on short courses and learning by experience. It is expected that over time this competency framework will be updated to reflect developments in the field's training capacity, for example, allowing a greater reliance on specific university courses for health impact assessments.

1.10 Health assessment practitioners are part of the public health endeavour, and competence must reflect this role. Public health is the 'art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organised efforts of society' (Acheson, 1988).

Competency

2.1 A competent expert advocates measures or alternatives that improve population health (not only reducing adverse effects, but also increasing beneficial effects), including articulating and navigating tensions between determinants of health and/or population groups, and improving health equity.

2.2 As a minimum, the Human Health Topic Lead's level of understanding must include all of the following:

- **Knowledge** of the concepts, theories and application of wider determinants of health, vulnerable groups, inequalities and equity pertaining to population health, mitigation hierarchy, determination of significance and public health outcome indicators (indicators of health determinants, health equity and health outcomes).
- **General competency should be demonstrated through** a relevant degree, (e.g., public health, health impact assessment, biomedical, biological and environmental sciences, town and country planning, environmental assessment or human geography), training in a health-related discipline or other professional qualifications, and through obtaining relevant experience for the expected depth and complexity of health assessment. In all cases, this includes knowledge, understanding and the ability to apply the principles of public health (health protection, health promotion and healthcare services), health impact assessment, and environmental health.
- **Context-specific competency should be demonstrated through** a working knowledge and appreciation of local, national or other relevant jurisdiction's public health challenges, their epidemiology and features that: render adverse effects able (or not) to be managed in accordance with the highest tiers of the mitigation hierarchy (including alternatives that avoid adverse effects); and beneficial effects able (or not) to be proportionately and equitably enhanced to promote public health.
- **Sector specific competency should be demonstrated through an** understanding of the hazards, opportunities and requirements of the broad sector of practice relevant to the health assessment, e.g., healthcare planning, public policy making, infrastructure projects, or spatial planning of

communities. This includes appreciation of where understanding of particular guidelines, technologies, regulations, management systems or working practices is needed.

2.3. As well as a sound knowledge of the key principles concerning public health, the Human Health Topic Lead must have a good understanding of impact assessment principles, including the ability to:

- **define** the scope of an assessment, including relevant determinants of health and vulnerable population groups, as well as its temporal and spatial boundaries;
- **determine** potential impacts and effects (whether positive, negative, direct, indirect or cumulative), including through selecting or collecting and critically appraising robust evidence to inform professional judgements, including engaging with stakeholders and informants using appropriate methods;
- **understand** the mechanisms established by legislation, policy and accepted practice, to adequately reduce potential adverse effects and enhance potential beneficial effects, including the early application of alternatives, design changes and mitigation;
- **identify** and contextualise local health circumstances to determine sensitivity and assess the magnitude, distribution and significance of any residual population health effects, including assessing the level of change relative to relevant public health, social, or environmental outcomes; and
- **advocate for, and defend**, the assessments where appropriate, including justifying the presence or absence of recommendations, or other measures, that protect and promote public health, e.g., as a health expert witness.

2.4. Having relevant knowledge enables a competent expert to apply the core principles to protecting and promoting health, and improving health and social care through relevant processes and the delivery of a health assessment geared to the decision-making level it is intended to inform.

2.5. Within all core health assessment documentation, it is the responsibility of the Human Health Topic Lead to ensure that both their competence, and the competence of their team in the production of content, is appropriate and clearly evidenced.

2.6. A competent expert adheres to relevant codes of professional conduct, for example those of IEMA ([IEMA Code of Professional Conduct](#)).

2.7. Specific competency criteria may be set by those commissioning a health assessment, proportionate to the purpose and needs of that assessment. Such criteria should be consistent with delivering complete and high quality health assessments, which align with guidance and relevant quality review standards.

2.8. Indicative criteria for the Human Health Topic Lead are set out in [Table 1](#).

2.9. The indicative criteria are intended to be used positively to benchmark competence, support career progression and give confidence to those leading and commissioning health assessments. Determining the robustness of a given health assessment is ultimately established through the application of health assessment quality review standards, not simply competency criteria.

Table 1

Health assessment competent expert framework (based on either qualifications or professional membership and, in all cases, experience)

Competency name	EITHER Qualification*	OR Professional membership	AND Experience	Ability given
<p>Human Health Topic Lead (Intermediate) [Competent Expert Level]</p> <p>(Guide criteria indicative of competency, which are not a formal test, nor are they the only way competence can be established. They should not act as a barrier to high quality health assessments being undertaken.)</p>	Level 5+ (foundation degree or equivalent) with a public health component.	Member in good standing with a relevant reputable professional body for public health or impact assessment where membership level has been achieved through assessment or interview.	<p>Meaningfully participated in and contributed to 5+ completed checklist or desktop health assessments that follow guidance and meet relevant quality review standards. Such health assessments to have been led, overseen or reviewed by a competent expert.</p> <p>AND, completed 3-5 days of health assessment training (online or in person) or equivalent CPD that demonstrates competency. Training should be either led by a competent expert for that level, or be accredited by a relevant professional body** or higher education establishment. Training may be in-house or external. This training requirement applies where it is available and is reasonably accessible in terms of location of delivery, capacity of training (frequency and class size) and cost of attendance.</p>	Can lead, internally review and do (plan, design, deliver and evaluate) or screen (determine the need for) a less complex health assessment (desktop/checklist).
<p>Human Health Topic Lead (Advanced) [Competent Expert Level]</p> <p>(Guide criteria indicative of competency, which are not a formal test, nor are they the only way competence can be established. They should not act as a barrier to high quality health assessments being undertaken.)</p>	Level 7+ (master's degree or equivalent) with a public health component and preferably a module on health assessment.	Member in good standing with a relevant reputable professional body for public health or impact assessment where membership level has been achieved through assessment or interview, for example to chartered status or registration on the UK Public Health Register.	<p>Meaningfully participated in and contributed to 5+ completed comprehensive or participatory health assessments that follow guidance and meet relevant quality review standards. Such health assessments to have been led, overseen or reviewed by a competent expert.</p> <p>AND, completed 3-5 days of health assessment training (online or in person) or equivalent CPD that demonstrates competency. Training should be either led by a competent expert for that level, or be accredited by a relevant professional body** or higher education establishment. Training may be in-house or external. This training requirement applies where it is available and is reasonably accessible in terms of location of delivery, capacity of training (frequency and class size) and cost of attendance.</p>	<p>Can lead, internally review and do (plan, design, deliver and evaluate) or screen (determine the need for) a complex health assessment (comprehensive/participatory).</p> <p>Can work with professional bodies to refine competences and health assessment methods.</p>

* UK level qualification or equivalent [gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels](https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels)

** Relevant professional bodies may include but are not limited to IEMA, the Faculty of Public Health and the Institute of Public Health in Ireland.

Table 2

Voluntary criteria relating to other health assessment roles (based on either qualifications or professional membership and, in all cases, experience)

Competency name	EITHER Qualification*	OR Professional membership	AND Experience	Ability given
<p>Commissioner</p> <p>(Voluntary standard that should not act as a barrier to commissioning health assessments.)</p>	Self-study in: the relevant triggers for health assessment; the different types of health assessment; the importance of using competent experts; and the requirements of quality review standards.	Not applicable.	<p>Completed ½ to 1 day of training (online or in person) delivered by a competent expert.</p> <p>OR, read through 2+ recent completed similar health assessments that follow guidance and meet relevant quality review standards.</p>	Can commission the right type of health assessment with awareness of competence, proportionality and quality.
<p>External reviewer</p> <p>(Voluntary standard that should not act as a barrier to reviewing and commenting on health assessments.)</p>	Level 5+ (foundation degree or equivalent) with a public health component and relevant self-study of the principles of impact assessment and relevant quality review standards.	Member in good standing with a reputable professional body for public health.	<p>Read the relevant guidance and read 5+ recent completed similar health assessments that follow guidance and meet relevant quality review standards.</p> <p>OR, complete ½ to 1 day, and preferably 3-5 days, of training on health assessment (online or in person) that includes a module on reviewing. Training should be either led by a competent expert for that level, or be accredited by a relevant professional body or higher education establishment. This training requirement applies where training is available and is reasonably accessible in terms of location of delivery, capacity of training (frequency and class size) and cost of attendance.</p>	<p>Has sufficient expertise to provide relevant technical review of completed health assessments on behalf of determining authorities or other stakeholders.</p> <p>Can work with professional bodies to refine competences and health assessment methods.</p>
<p>Contributor or coordinator</p> <p>(Voluntary standard that should not act as a barrier to supporting or participating in health assessments.)</p>	Relevant self-study of the principles of public health and impact assessment and relevant quality review standards.	Affiliate of a reputable professional body for public health or impact assessment.	<p>Completed 3-5 days of health assessment training (online or in person), delivered by a competent expert, or training accredited by a relevant professional body**.</p> <p>OR, has a detailed working knowledge of the relevant guidance and has read through 2+ recent completed similar health assessments that follow guidance and meet relevant quality review standards.</p>	<p>Can contribute to a health assessment as part of a team led by a competent expert.</p> <p>Can coordinate the wider project management of the health assessment.</p>
<p>Trainer</p> <p>(Voluntary standard that should not act as a barrier to health assessment capacity building.)</p>	As for Human Health Topic Lead, intermediate/advanced as appropriate.	As for Human Health Topic Lead.	<p>As for Human Health Topic Lead.</p> <p>AND, has previously led or completed and passed a training course similar to the one being facilitated.</p>	Can deliver health assessment training courses that are accredited by a relevant professional body or higher education establishment.

*UK level qualification or equivalent [gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels](https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels)

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Acknowledgements

Working Group

This practitioner's guide has been developed by IEMA and EIA professionals working for organisations registered to the EIA Quality Mark (iema.net/qmark).

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The suggested citation: Pyper, R., Birley, M., Buroni, A., Gibson, G., Day, L., Waples, H., Beard, C., Dellaflora, S., Salder, J., Netherton, A., Green, L., Purdy, J., Douglas, M. (2024) *IEMA Guide: Competent Expert for Health Impact Assessment including Health in Environmental Assessments*.

Further information

The use of this guide will be reviewed, and future iterations published if, and when, required.

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About IEMA iema.net

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We are the global professional body for over 21,000 individuals and 300 organisations working, studying or interested in the environment and sustainability.

We are the professional organisation at the centre of the sustainability agenda, connecting business and individuals across industries, sectors and borders.

We also help and support public and private sector organisations, governments and regulators to do the right thing when it comes to environment- and sustainability-related initiatives, challenges and opportunities.

We work to influence public policy on environment and sustainability matters. We do this by drawing on the insights and experience of our members to ensure that what happens in practice influences the development of government policy, legislation, regulations and standards.

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