

Competence Profiles – Guidance for applicants and Assessors

PART 2 – INDUSTRY CLASSIFICATION (Y1) CONSULTANCY AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

I write this from the perspective of a single man operation, but also from experience of operating on the other side of the relationship, being a manager in a manufacturing organisation employing consultants for specific tasks.

A Consultants employment status can range from a one-man operation to a full time employee within a large organisation (eg WS Atkins).

The Consultant's role can be varied in work type and employment contract. These can include:

- Employment to solve a "one off" problem. Usually short term and with a fixed scope of work.
- On a "call off" basis. The Consultant is called in on occasions when the client has some issue that needs resolution.
- On a fixed term contract. Where the client has a longer term need but has a clear start and finish.
- On an open-ended contract, working full time for the client.

Working arrangements can be full time with the client (either in his offices or site) or remotely.

Competence A – Knowledge and understanding of Engineering Principles

This is the key competence for a Consultant. The client is buying in expertise and if that offered by the Consultant is not correct and current then the service offered is useless and potentially dangerous (both financially and legally).

Hence the Consultant has to keep up to date with all developments within his chosen sphere of work.

The consultant is often expert in a narrow field of Engineering. However he must be knowledgeable in many other fields such that he understands the wider implications of any proposals he may make.

This Competence will link closely to the personal Development Action Plan.

Evidence: Examples of a project where a novel, but technically sound, approach has been applied to a client's request.

Competence B – Practical Application of Engineering knowledge and expertise

The Client will often use a Consultant to offer a fresh mind to an existing problem Hence the Consultant needs to be able to apply an open mind to be able to propose a solution.

It is often on the Consultant's own initiative that his workload develops. Therefore he has to be keenly aware of potential projects, in talking to clients he can identify sources of work.

Evidence: Examples of Project work with some emphasis on competing the task and reviewing the outcomes.

Competence C – Leadership and Management

Generally a consultant is not being employed as a manager, but as a specialist to solve a potential problem. Sometimes the Consultant operates as a one-man operation. Hence his opportunities to manage staff or teams is limited.

The Consultant will generally be asked to solve a problem and the early question will be “how much and how long?” The Consultant will have to give some commitment, maybe not 100% firm, but then have some means to measure that he will conform to these commitments. To do this he may have to offer project plans and budgets.

The Consultant will have to take time occasionally to review his work and monitor his quality. A good consultant will talk to his clients and understand how his work has been received.

Evidence: Project planning (software?)

Competence D – Communication and inter-personnel skills

This is a clear area where the Consultant needs good skills. He must be able to demonstrate that he has performed his task to the satisfaction of his client.

Often the Consultant will be required to present his proposals to his client, sometimes to a group of people who may be from different backgrounds.

In general the client will require some written report from the Consultant and clearly the quality of the task will be judged on this report. Again the Consultant has to consider the readership of the report may be from varied backgrounds and seniority.

In some cases the Consultants report may be used to further a particular cause or stance (maybe even a legal case). Consequently the Consultant's report must clearly describe the work undertaken and the limitations to the conclusions drawn.

Evidence: Reports (written), Oral presentation during interview.

Competence E – Professional Conduct

The Consultant must be fully aware of all applicable legislation, clearly he cannot propose any solution that leaves the client exposed to legal risk.

Personal development has to be geared clearly towards the anticipated needs of existing and potential future clients. Consequently the Personal Development Action Plan needs to be a very flexible document.

Evidence: Personal Development Action Plan. Attendance at relevant courses / seminars.