

# Assessment and development of literacy, numeracy and spoken communication skills

## Guidance for providers of adult social care and primary health care in Kent, Surrey and Sussex

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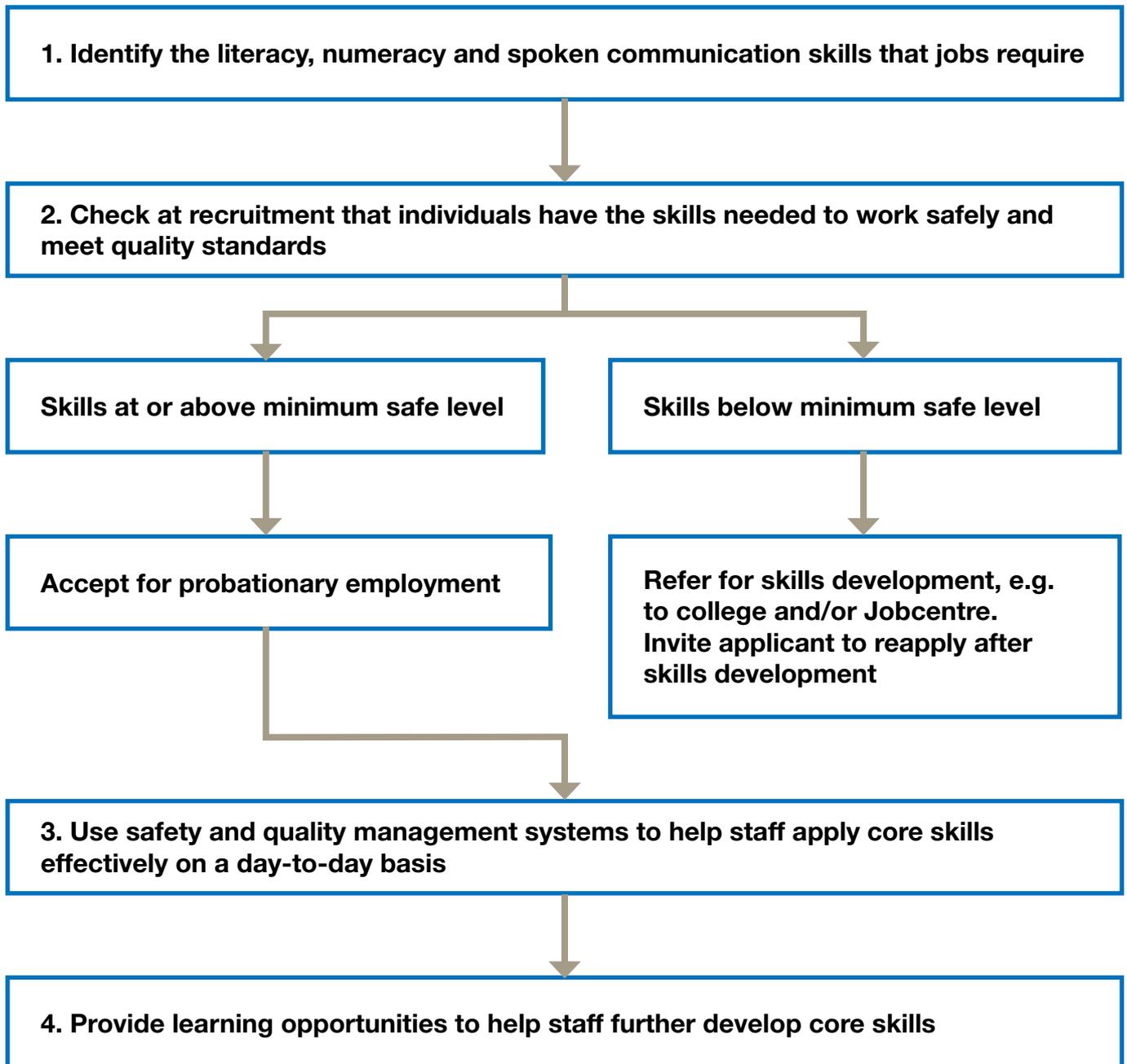
**The Care Quality Commission (CQC) expects providers to have systems in place to ensure that staff have – and are supported to apply – the right skills to meet people’s care and treatment needs. <sup>1</sup>**

Every job in adult social care and in primary health care requires staff to use literacy, numeracy and spoken communication skills. So it’s essential to:

-  check that staff have the literacy, numeracy and spoken communication skills their jobs require
-  support staff to apply the skills effectively in their work
-  provide opportunities to develop the skills – and are encouraged to take those opportunities.

<sup>1</sup> Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014: Regulation 18. <http://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/regulations-enforcement/regulation-18-staffing>

## At a glance



# How to identify the literacy, numeracy and spoken communication skills that jobs require

Review the job and consider:

- what are the day-to-day requirements of the role in relation to literacy, numeracy and spoken communication skills? What reading does the job require? What documentation needs to be completed? Who must the post-holder communicate with? What tasks involve numbers?
- what does doing the job well look like? What does doing it badly look like?
- what are the critical tasks and activities?
- where it is most important in the job for staff to apply literacy, numeracy and spoken communication skills effectively?
- what problems typically arise in relation to communication, record-keeping and report writing, tasks that involve numbers?
- what help do post-holders typically require?

If you cannot answer these questions from personal knowledge, you may wish to refer to:

- job description, person specification
- written guidance on safety and quality issued to staff, including task specifications, risk assessments, training materials
- records of compliments, complaints, incidents
- inspection feedback
- other people with current experience of the job, including:
  - managers and supervisors, trainers and assessors
  - staff employed in the role
  - people who use the service.

Now draw up a short literacy, numeracy and spoken communication skills specification for the role that lists where effective application of core skills is essential to safety and quality.

Use this formula:

**To be effective in this role, a person must be able to...**

Then give a concrete example, for example 'build rapport with people who use the service' or 'write detailed, objective, legible notes in the care plan' or 'administer medicine accurately'.

# How to assess, support and develop the skills

## How to assess literacy, numeracy and spoken communication skills

The aim of assessment is to check that a person has at least the minimum level of skills required to work safely and meet quality standards in a given role.

The most accurate way to check skills is to observe the person applying the skills while actually doing the job – for example, interacting with a person who needs care and support, or briefing a colleague at hand-over, or filling in a care plan.

Where this is not possible, set the person a task that will give you a realistic indication of the person's skills. The closer the assessment task is to what the person will actually have to do on the job, the better.



**With the interview process, we do an assessment, just to get minimum standards. It's based on using the internet to plan a trip – something they're likely to have to do. They have to go online and find information about when things open, how much they cost, whether there is disabled access. (Learning disabilities care provider)**

**In our interview we use a couple of little exercises, just very simple ones. We give them a couple of scenarios. 'You've gone today to deliver care to Mrs Jones. You normally do abc for her. But today she doesn't want you to, she's not feeling so good, and so on. Please reflect this and write a report.' We get them to do a written report.**

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Homecare provider

Ideally assessment at recruitment should cover literacy, numeracy and spoken communication skills. This can be done simply and quite quickly. The best approach is to ask the person to read something, then write a response and then discuss what they have written. This can be used to assess both literacy and numeracy, as well as spoken communication skills.



### Tip

Do not rely on application forms or telephone conversations as indicators of skill levels



**Managers need to be aware when they are recruiting that the person turning up for interview is not necessarily the person who filled in the paperwork or even the person who has made the telephone call, sometimes it can be a completely different individual. A member of the family has gone through the initial screening process on their behalf.**

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**Provider of homecare, residential and supported living service**

## **Probationary assessment**

Post-recruitment, induction training and the Care Certificate will give you a much fuller picture of the person's ability to meet the requirements of the job, allowing you to identify areas where the person may need support and development.



**If a person needs to get from A to B to be a top performer you need to assess whether they are able to close the gap from A to B. And it might take a few months – sometimes people here say, 'She can't do something,' and I say, 'She's only been here four weeks. Give her a chance.' What we need to do as employers is to say, 'Is she going to close this gap?'**

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**Homecare provider**

## How to support literacy, numeracy and spoken communication skills

Use your existing safety and quality management systems to support staff to apply the skills effectively.

Your aim is to ensure staff know concretely and in detail what is required in tasks involving literacy, numeracy and spoken communication skills – in other words, exactly how they are expected to apply the skills, e.g. how to speak ‘respectfully’, or how to write ‘objectively’ – and then to support staff to apply the skills effectively.



### Tip

Staff will benefit from consistent messages, so it is important that managers, supervisors and trainers agree what effective application of skills looks like in practice. Written guidance can help to create and sustain shared understanding. Policies and procedures, training materials, and health, safety and quality guidance all offer opportunities to explain how to use the skills. Make sure that guidance is written in plain, accessible language. This will help managers, supervisors and trainers to communicate the guidance to staff.

Start at induction by showing staff exactly how to undertake tasks involving literacy, numeracy and spoken communication skills. Discuss the difference with staff between effective and ineffective application of the skills and the impact on safety and quality. Then use:

- supervisory monitoring and feedback
- on-the-job coaching and mentoring
- reflective discussion and peer learning at team meetings, and
- written guidance to reinforce and develop the understanding and ability of staff.

This will help both to manage any risks to safety and quality related to the skills, and also to create an environment that enables and motivates staff to improve their skills, on a daily basis, directly through their work.

# Resources to help you

See the resource directory for a range of resources to support identification, assessment and development of the skills.

Visit [www.skillsforcare.org.uk/coreskills](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/coreskills) where you'll find the following resources.

## Developing the core skills of your workers: a practical guide for managers

- 27 page interactive pdf

Where do I start? – 1. Identifying the need – 2. Where are the gaps – 3. Bridge the gap – 4. Keeping on track – Appendices and sample learning activities, includes Assessing core skills as part of the Care Certificate [see item below]; plus one learning activity each for English, number and digital skills, plus a stress management activity.

## Core skills in social care

- six page interactive pdf

Specification of English, number, digital, and employability skills, following a list format under four headings: Staff use these skills to... Staff who lack these skills... As a general guide, everyone working in social care should be able to... Higher level skills enable staff

## Assessing core skills as part of the Care Certificate

- five page interactive pdf

Identical to appendices 1-5 in Developing the core skills of your workers: practical guide for managers. Direction to use the Care Certificate workbook to assess core skills, plus manager's prompt sheets to help assess English, number, digital skills

## Resources

- word documents, pdfs, web links

English skills

Number skills

Digital skills

Employability skills and additional learning activities

Reflect on the learning

Group activities for team meetings

## Also of interest

Funding

Care Certificate

Ongoing learning and development

