

Extending the RDNA Approach to Competency

Pilot Evaluation Report 2011

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Summary

A single robust approach to professional standards of competency for regulators in environmental health and trading standards disciplines is an important part of LBRO's work with national regulators and central government in simplifying the complex regulatory system. The approach is supported by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) and the Trading Standards Institute (TSI), as set out in the CIEH, TSI and LBRO Joint Statement of Commitment.

The common approach to competency developed by LBRO built on the system already in use by health and safety regulators, a competency framework and online self-assessment tool called the RDNA approach. The competency framework consists of core regulatory skills and skills specific to health and safety regulators. LBRO worked with representatives from local authorities, national regulators and professional bodies to develop additional content for competency frameworks covering the regulatory areas of food, metrology, animal health and welfare, housing and port health and refined the RDNA online tool so that it was able to be used by local authority regulators with multi-disciplinary roles. The new RDNA tool and approach was piloted between February and March 2011 by 161 users from 26 organisations. Evaluation of the pilot was carried out through an online survey, which had 108 responses, a response rate of 67%. A summary of the findings from the pilot is below, which focuses on those areas where respondents suggested possible areas for improvement or areas which might need to be amended.

General

- Overall, the feedback provided by the individuals that participated in the pilot was positive. Broadly, respondents found the system easy to use and gave positive views on the core skills and the knowledge sections. 86% of respondents identified development needs as a result of the assessment, 90% said that the RDNA approach was helpful in their development review process, and 80% would support the continuation of the RDNA approach to competency within their local authority (with 12% saying they were not sure and 8% saying 'no').
- Some managers and some multi-disciplinary officers had concerns that the number of sections they or their officers would have to complete would make the process too onerous.
- A few users raised that they felt there was too much jargon used in the statements and questions were too wordy in places. This issue was raised for the core regulatory skills section as well as some of the knowledge sections.
- There was also concern raised that there was repetition between different modules or sections.

Core Skills

- The core regulatory skills section was generally well received. A few people felt that some of the questions were too general to usefully identify development needs.
- Several issues were identified with the content of the leadership skills section. Some users felt it wasn't clear who this section was aimed at, that it focused more on

organisational than leadership skills and that the questions were not sufficiently detailed to be meaningful.

Technical Knowledge

- The food, health and safety and metrology sections had largely positive feedback, with some specific suggestions made for additional areas to be included and for certain clarifications.
- Some users of the animal health and welfare section felt there needed to be a clearer split between typical district and county functions to enable users who only covered one of the functions to easily skip to the relevant questions. Several users also thought that the questions in the farm animal health section were too broad to be useful.
- The number of users who responded in relation to the port health and housing knowledge sections was too low to reliably evaluate the content. Further consideration of these sections is recommended.

Usability

- Most users completed one of the core skills sections and one or two of the technical knowledge sections, with around 70% of people finishing the process within 2 hours.
- In general users found the online tool easy to use (83% thought this). Recurring issues raised with usability were in relation to the format of the screens (double scroll bars) and the save function.
- Some users indicated they would like to have the option of skipping whole modules within a section, rather than having to choose not applicable for each statement within a particular module. For example district council officers want to be able to skip the Food Standards modules of the Food section.

Contribution to Development Process

- Most users said that the development discussion they had with their manager was more productive after using the RDNA tool. The main reason given was that it provided a structured approach that made it easier to articulate what their development needs were and the extent of the development needed.
- Overall 90% of users said the RDNA approach helped with their development process.

Managers' perspectives

- The majority of managers felt that using the RDNA approach meant they were better able to consider the development needs of their team as a whole in relation to skills available.
- 80% of managers said they would support the continuation of the RDNA approach at their local authority.

- The most common concern of managers was the time it would take to use the approach for all their officers.
- Some managers felt they would need to give further consideration as to how the RDNA approach could integrate with their local authority's standard procedures

Next Steps

- A list of proposed actions following on from the findings of this report is at Annex 1.

SECTION 1: Introduction

About the RDNA Approach

The creation of a robust approach to professional standards of competency for regulators across environmental health and trading standards disciplines is part of LBRO's work with a 'World Class Coalition' of national regulators, professional bodies and central government departments. This work fits with the Government's agenda of a change in regulatory culture and developing approaches which support regulators in using their professional discretion.

The RDNA (Regulators Development Needs Analysis) approach to competency was first developed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in partnership with the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland and Local Government Regulation as a tool for competency in health and safety regulation. The approach, which included core regulatory skills and skills specific to health and safety regulators, has been used by health and safety inspectors in the HSE and local authorities since 2009. LBRO and the World Class Coalition have been working together to expand the RDNA approach so that it is applicable to a wider range of local authority regulatory functions.

The RDNA Approach consists of:

- A common **regulatory skills framework**, detailing skills which are generic to any regulator. The framework is broken down into regulatory skills and leadership skills.
- A series of **technical knowledge frameworks**, specific to areas of regulation and sectors. These are shown in the figure below.
- A means of undertaking self-assessment via an **online tool** – the **Regulators' Development Needs Analysis tool** (RDNA tool).
- A means of supporting officers in meeting the development needs identified – the **Guidance for Regulators Information Point** (GRIP).
- A **development process** which helps regulators and managers get the maximum benefit from the development activities undertaken.



Further Development of the RDNA approach

The World Class Coalition agreed at its meeting in March 2010 that the RDNA approach to competency be extended to cover additional LA functions. A workshop was held in July 2010 at which LA practitioners and representatives from professional and central bodies gave their views on the functions to which the approach should be extended in the first instance, and how the core skills might need to change to accommodate the additional functions.

The work on developing the common skills and knowledge frameworks for additional LA regulatory functions was carried out during September – December 2010 by working groups comprised primarily of LA practitioners and representatives from professional bodies and national regulators. Competency frameworks were developed for the following functions:

- food (hygiene and standards);
- port health;
- housing;
- animal health and welfare; and
- metrology.

Piloting the new RDNA Approach

The new RDNA approach was piloted with 161 officers participating from 25 local authorities, and one national regulator, during February and March 2011. Following the pilot, participants were asked to complete an online survey. The results from the online survey, which was completed by two thirds of the people participating in the pilot, form the basis of this report. For full details of how the evaluation of the pilot was carried out see Annex 2.

The five technical knowledge sections listed above, plus health and safety, were included in the pilot. The Guidance for Regulators Information Point was not available for testing during this pilot.

Objectives of the Pilot

The objectives of the pilot were to test whether:

- the content of the skills and knowledge frameworks are accurate, meaningful, helpful and fit for purpose;
- the online RDNA self-assessment tool is user-friendly;
- the RDNA report produced after completion of the online RDNA tool provides a useful input to development review and discussion about and prioritisation of development needs;
- the guidance and suggested application of the RDNA approach is clear and useful;
- the approach meets the needs of local authorities and other regulatory bodies, in relation to development and maintenance of regulatory competence standards in a cost-effective way; and
- the approach can be integrated into an organisation's staff development procedures.

This report details the findings from the evaluation of the competency pilot and proposes actions for the project team to take forward to address issues which have been identified. The report looks at the content of the Skills Sections (Section 3) and the Knowledge Sections (Section 4), how easy the online RDNA tool was to use (Section 5), and the contribution of the RDNA approach to staff development from the regulators' perspective (Section 6) and the managers' perspective (Section 7). A summary of all the action points proposed along with a list of participating organisations is annexed to the report. This report will be presented to the RDNA Board on 9th May 2011 and will be shared with all the local authorities that participated.

SECTION 2: Skills Sections

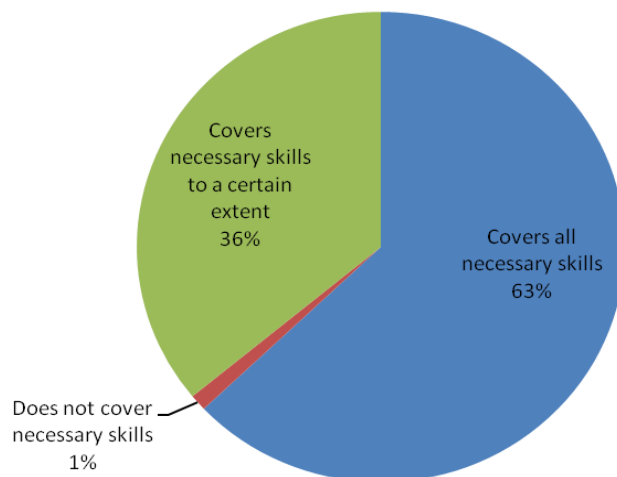
The Skills Sections are the core of the competency framework. They detail those skills which are generic to any regulator, irrespective of the function in which they happen to regulate. The framework is broken down into regulatory skills and leadership skills. The two sections of the Skills Framework are considered in turn below.

Regulatory Skills

The regulatory “core” sets out generic regulatory skills such as promoting compliance, enforcement, advising and influencing, conducting interventions, assessing risks, using knowledge and intelligence, and working effectively with business. Positive indicators are used to set out what “effective” means in relation to these areas.

91 respondents completed the Regulatory Skills section. The chart below shows their views on whether the section covered the skills necessary for a regulator.

Fig 2.1: Response to question ‘does the Regulatory Skills Section cover the skills necessary to be a good regulator?’. Sample size – 91



Of those respondents who felt the skills were covered to a certain extent, a number of people felt that skills relating to taking cases to court (eg evidence handling, preparation of prosecution reports, attending court) should be included. Other suggestions made for additional skills / tasks included internet investigations and correspondence and report writing.

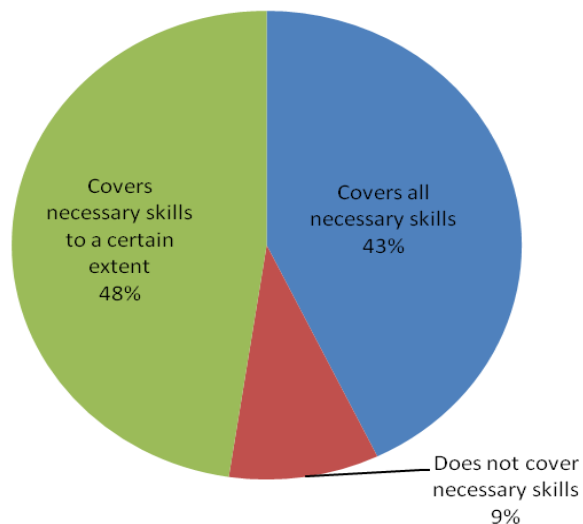
Around two thirds of those who assessed themselves against the statements within the Regulatory Skills section were able to understand the statements fully (69%), the remaining 31% felt that some of the statements were not completely clear. The main reason given for this was that the questions were too wordy or there was too much jargon which made them difficult to understand although no specific examples were given. Comments were also made that some of the questions were too general, especially in comparison to the Knowledge sections. It should be noted here that 11% of the respondents did not look at the positive indicators, which are crucial in fully understanding the statements.

Leadership Skills

The leadership skills section aims to look at leadership competencies particularly relevant to leadership in a regulatory context. The framework has been developed by the two main professional bodies for local authority regulators – the Trading Standards Institute and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health. It is an elective section within the RDNA system available to regulatory officers, managers and heads of service who wish to assess and develop their leadership skills.

24 respondents completed the Leadership Skills section. Of these, 7 were at officer level (eg trading standards officer) and the remaining 17 were at either team leader or manager level. The majority of those who completed the Leadership Skills section were able to understand the questions fully (83%), however, around half of people thought that the section only covered the necessary skills to a certain extent (see Figure 2.2).

Fig 2.2: Response to the question ‘does the Leadership Skills Section cover the skills necessary to be a good regulatory leader?’. Sample size – 24



Generally respondents felt that the section focussed more on organisational and management skills rather than leadership skills. For example:

“I thought that the leadership skills were really a mix of basic administrative and self management skills that I would expect any authorised officer to have.”

Manager, District Council

A number of respondents were unclear on whether the leadership section was designed to look at the leadership skills needed by officers at all levels, or the skills needed by managers, and that the questions generally did not cover all the relevant areas for either of these potential aims.

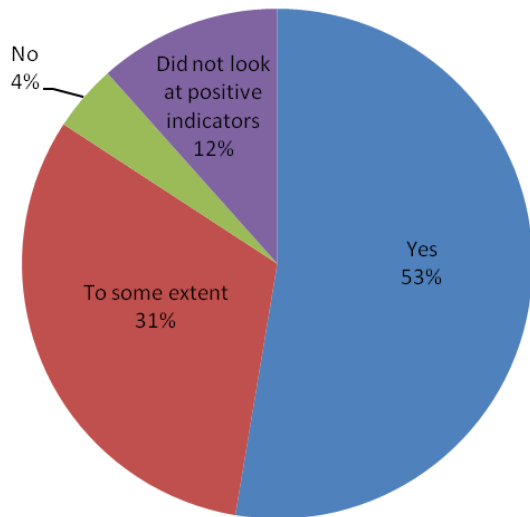
A number of respondents commented that this section was too condensed with too few questions which meant it was difficult to identify development needs and that the questions were of limited use.

Positive Indicators

For the regulatory and leadership skills sections additional information called “Positive Indicators” is provided within the online RDNA Tool, to provide assistance to the user in deciding whether they have a development need in relation to the particular task described in the statement. Figure 2.3 shows that most respondents used the positive indicators and most found them helpful.

Fig 2.3: Response to the question: ‘were the Positive Indicators helpful?’.

Sample size – 95



Some users commented that the Positive Indicators would be easier to use if there were specific positive indicators associated with the different statements, rather than a set of indicators for each skill.

Action Plan – Skills Framework

1. Review Regulatory Skills question set with a view to including questions on skills needed for taking cases to court.
2. Review Regulatory Skills question set specifically for unnecessary use of jargon and “wordiness”. Ensure that where a technical term is used which is not commonly used by all regulators, a definition is provided.
3. Review Leadership Skills section to look at issues raised with the content, and consult with local authority users to ensure content is suitable.
4. Ensure objective of Leadership Skills section is clear, and consider including information on the system to explain the objective of the section and who should complete it.
5. Assess the potential drawbacks and benefits of linking Positive Indicators with specific statements rather than the whole module, and the place of Positive Indicators in reports for managers.
6. Explore ways in which the system can encourage greater visibility and use of the Positive Indicators both by staff and managers.

SECTION 3: Knowledge Sections

The knowledge sections describe the specific technical competencies needed for the different regulatory functions. Users can choose which knowledge sections to complete based on their job role. There were six knowledge sections available on the RDNA tool for the pilot. 90 respondents completed one or more of the knowledge sections, Table 3.1 shows which sections respondents completed.

TABLE 3.1: The knowledge sections completed by respondents

| | Health and Safety | Food | Animal Health & Welfare | Metrology | Port Health | Housing |
|-----------------------|-------------------|------|-------------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|
| Number of respondents | 23 | 50 | 23 | 14 | 6 | 5 |

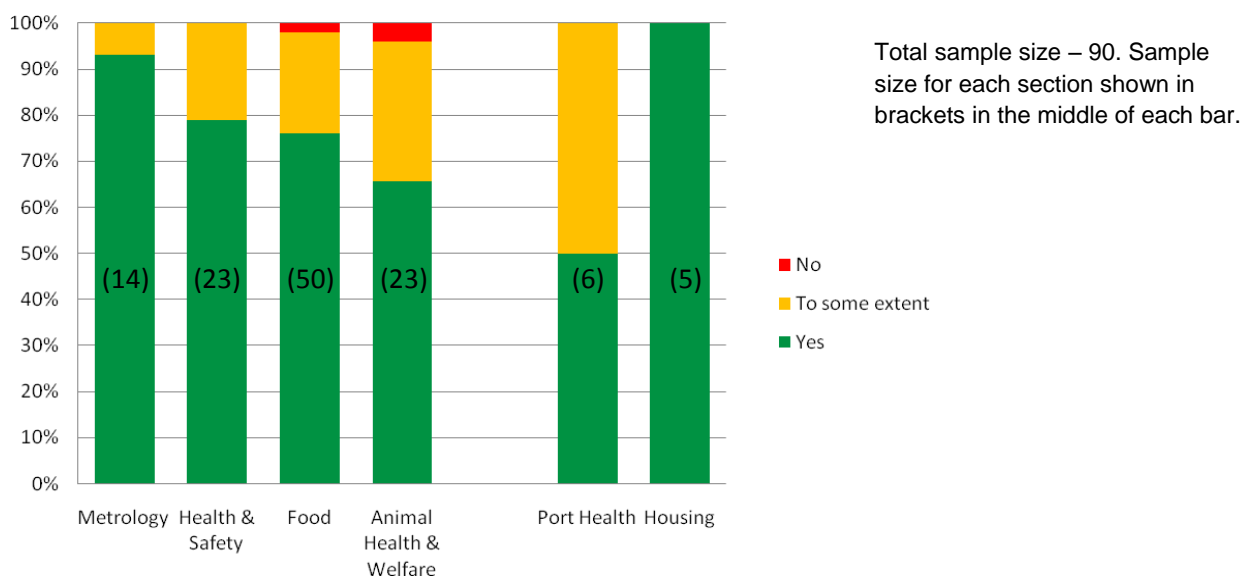
Most respondents only completed one of the knowledge sections (63 respondents, 70%). No respondent completed more than three knowledge sections during the pilot period.

It should be noted that the number of respondents that completed the housing and port health sections is low. Given this, it is difficult to draw conclusions on whether the content of these knowledge sections is fit for purpose. A description of the feedback from those that did complete these sections is provided, however it is recommended that further feedback is requested on these sections.

Getting the right content

Figure 3.1 shows how satisfied participants were that each technical knowledge section covered all the necessary areas.

Fig 3.1: Answer to the question: Do the Knowledge sections of the RDNA tool cover the necessary knowledge areas.

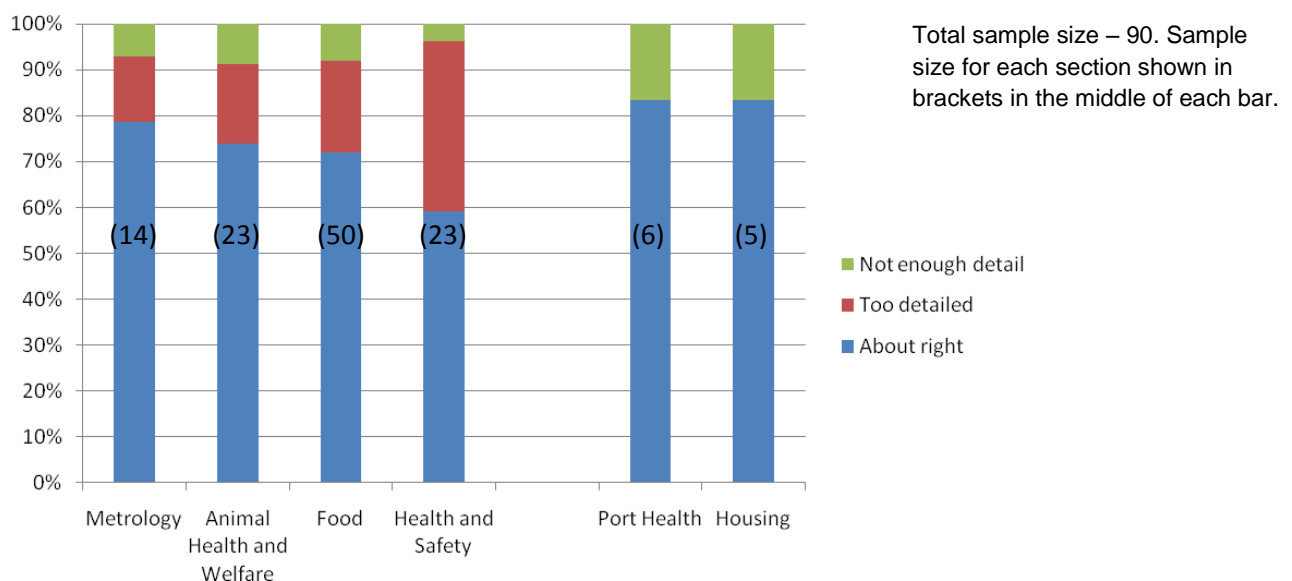


Green indicates that all the necessary knowledge areas were covered, yellow that there could be additional areas and red that it did not cover the necessary knowledge areas. The graph shows that the metrology section was thought to be the most comprehensive having more than 90% of participants saying all the necessary knowledge areas were covered. The animal health and welfare section had the lowest proportion of people stating that all the necessary areas were covered. The housing and port health sections are excluded from this comparison due to the low numbers of respondents.

Getting the right level of detail

Figure 3.2 shows how participants felt about the level of detail in each technical knowledge section. The metrology section had the largest proportion of pilot users who agreed the level of detail was about right. A larger proportion of the pilot participants felt that the health and safety section contained too much detail than for the other technical knowledge sections. The housing and port health sections are excluded from this comparison due to the low numbers of respondents. Further discussions about points raised specific to particular sections are addressed below.

Fig 3.2: Answer to the question: ‘How would you rate the level of detail in the knowledge sections?’.



The rest of the analysis of the content of the knowledge sections is broken down into the six regulatory areas included in the pilot.

Health and Safety

Generally the health and safety knowledge section was rated well by respondents. 83% of the 23 respondents who completed this section felt that all the necessary knowledge areas were covered and that the information provided throughout the section was sufficient to enable them to make their response. One specific suggestion made was that the section could include a question on health and safety at events.

A number of people commented that there were some questions which seemed to cover areas which are regulated by the Health and Safety Executive not local authorities. This will need to be checked. Around a third of respondents indicated that the health and safety section went into too much detail (35%).

Food

76% of the 50 respondents who completed the food section felt that all the necessary knowledge areas were covered and that the information provided throughout the section was sufficient to enable them to make their response. 22% felt that there were some additional areas that could be included. Specific suggestions raised were that the food technology section should include questions relating to the manufacturing process and that the food statute section needed more detail. Several people commented that there were some technical words that they did not understand and would have appreciated a definition for (one example cited was the use of the word pellofreeze). Several people also noted that the food allergens section appeared to be repeated in both the food standards and food hygiene modules.

The food section combines food standards and food safety and hygiene, two areas which are normally delivered by different officers, especially in parts of the country where the local authorities are split into two tiers, as well as in some single tier local authorities. This meant that a number of officers whose role only covered either food standards or food safety commented that it was frustrating that they had to choose not applicable to every question that was not within their role, rather than being able to choose not applicable to a whole module.

20% of respondents felt that the food section went into too much detail and 8% felt that there wasn't enough detail. A respondent's opinion of whether there was too much detail appears to be influenced by their own role, for example comments often cited some of the more specialist areas which were included in the tool as examples of where there was too much detail, because the respondent did not carry out this specialist area or did not do it regularly. Examples cited included some of the aspects of food technology and nutrition and health.

Animal Health and Welfare

65% of those completing the animal health and welfare section felt that all the necessary knowledge areas were covered and 39% felt that there was enough information provided to enable them to make a response.

The main comment expressed by a number of people specifically in relation to the farm animal module, was that the questions were too broad and covered too many areas in one question to enable development needs to be identified. Examples given by respondents of questions being too broad were the questions on disease outbreaks, transit of farm animals and livestock markets.

A number of people suggested that there needed to be a clear split in the statute section to separate issues relating to farm animal health and those relating to companion animal welfare, as these areas are usually delivered by different officers. The same comment was raised as within the food section; that it would be helpful for users to be able to select a

whole module within a section as not applicable to their role rather than having to select not applicable for each individual question.

Metrology

The overwhelming majority of the respondents who completed the metrology section felt that all the necessary knowledge areas were covered and that sufficient information was provided to enable them to make a response (93%, 13 of 14 respondents). The level of detail in the metrology was also about right for most people (79%).

One comment that was made was that it would be helpful if users could select the appropriate equipment which their local authority uses to answer questions about, rather than questions asking about all types of equipment. Another general comment relating to the metrology section was that in some areas, for example statistics and maths and physics, the statements did not indicate what level of understanding was needed whereas other questions did (for example whether a “basic knowledge” or “good working knowledge” is needed).

Port Health

Three of the six respondents who completed the port health section felt that all the necessary knowledge areas were covered. The remaining three felt that there were some additional areas that could be included with two people commenting that it wasn't tailored enough towards port health activities. Suggestions for additional areas which should be covered included high risk imported food of non-animal origin and shellfish. The level of detail in the areas which were included in the port health section was thought to be about right by most participants (5 out of 6 respondents).

Housing

All of the respondents that completed the housing section felt that all the necessary knowledge areas were covered. However, given that only five people provided feedback on this section it is recommended that the section is tested by more users. No specific comments were provided in relation to the housing section.

Across the Knowledge Sections

Repetition of similar competency statements was mentioned by a number of users. This was identified as frustrating and adding time to the process unnecessarily. For example it was noted in relation to the food section that the same topic came up in two different modules. Some managers were concerned that staff, especially those needing to complete more than one section, would not use the RDNA tool if there was repetition. For example:

“It is rather repetitive. The approach is probably fine if you are a single issue officer or service, but as a TSO Manager, expecting staff to maintain competence in at least 4 areas of activity this could become burdensome. If the idea of RDNA holds water, there needs to be a harder look taken at what the core skills are...” Trading Standards Manager, Shared Service

Action Plan – Knowledge Framework

7. Conduct further user testing of the port health and housing sections to confirm that these sections are fit for purpose.
8. Review the Health and Safety knowledge section to ensure that areas enforced solely by the HSE are not included.
9. Provide the ability for users to choose “not applicable” for modules within a section not relevant to their role, rather than having to do this for each individual question. Raised particularly in relation to areas where roles are split across two tier council areas, eg modules within food and animal health and welfare.
10. Ensure that technical words and acronyms are defined where not commonly used by all regulatory officers (raised in relation to food section, but applicable to all knowledge sections).
11. Conduct an editorial review across all sections to avoid unnecessary repetition. Where repetition is a problem consider whether it is possible to move content to core skills.
12. Consider whether it is appropriate to make clear the level of knowledge required for all questions, for example basic or good working knowledge (raised in relation to metrology section, but applicable to all knowledge sections to ensure consistency of language).
13. Reconsider questions in Farm Animal module of Animal Health and Welfare Section, with a view to ensuring that questions are more focused, covering fewer areas within one question.
14. Consider splitting statute module in Animal Health and Welfare section into areas related to farm animal health and welfare and those related to companion animal welfare.

SECTION 4: Using the RDNA Tool

The RDNA tool is the online self-assessment tool which allows regulators to assess themselves against the core skills and technical knowledge competency frameworks. This section looks at the usability of the online tool and makes recommendations for actions to improve the tool.

Usability of RDNA tool

The majority of respondents who used the online RDNA tool found it easy to use (82%, 105 respondents). Despite this, there were some issues with using the system that were raised by a number of people. Several users commented that they found the double scroll bar on screen difficult to use and found the need to scroll up and down to refer back to the question frustrating. A considerable number of users experienced difficulties with saving their results and several had problems producing their final report.

Time taken to complete the RDNA assessment

Most people took less than 2 hours to complete the online RDNA assessment (76%), with 11% taking 2-3 hours and 12% taking more than three hours. Most respondents completed one of the two skills modules and one of the six knowledge modules. The most any respondent completed was four out of the total eight sections. There was no clear relationship between the amount of time taken and the number of sections completed.

A number of respondents stated they thought that if they had to complete all the sections which were relevant to them it would have taken longer and some managers expressed concern that their staff who worked in a multi-disciplinary role could have to spend a long time completing the assessment. Several respondents said that they were happy with the amount of time spent completing the assessment as they felt it was valuable to spend time considering development needs. Users felt that the “wordy” question style in some sections meant that it took them longer than they would have liked to complete the assessment as they had to spend extra time considering what the question wording meant.

Supporting information and help for the RDNA tool

There were several help options provided to participants who experienced difficulties with using the RDNA tool, including online help, email and telephone support and referring back to the information pack provided at the initial briefing.

Briefing pack – this was provided to pilot participants by LBRO - 77% of respondents used the briefing pack and of these 95% found it of some use or useful.

Online help - Around half of respondents used the online help with 43% of those that did use it finding it useful and 53% finding it of some use (leaving 2 respondents who didn't find the online help useful).

Email and telephone support – 13 respondents used email support and 9 used telephone support. All but one of the respondents using email support found it of some use or useful.

Action Plan – Usability of RDNA Tool

- 15 Change the on-screen format so that questions do not appear in a box within an existing box, removing the need for the double scroll bar.
16. Ensure that the on-screen save and submit process is clear, and test the system to ensure that there are no technical problems with the save function

SECTION 5: The development process using the RDNA approach

As part of the RDNA approach, managers are asked to “validate” the development needs identified by their staff. The RDNA tool provides a report to assist managers with this task, which would normally be carried out as part of the performance and development process.

Validation of RDNA Assessment by Managers

Users who assessed their own development needs via the RDNA tool were asked how their manager validated their RDNA assessment. Of the 86 people that this applied to, 49 (57%) said that their manager used the report from the RDNA tool. 9% said that their manager sat with them whilst they completed the assessment and 4% said that their manager completed their RDNA assessment in parallel to them so that results could be compared. The remainder said that their manager hadn't yet validated their assessment, that their manager was not going to validate their assessment or that they weren't sure how their manager had validated their assessment.

Identification of Development Needs

Most people who used the RDNA tool identified development needs as a result of the assessment (86%, 74 out of 86 people). Of those that said they had not identified any development needs, several commented that using the tool had actually identified development needs but that they had already been aware of these.

13% of respondents (11 people) felt that they had development needs within the topics covered by the RDNA tool that were not picked up as part of the RDNA assessment. For example, one user who had completed the regulatory skills and animal health and welfare sections commented that the reason they thought the RDNA tool had not identified all their development needs was that some of the questions were too broad, a comment which was generally made by those completing the animal health and welfare section.

The RDNA tool allows respondents not only to identify areas where they disagree with a statement and therefore have a development need, but also areas where they agree they are confident in an area but would like to develop further, and areas where they already exceed the skills or knowledge needed. 76% of respondents said they had highlighted some areas where they were confident but wished to develop further and 44% said that they had highlighted some areas where they already exceeded the skills or knowledge needed.

Development Discussions with Manager

Only 41% of those who had used the RDNA tool to assess their own competence had completed their development discussion with their manager by the end of the pilot period (33 people). The reason given for this by most people was a lack of time to complete this within the time available.

Of those respondents who had discussed their development needs with their manager, most said that they felt the discussion was more productive as a result of using the RDNA assessment tool (70%, 23 out of 33 people). A number of people commented that this was because the tool provided a structured approach that made it easier to articulate what their development needs were. It was also noted by several people that the approach helped to

focus them not just on where their development needs lie but also the extent of the development required.

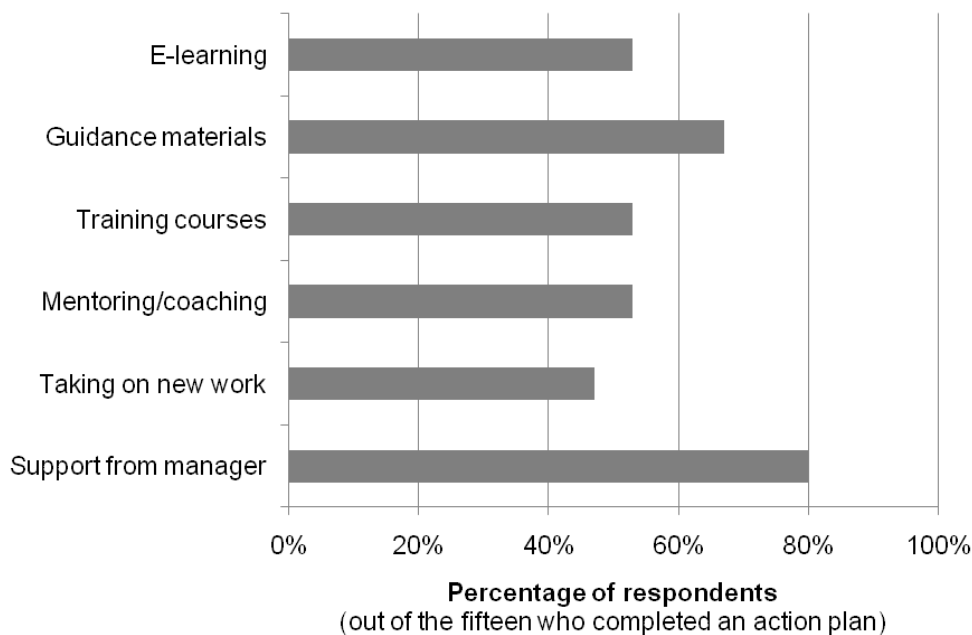
In most cases, managers agreed with the development needs identified through the RDNA tool. 94% of users said that their manager had not identified any development needs that the RDNA assessment had failed to identify, and 91% of users said that their manager did not disagree with any of the development needs identified by the RDNA tool.

Action Plan for Development

Three quarters of those who had discussed their development needs with their manager agreed a set of development objectives and 45% had produced an action plan for their development needs. The main reason given for not producing development objectives or an action plan was lack of time within the pilot period. The fact that the Guidance for Regulators Information Point (GRIP) was not available was also a factor cited by a number of people as the reason for not developing an action plan.

The fifteen respondents who had already developed an action plan for their development identified a wide range of resources and support that their action plan drew on. The chart below shows the types of resources / support.

Fig 5.1: Resources drawn on by fifteen action plans developed within pilot timescales



Overall contribution to development review process

Most people said that the RDNA approach was helpful or of some help in contributing to their development review process (39% helpful, 50% of some help, 11% not helpful). There were a number of positive comments made by respondents relating to the structure and focus the RDNA approach gave to thinking about development, for example:

“I think the RDNA tool brings a structured approach to assessing competency, which is not overly complicated and is fully transparent and subject to clearly detailed

written record, which I have found to be extremely helpful.” Team Leader, Unitary Council

Two of the 9 people who said that the RDNA approach was not helpful stated that this was because they did not like the approach of self assessment for development. Several people had some concerns about how likely it was that their development needs could be met, especially given the current financial pressures in local authorities. The development of the Guidance for Regulators Information Point (GRIP) tool will be important in providing regulators with resources to assist with meeting development needs.

Action Plan – Development Process

17. Communicate to pilot participants when GRIP is available and test content of GRIP to ensure that it can address the need for identifying low cost solutions to development needs.

SECTION 6: The RDNA approach – Managers' perspectives

25 of the respondents to the survey were managers who used the RDNA approach to assess the development needs of their staff. This section considers the views on the RDNA approach expressed by managers.

Time taken by managers

Managers mainly prepared for development discussions by using the RDNA report produced following the staff self assessment (80%), with 20% sitting with staff whilst they used the RDNA website tool. One of the managers who sat with one member of staff and just read the report for another member of staff stated that completing the assessment whilst discussing with a staff member was much more effective. Around half the managers said that on average it took less than one hour to prepare for one staff member's development discussion using the RDNA approach, the other half said it took them between one and two hours. Several managers expressed concern that the RDNA approach could take up too much of their time and also their staff's time especially in multi-disciplinary teams where a lot of the knowledge sections would be relevant.

RDNA report

The majority of managers found that the RDNA report was useful or of some use in preparing for their development assessment of staff. One suggestion to improve the report raised by several people was revising the format so that development needs are highlighted or summarised, as it was felt that currently the development needs can get lost in the report.

Two people (8%) did not find the report useful and two people did not use the report at all. Both people who stated that the report was not useful commented that this was because they felt their own authority's development procedures were already good enough at identifying development needs and that the RDNA approach did not add any value to their existing systems.

Development discussions with staff

The majority of managers felt that the development discussions they had with their staff were more productive at least to a certain extent as a result of using the RDNA approach (50% agreed discussions more productive, 42% said more productive to some extent, 8% said not more productive). Around half of managers stated that they felt the structured approach helped to focus discussions with staff and one person noted that their staff were pleased with the approach because it could be tailored to their role well.

One manager noted that the value of the process depends on how staff used it, for example they felt that where staff had not made personal comments about why they had answered the question that way then the approach did not work well. Several people noted that they had to remind their staff that they only needed to complete the sections which were relevant to their own role, rather than try and answer all the questions.

Use of RDNA approach across a team

60% of managers felt that using the RDNA approach meant they were better able to consider the development needs of their team as a whole in relation to skills available, with a further 20% stating that they could do this to a certain extent. One manager commented that using the RDNA approach highlighted issues with their systems as well as knowledge gaps which applied across their team. Another stated:

“This is where I found the greatest value. Comparing assessments as an exercise identified numerous development areas as a whole where we felt a wholesale rather than an individual approach to maintaining competency was likely to be a better route. By dealing with some of issues in this way should assist in controlling training budgets.” Team Leader, Shared Service

Embedding the RDNA approach into local authorities

80% of managers agreed that they would support the continuation of the RDNA approach to competency within their local authority. Two of the five managers who were not sure or who said they would not support the RDNA approach stated that this was because they felt the process would take too long.

Around two thirds of managers felt that the RDNA approach could be implemented and embedded into their local authority’s approach to competency and development, with 28% saying they were not sure if it could. One person noted they would need to look at how the RDNA approach could be aligned with their authority’s appraisal process. Only one person stated they thought it could not be embedded into their local authority’s existing approach, this was because they felt their local authority’s development process was sufficient to meet their needs.

Action Plan – Managers’ Perspectives

18. Change report format so that development needs are summarised or highlighted clearly, to make report easier to use.
19. Consider how managers’ concerns that the approach will be too onerous for multi-disciplinary officers could be addressed.

ANNEX 1: Action Plan

Action Plan – Skills Framework

1. Review Regulatory Skills question set with a view to including questions on skills needed for taking cases to court.
2. Review Regulatory Skills question set specifically for unnecessary use of jargon and “wordiness”. Ensure that where a technical term is used which is not commonly used by all regulators, a definition is provided.
3. Review Leadership Skills section to look at issues raised with the content, and consult with local authority users to ensure content is suitable.
4. Ensure objective of Leadership Skills section is clear, and consider including information on the system to explain the objective of the section and who should complete it.
5. Assess the potential drawbacks and benefits of linking Positive Indicators with specific statements rather than the whole module, and the place of Positive Indicators in reports for managers.
6. Explore ways in which the system can encourage greater visibility and use of the Positive Indicators both by staff and managers.

Action Plan – Knowledge Framework

7. Conduct further user testing of the port health and housing sections to confirm that these sections are fit for purpose.
8. Review the Health and Safety knowledge section to ensure that areas enforced solely by the HSE are not included.
9. Provide the ability for users to choose “not applicable” for modules within a section not relevant to their role, rather than having to do this for each individual question. Raised particularly in relation to areas where roles are split across two tier council areas, eg modules within food and animal health and welfare.
10. Ensure that technical words and acronyms are defined where not commonly used by all regulatory officers (raised in relation to food section, but applicable to all knowledge sections).
11. Conduct an editorial review across all sections to avoid unnecessary repetition. Where repetition is a problem consider whether it is possible to move content to core skills.
12. Consider whether it is appropriate to make clear the level of knowledge required for all questions, for example basic or good working knowledge (raised in relation to metrology section, but applicable to all knowledge sections to ensure consistency of language).
13. Reconsider questions in Farm Animal module of Animal Health and Welfare Section, with a view to ensuring that questions are more focused, covering fewer areas within one question.
14. Consider splitting statute module in Animal Health and Welfare section into areas related to farm animal health and welfare and those related to companion animal welfare.

Action Plan – Usability of RDNA Tool

15. Change the on-screen format so that questions do not appear in a box within an existing box, removing the need for the double scroll bar.
16. Ensure that the on-screen save and submit process is clear, and test the system to ensure that there are no technical problems with the save function

Action Plan - Development Process

17. Communicate to pilot participants when GRIP is available and evaluate content of GRIP to ensure that it can address the need for identifying low cost solutions to development needs.

Action Plan – Managers’ Perspectives

18. Change report format so that development needs are summarised or highlighted clearly, to make report easier to use.
19. Consider how managers’ concerns that the approach will be too onerous for multi-disciplinary officers could be addressed.

ANNEX 2: Methodology

All local authority regulatory services heads of service were sent an invitation to participate in the competency pilot. 31 local authorities expressed an interest in taking part along with one national regulator – the Vehicle Certification Agency. Those authorities that expressed an interest in participating were asked for an indication of which areas of regulation they wished to cover and how many staff and managers they expected to be involved. This enabled LBRO to ensure that as far as possible there were authorities of different type, size and geography participating and that each of the technical knowledge modules would be tested. All 31 local authorities and the national regulator were accepted for the pilot, but 6 local authorities pulled out before the start. Table 1 below shows the types of local authorities that participated, a full list is at Annex 1.

Table 1: Types of local authorities participating in the pilot

| | English District (two tier) | English County (two tier) | English Unitary | Metropolitan and London Borough | Welsh Council | Scottish Council | TOTAL |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------|
| Number of authorities | 2 | 2 | 5 | 12 | 2 | 1 | 25 |

The pilot period ran during February and into early March 2011. Each local authority participating in the pilot received a team briefing from LBRO in January or early February and briefing packs were provided to participating staff. Following the briefing the participants were asked to use the RDNA website tool to assess their development needs, hold a development discussion with their manager and agree an action plan for their development. As the results in Section 5 show, not all participants were able to get to the stage of discussing their development needs with their manager, mainly due to work pressures which meant this couldn't be completed during the pilot period.

The evaluation of the pilot was carried out through an online survey. The survey link was sent to all participating local authorities during March with a request for response from everyone who had piloted an aspect of the RDNA approach. 161 users from the pilot organisations registered to test the RDNA IT system during the pilot stage and a total of 108 responses were received to the survey, a response rate of 67%.

The full question set and summary of responses is available as a technical annex.

ANNEX 3: List of organisations that participated in the pilot

Bolton Council
Brighton & Hove City Council
Buckinghamshire County Council
Bury Council
Chelmsford Borough Council
City of London
Cornwall Council
Essex County Council
Huntingdonshire District Council
Manchester City Council
Monmouthshire County Council
Oldham Council
Borough of Poole
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Salford Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
South Lanarkshire Council
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
Stockton on Tees Borough Council
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
Torfaen County Borough Council
Vehicle Certification Agency
Wakefield Council
Wigan Council
Wiltshire Council
Worcestershire Joint Regulatory Service