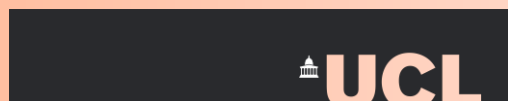


IPS competence framework and curriculum: guide



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The IPS competence framework and the IPS curriculum described in this document can be accessed online at:

www.ucl.ac.uk/core/competence-frameworks
and
www.rcpsych.ac.uk/improving-care/nccmh/other-work/ips

IPS competence framework and curriculum: guide
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Authorship statement

Stephen Pilling conceived the idea of the work, which was then commissioned by IPS Grow, a project delivered by Social Finance. Anthony Roth devised the competence framework map, wrote the competences and the curriculum, and co-wrote the background document with Helen Baldwin, Katherine Plummer and Kasia Trojanowska. The work was edited by Kasia Trojanowska and Clare Taylor.

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Foreword

The successful implementation of the evidenced-based individual placement and support (IPS) approach very much depends on the qualities and competences of employment specialists and their team leaders, as well as commitment from clinical teams, senior health service leaders and commissioners.

The employment specialist role is multi-skilled. It involves the ability to develop hopeful relationships with people accessing the service (IPS clients) to build their self-belief and confidence. It requires working effectively with clinical teams to find solutions to issues that impact on work and recovery, and building relationships with employers in order to negotiate job opportunities that meet each individual's strengths, needs, abilities and preferences. This then needs to be followed by effective in-work support for both the individual and their employer.

The IPS sector in the UK is at an important turning point, with a commitment from NHS England and NHS Improvement to rapidly expand access to IPS across England as part of the NHS Long Term Plan and The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health. In my role as National Lead for IPS Grow I am keen to ensure that as the sector grows, we raise the profile of the employment specialist role as a career and we achieve consistent standards and clarity around what is expected of the role.

This competence framework and curriculum has been developed in recognition of the highly skilled nature of the employment specialist work, and to start to drive consistency in training standards. It has been created by Professor Anthony Roth of University College London, with contributions from Professor Steve Pilling. Professors Roth and Pilling are the leading experts in curricula and competence frameworks for UK mental health professionals, having previously developed the frameworks for Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) and for child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS).

As outlined in this document, the curriculum has drawn on years of research into what makes a good IPS employment specialist, with input from leading IPS providers and experts by experience in the UK. We are also pleased that Deborah Becker and Robert Drake, who founded the IPS intervention model, reviewed and commented on the framework.

We hope that the publication of the curriculum creates recognition for the wide-ranging and highly skilled work that employment specialists do and serves as a guide for future development of IPS training in the UK. As the sector and the role develops, we will seek to revise and update this document, building on the growing experience of practitioners in the field.

We look forward to working with the IPS sector to make use of this curriculum to support quality delivery by employment specialists as the sector grows.

Lynne Miller, National Lead for IPS Grow

1 Introduction

1.1 Rationale for individual placement and support (IPS)

People with severe mental health problems can find it challenging to enter (or to re-enter) competitive employment. This can have many consequences, not only financial but also psychological, given that for those who wish to work, employment can make a major contribution to their wellbeing and mental health recovery.

The IPS model assumes that anyone who expresses an interest in employment should be supported to pursue it. The presumption is that with the right support and job match, clients can achieve their goal of paid employment.

The IPS approach is internationally recognised as the most effective way of supporting people with mental health issues to gain and keep paid employment. It is based on over 20 years of research, including around two dozen successful randomised control trials.

1.2 IPS in practice

How does this work in practice?

Once a referral from the clinical team or self-referral is received, an IPS employment specialist meets with a client to identify their aims, interests, skills, strengths, transferrable skills and capacities in order to generate a good job match and clear employment goals. Helping people to find a job they truly want is a core principle of the IPS programme, as people are more likely to find and keep a job that they are committed to. Hand in hand with this process, employment specialists develop and maintain relationships with local employers to negotiate job opportunities in the hidden labour market. Clients are provided with ongoing support during the job seeking and employer engagement process, and continuing support once they are in paid employment. This will include supporting the employer and addressing any challenges that arise.

Employment specialists are integrated into the mental health team and considered a key part of the multidisciplinary skill mix. The role involves working with the clinical team to raise the profile of employment. Clinical staff are involved in providing interventions to support the return to work, to support clients to think about work and to manage their health in the workplace. IPS involves the whole clinical team adopting the IPS principles.

Employment specialists are also part of a virtual employment team and report to an IPS team leader. Each team leader provides employment supervision and monitors and manages the performance of employment specialists through supervision, training, quality audits, field mentoring and role modelling of the IPS approach. They have responsibility for driving and promoting the quality of an IPS service by monitoring fidelity standards and the outcomes for clients. They also have a managerial and organisational role, building relationships with clinical teams to generate referrals, developing collaborative working partnerships with clinicians and identifying barriers to implementation of (and fidelity to) the IPS model. They coordinate relationships with local employers and ensure that service developments are co-produced with people accessing IPS services wherever possible.

Although team leaders will possess the skills described in the framework and curriculum, their role and remit are considerably broader than that of an employment specialist.

1.3 Evidence for IPS

A number of randomised clinical trials and systematic reviews have indicated that IPS achieves twice the rate of job outcomes and sustainments than traditional models. There is also evidence that good fidelity to the IPS model is associated with better outcomes.¹⁻⁴

1.4 Developing the competence framework

The method used to develop the competence framework conforms to a number of key principles.⁵

- As far as possible, the framework is evidence based. This means that there is reason to believe that the competences it sets out are likely to make a difference – for example, because they have been included in a manual employed in a successful trial.
- The framework is intended to be indicative rather than prescriptive, retaining the role of operational judgement. It is a practitioner support tool that identifies best practice, but it also allows for an informed decision as to when, whether and how competences are put into action.
- The framework was subject to oversight from an Expert Reference Group (ERG), composed of such experts in the field as researchers, trainers, expert practitioners and experts by experience. This ensured that the product is proactively guided by expert opinion. The ERG had a direct role in peer-reviewing emerging content as well as a broader focus of the framework.
- The content of the framework was reviewed both by members of the ERG and by external peer reviewers with recognised authority in the field. The role of all reviewers was to identify areas where the draft framework was unclear, erroneous or contained significant gaps. An additional benefit of external review was to ensure that the practice described in the framework reflects a consensus among practitioners.
- The framework is set at a single level, describing what would be expected of a competent employment specialist. This is in contrast to frameworks that identify a tier of skill levels, for example from novice through to expert. Although there can be merit in a tiered approach, such distinctions can be arbitrary and misleading, in that to be effective, interventions require the deployment of a coherent hierarchy of skills; deciding which of these are expected only of more experienced workers is not helpful.
- A major challenge is to present competences in a way that makes them accessible to their intended audience. Perhaps the least helpful approach is simply to list competences, which requires readers to work out an organisational structure – something that they may find particularly challenging if they are not already familiar with the area. For this reason, the framework is set out as a ‘map’ (see [Section 5.2](#)), which identifies all the areas of knowledge and skill, organises them into a series of

domains, and helps to identify the ways in which the sets of competences interrelate. The map is intended to be holistic, clustering areas of competence together and illustrating the way in which sets of competences need to be put together in order to deliver an intervention.

- Competence statements are derived from a number of sources. Two texts setting out the structure and content of IPS^{6,7} are supplemented by training materials supplied by members of the ERG, along with relevant research and clinical papers. The knowledge and skills outlined in these sources are then 'extracted'; the person doing this makes sure that the relevant knowledge and skills are described clearly and concisely, at the right level of detail, and that consistent terminology is used. Extraction also involves identifying the principles that lie behind statements about clinical strategies, such that descriptions of skills convey a sense of why something is done, rather than listing behaviours without giving an overview of the rationale for an action. This is an important element of framework development, with the intention of supporting the intelligent application of competences, rather than rote adherence.
- A key aim is to write the competence statements at a level that enables users to understand what it is they need to know and do in order to carry out an activity. As such, they are concise, explain technical references as they arise (so that users do not have to cross-refer to other sources in order to understand what is required of them), and give sufficient detail to identify what a practitioner actually needs to do.

1.5 Relationship of the competence framework and the curriculum

The curriculum is closely mapped to the competence framework, the latter providing a more detailed account of the knowledge and skills associated with the IPS model. The purpose of the curriculum is to indicate the outline structure and content that a training programme should provide; cross-referencing to the framework supplies a more detailed account.

2 The IPS competence framework

2.1 The competences

Competence is usually defined as the integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Practitioners need background knowledge relevant to their practice, but it is the ability to draw on and apply this knowledge in different situations that marks out competence.

Knowledge helps workers understand the rationale for applying their skills so that they think about both how and why they are implementing their skills – in other words, it enables them to be ‘thinking practitioners’. This is critical – implementing the framework and curriculum in a rote fashion and being concerned only with adherence would likely result in ineffective practice. As such, it is important to view the framework as indicative, rather than prescriptive.

The framework is primarily designed to be relevant to employment specialists working within the context of an IPS service. The IPS competence map is shown in [Section 5.2](#). It organises the areas of competence into eight domains; taken together, these show the knowledge and skills required of an employment specialist.

2.1.1 Organisation of the map

The map shows the ways in which the activities fit together and need to be ‘assembled’ in order for practice to be proficient.

An employment specialist’s ‘stance, values and style of interaction’ represent a basic orientation to the work, and for this reason this encompasses nearly all the framework (as indicated by the black rectangle).

In outline, the domains of the framework are:

- the underpinning areas of **knowledge** required of an employment specialist
- the areas of **professional competence** that need to be in place in order to practise safely and effectively
- the **communication skills** needed to work with individual clients, their families, the mental health team and employers
- the **engagement** skills required to initiate an IPS intervention
- skills in **working with employers**
- skills with the client and with employers that relate to **gaining, supporting and maintaining employment**
- **meta-competences**, which are higher-order competences that involve judgements, decision-making or self-reflection, and which guide the implementation of an IPS intervention.

Although the primary focus of the IPS framework is on the skills and knowledge required of employment specialists, it also includes two areas of knowledge and skill that are essential to supporting workers in this role:

- **Supervision of employment specialists** – this section outlines the principles that guide supervision of employment specialists, with a particular emphasis on strengths-based supervision (aligned with the principles that underpin IPS).
- **Implementing IPS in line with its principles and supporting the work of staff** – this section describes the ways in which services need to be organised in order to support the work of IPS employment specialists.

2.2 Layout of the competence lists

The lists of competences are accessed online. Most competence statements start with the phrase 'An ability to...', indicating that the focus is on the practitioner being able to carry out an action.

Some competences are concerned with the knowledge that a practitioner needs in order to carry out an action. In these cases the wording is usually 'An ability to draw on knowledge...' and the competence lies in the application and use of knowledge.

As far as possible, the competence descriptions are behaviourally specific – they try to identify what a practitioner actually needs to do to execute the competence. For clarity, each competence statement is set out in a 'box'. At points these are indented, usually where a fairly high-level skill is introduced and needs to be broken down. In the example below, the high-level skill is the notion of being 'collaborative and empowering'; what follows are concrete examples of the sorts of things a practitioner needs to do to achieve this:

An ability to work in a manner that is consistently collaborative and empowering, by:

translating technical concepts into 'plain' language that the client can understand and follow
--

taking shared responsibility for developing agendas and session content

The competences in indented boxes usually make most sense if practitioners hold in mind the high-level skill that precedes them. So, with the same example, although using the language of the client is always a sensible thing to do, there is a very good conceptual reason for doing this: it will impact on (and therefore contribute to) clients' sense of being understood and thereby support their engagement in the therapy process. Bearing in mind the conceptual idea behind an action should give practitioners a 'road map' and reduce the likelihood that they apply techniques by rote.

3 Curriculum for employment specialists: summary

The curriculum has been developed directly from the competence framework. It provides a comprehensive, structured programme of learning to enhance practitioners' knowledge of the theory and application of IPS. It aims to guide the development of the practical skills necessary for supporting people into competitive employment within the context of IPS.

The curriculum assumes that trainers will use diverse teaching strategies to consolidate learning, including experiential skills-based workshops, clinical vignettes and self-directed study, and that this will be integrated with supervised practice. This should equip trainees with the skills and confidence necessary to engage effectively with clients, their families, mental health teams and local employers and to overcome challenges to IPS in a pragmatic and self-directed manner.

The curriculum is divided into three key sections:

1. Underpinning areas of knowledge
2. Professional competences
3. Putting IPS into practice.

3.1 Underpinning areas of knowledge

The introductory section of the IPS curriculum sets out six units that offer a foundational knowledge base relevant to IPS. Working through this section, students will gain an understanding of the recovery model, the rationale for IPS, and the implementation of the core principles of IPS. Crucially, students will also develop a deeper understanding of how mental health issues may present, the biopsychosocial factors underpinning mental health problems, and how such experiences may have an impact on a person's physical and cognitive functioning. The final unit provides education on legislation relevant to employment.

Section 1 units:

- 1.1 Practitioner's stance, values and style of interaction in IPS
- 1.2 Knowledge of the recovery model
- 1.3 Knowledge of the rationale for IPS
- 1.4 Knowledge of IPS, its principles and their implementation in practice
- 1.5 Knowledge of mental health presentations and their impact on functioning
- 1.6 Knowledge of legislation relevant to employment

3.2 Professional competences

Section 2 introduces the professional competences required for working within IPS, with six interdependent units focused on issues of ethics, diversity and safety. Students will gain an understanding of the professional and ethical guidance that governs IPS practice and its practical implementation. Taken together, the units will help students understand potentially complex issues around confidentiality and consent, such as assessing capacity to consent

and identifying situations in which information-sharing may be required to maintain safety. Students will gain awareness of the social, cultural and intersecting factors that can impede or restrict access to employment opportunities for individuals from certain demographic groups, and as such, may affect the acceptability and effectiveness of IPS in practice. On this basis, students will develop the skills needed to adapt IPS in response to social and cultural variation. The final unit outlines the ways in which employment specialists can make the most of supervision and support to facilitate consistent professional and personal development.

Section 2 units:

- 2.1 Operating within professional and ethical guidelines
- 2.2 Working with issues of confidentiality and consent
- 2.3 Assessing capacity
- 2.4 Sharing information to maintain safety
- 2.5 Working with difference
- 2.6 Making use of supervision and support

3.3 Putting IPS into practice

Section 3 provides students with the skills necessary to implement IPS in practice. It includes 16 units that will enable students to develop the wide range of skills needed to promote effective delivery of IPS, from the point of initial engagement with the client through to supporting and maintaining them in employment. This includes communication skills, both with clients seeking employment and with local employers, aiming to foster high-quality, long-lasting working relationships.

Employment specialists need to take into consideration the financial impact on a client when gaining a job – will they be better off or worse? A key IPS principle is that the client gains timely information about the financial impact of starting a job and makes an informed decision on how to proceed. Given this principle, the employment specialist needs to have knowledge of the benefits system and/or access to relevant resources and specialist advice to guide a client.

They will also require skills in multi-agency working and employment liaison to facilitate positive alliances with local employers. At the core of IPS practice is an ability to construct vocational profiles and implement individualised employment plans, and to use psychological strategies to support the client's motivation.

They will also require skills relevant to carrying a caseload and supporting clients to move through each stage of the IPS process.

Section 3 units:

- 3.1 Communication skills with clients and their families
- 3.2 Fostering and maintaining the working alliance
- 3.3 Communication skills with the mental health team
- 3.4 Completing concurrent progress notes
- 3.5 Using psychological strategies to support IPS
- 3.6 Engaging service users with the IPS process

- 3.7 Providing information on the benefits system and the financial implications of employment
- 3.8 Discussing disclosure with client and employers
- 3.9 Constructing a vocational profile
- 3.10 Constructing an individualised employment plan
- 3.11 Providing support for job applications
- 3.12 Gaining knowledge of local employment opportunities
- 3.13 Employer engagement
- 3.14 Profiling the job setting
- 3.15 Conducting a job search
- 3.16 Providing individualised job support

3.4 Accessing the competence framework and the curriculum

The competences and the curriculum are not included in this document; they can be downloaded from the websites of the Centre for Outcomes Research and Effectiveness (CORE) at University College London:

www.ucl.ac.uk/CORE/competence-frameworks

and the National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health:

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/improving-care/nccmh/other-work/ips

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5 Appendices

5.1 Expert Reference Group

This work was commissioned by IPS Grow, which is a national initiative supporting services across England to deliver high-quality individual placement and support.

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5.2 Competences map

See next page.

