

Information for oral health practitioners

What to expect during a competence review

The Dental Council is responsible for ensuring oral health practitioners maintain the required standard of competence to protect public safety and uphold professional standards.

A competence review may be initiated in response to concerns about your professional practice.

This guide explains what you can expect if your competence is being reviewed.

Support during the review process

We understand that being the subject of a competence review can be a stressful and uncertain experience. You don't have to go through this process alone – support is available to help you navigate the process. While it's entirely your choice whether to seek support, we encourage you to consider doing so to help manage both the professional and personal impacts.

You may wish to:

- Contact your professional indemnifier for advice and support
- Speak with your professional association for peer assistance
- Access health and wellbeing support services
- Seek independent legal advice.

If you would like help connecting with support services, you are welcome to contact us confidentially at any time.

Why is a competence review being initiated?

Oral health practitioners are expected to be competent within their scope of practice, respect patient rights, and follow the ethical principles, professional standards, and practice standards described in the [Standards Framework for Oral Health Practitioners](#).

Concerns may arise when care does not meet expected standards. These concerns can be raised by patients, other members of the public, colleagues, employers, other health practitioners, the Health and Disability Commissioner (HDC), or the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC).

The Council may initiate a competence review:

- Following a notification or concern referred to the Council
- Proactively, without a formal notification.

If a review is initiated, the Council may:

- Refer the matter to a **competence review committee (CRC)**, which will carry out a structured review of your professional practice, or
- Carry out a review using an alternative format, such as an individual assessment conducted at a tertiary institution or other suitable venue.

How does the competence review work?

A competence review is not disciplinary. It is evaluative, educative and fair, aiming to identify and address any competence concerns that could pose a risk to public safety. While complaints may trigger a review, the review itself is not an investigation of a specific complaint.

The process is designed to be collegial and supportive.

If referred to a CRC, you will:

- Have already been assigned a case manager
- Receive the Terms of Reference outlining the scope and methods of the review
- Be informed of the CRC members and their qualifications.

You will have a reasonable opportunity to comment on the Terms of Reference, the format of the review, and the CRC membership. You may request changes if you believe there is a conflict of interest or suggest amendments to the Terms of Reference. These requests will be carefully considered.

Your performance will be assessed against the Council's standards and competencies relevant to your scope of practice.

Who is involved?

The CRC is appointed by the Council to carry out the review and report back.

Each CRC typically includes:

- Two oral health practitioners with relevant experience
- Occasionally, one layperson who brings a public perspective.

Practice-based review

A CRC review usually includes a visit to your practice. This visit will be attended by CRC members and a writer who will document the process. A videoconference may be held beforehand to introduce the review team, explain the process, and answer questions you may have.

The practice visit typically includes—

- Observation of patient care
- Case-based scenarios
- Review of compliance with practice standards.

Patient records may be requested before or after the visit.

The practice visit usually takes place over one day and may be followed by a videoconference if needed. You are welcome to have a support person present during the practice visit and any meetings.

Institution-based review

In some cases, the Council may arrange a review at a tertiary institution, conducted by oral health educationists. This format allows for practical assessment in a controlled setting.

The assessment typically includes—

- Simulated tasks
- Case-based scenarios
- Review of compliance with practice standards.

The assessment may take place over one or more days. A videoconference may be held beforehand to introduce the team and explain the process.

Will you get a chance to respond?

Yes. After the review, a draft report will be sent to you for comment. You'll be invited to provide a written response.

Your feedback will be considered and may be incorporated into the final report. You'll receive a copy of the final report provided to the Council and be notified of the next steps.

What are the possible outcomes?

After the review, the CRC report is presented to the Council. If the Council believes you meet the required standard of competence, it may:

- Take no further action
- Issue an educative letter based on the review findings.

If the Council believes you have not met the required standard of competence, it **must** order one or more of the following—

- That you undertake a competence programme – a tailored plan to address identified areas for improvement
- Include conditions in your scope of practice
- Sit an examination or undertake an assessment
- Be counselled or assisted by nominated persons.

These actions aim to support your development while ensuring public safety.

What if there is a risk of harm to the public?

If the Council believes your practice poses a risk of serious harm to the public, whether during or following a competence review, it may take interim action under section 39 of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003. These actions may include:

- Imposing conditions on your scope of practice
- Requiring supervision or oversight
- Suspending your practising certificate.

These decisions prioritise public safety and are subject to review. You will be informed and given an opportunity to respond.

How long will a review take?

Competence reviews typically take 3 to 6 months from the time the Terms of Reference are finalised. However, timeframes may vary depending on the complexity of the issues, availability of those involved, and other factors. Delays can also occur if there are difficulties in obtaining information or if a practitioner does not engage with the process in a timely way.

The Council will consider the CRC's recommendations and advise you of any resulting actions as soon as possible. We aim to keep you informed throughout the process.

Are there any costs involved?

There is no cost to you for the competence review itself. The cost of the review is borne by the profession you are registered in, through the APC fee. However, personal costs, such as attending assessments or accessing support, are your responsibility. If you are required to participate in a competence programme, or comply with conditions on practice as a result of the review, these costs are also your responsibility.

Confidentiality of information

Confidentiality is central to the competence review process. All information is treated with care and respect. CRC members sign a confidentiality agreement and are committed to protecting your privacy. They will not share any personal or health details unless legally required.

Anything you share during a competence review or programme is used only for that review or programme.

Need support?

Being involved in a competence review can feel overwhelming. It's okay to ask for help. You may wish to:

- Contact your indemnifier for advice and legal support
- Speak with a trusted colleague or mentor
- Reach out to your professional association for peer assistance
- Access confidential support services if you're feeling stressed or anxious.

Still have questions?

If you're unsure about any part of the review process, contact your case manager or reach out to the CRC Chair. We're here to answer questions and help clarify what to expect.

You can contact us at:

Dental Council

Level 7, 22 The Terrace, Wellington 6011

Phone: +64 4 499 4820

Email: protection@dcnz.org.nz

Website: www.dcnz.org.nz

Dental Council

Te Kaunihera Tiaki Niho