

Sentinel

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COVID 19 - SENTINEL EXTENSIONS TO COMPETENCE AND MEDICAL CERTIFICATION

The COVID 19 situation is clearly developing at pace and in keeping with Government direction, it is critical that we all play our part in keeping the railway running safely for those who rely upon it during this national emergency. To fulfil our duty in maintaining and operating the network, we are reliant on the ready availability of trained, fit and competent staff. We have already seen a steady decline in staff attending training, even while it is still available, and it is not difficult to envisage a situation soon when traditional training and assessment activity is stopped completely. It is logical to assume that routine medical activity will also be suspended or become equally difficult for staff to attend in a timely manner.

In order to mitigate the risks of not having sufficient, skilled people to maintain the network safely for vital freight and key worker services, Network Rail has temporarily extended by four months all Sentinel railway competences and medical certificates. The system will be updated by 26th March but for the avoidance of doubt, the extension period is effective from today. For Network Rail staff, HAVS health surveillance dates and Annual Capability Conversation (ACC) requirements have also been extended and Oracle will be updated in a similar timeframe. By undertaking this as an extension for all competences, not just those expiring in the next four months, we prevent a bow wave of reassessments which I am sure you all welcome.

While the mandatory requirement for re-training, formal assessment, and the ACC will be suspended during this period, managers have an important role to diligently observe the other requirements of competence management. If a manager or individual doubts continued competence or becomes aware of any change in health status or behaviour, they must stop work using that competence and engage with the relevant service for advice. If there is any suspicion about someone being unfit through drugs or alcohol, there is no relaxation to existing controls.

Network Rail has taken account of Office of Rail and Road emergency guidance published on 20 March and undertaken a risk assessment before implementing this change. The unprecedented crisis and the need to maintain vital transport links formed part of that assessment. While the formal recertification etc has been deferred, careful oversight by managers of the workers affected and continuing local competence management support our judgement that any additional risk is minimised and acceptable for this temporary period. I will consult with others before the end of the extension period at which time I will decide whether a further extension is required.

Rupert Lown

Chief HSQE Officer
Network Rail

