Public Health Practitioner Training Scheme

This paper sets out the rationale and background to the NESC Public Health Practitioner Training scheme and provides information about how it works. The Training Scheme is designed to develop the competence of the trainees towards achieving level 7 of the Public Health Career Framework.

Why develop the Public Health Practitioner workforce?

The foundations have been laid over a decade or so: from the CMO’s report on strengthening the Public Health function\(^1\) that recommended increases in capacity and capability across the Public Health workforce; to the Wanless reports that demonstrated the risks in not investing in Public Health\(^2\) and the lack of progress made in taking the steps necessary to improve the health of the population\(^3\); through the repeated emphasis on Public Health workforce needs in government policy and the creation of new types of workers such as Health Trainers\(^4\). The final report by Lord Darzi on the next stage review of the NHS\(^5\) concluded that we need to ‘create an NHS that helps people to stay healthy’, and that comprehensive well-being and preventive services need to be commissioned in partnership with local authorities. This has translated these aspirations into the rebuilding of an NHS that doesn’t just say that promoting health is important, but has woven this priority through every element of its business.

The Public Health workforce is defined by the CMO as comprising:

• Public Health Specialists
• Public Health Practitioners
• Wider Public Health workforce

The Public Health Practitioner workforce encompasses those engaged in Health Promotion/Health Improvement, PH Intelligence & Information, Health Protection, Academic or Health and Social Care Quality PH roles. The development pathway for this group leads ultimately to becoming registered as a Public Health Practitioner on the UK Public Health Register and thereafter potentially a Defined Specialist on the UKPHR.

Background to the NESC Public Health Practitioner Training scheme

A proposal was drawn up originally in 2004; an opportunity arose to submit a bid for funding to the SHA in January 2007. The scheme was agreed with the Directors of Public Health of PCTs and the Public Health education committees in existence at the time of the bid.

\(^1\) The report of the CMO’s project to strengthen the Public Health function. DH, 2001

\(^2\) Securing good health for the whole population. Final report Wanless D, HM Treasury, 2004


\(^4\) Choosing Health: making healthier choices easier. DH, 2004; Delivering Choosing Health: making healthier choices easier. DH, 2005

\(^5\) High Quality Care for All. The Next Stage Review final report. Darzi, DH, 2008
A proportion of the funding requested was agreed in the autumn of 2007 as a pilot over three years comprising two cohorts. A further cohort has since been agreed.

The scheme comprises one of several strands of development for Public Health Practitioners within the work of NHS Education South Central, all of which base their provision on the national Public Health Skills & Career Framework published by Skills for Health in April 2008.

Five trainees were recruited in time to start an MSc course in October 2007 and a further five trainees were recruited in 2008. Recruitment to a third cohort is currently in progress. The feedback and experience of the first two cohorts have been invaluable in helping to develop and shape the programme. The programme is being evaluated by NESC as part of the Innovation, Development and Wider Workforce programme of work.

Preliminary results from the evaluation show that the programme is perceived by the trainees to offer a great opportunity for gaining a wider in depth knowledge of Public Health and Health Promotion through the trainees’ shared experiences.

The first cohort started in October 2007 and a second cohort recruited in October 2008. A third group is now being recruited to start in October 2009.

**Operational Details**

The scheme is a unique initiative funded by the South Central Strategic Health Authority through monies allocated to NHS Education South Central. Trainees are recruited or seconded for 2.5 days a week (0.5wte) to participate in the two year scheme. Their employer receives a contribution to the trainee’s salary and expenses for the two years. In the first two years this has been used to employ backfill for a current practitioner post and to relieve them of half of their workload to become a PH practitioner trainee on the scheme. Additional costs are covered by the employing organisation.

The programme includes:

- a part-time MSc in Public Health and/or Health Promotion (over two years) followed by support for completion of a dissertation in the third year
- participation in a learning set and additional workshops as required
- two placements in another organisation of five weeks full time or 10 weeks part-time
- the development of a portfolio to provide evidence of progress (Public Health Skills & Career Framework and Agenda for Change KSF)
- protected personal study time

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The Training Scheme is designed to develop the competence of the trainees towards achieving level 7 of the Public Health Skills & Career Framework. The MSc will provide the majority of the Knows How competencies and some of the Shows How. The Learning Sets and placements support the trainees in identifying their individual development, training and experience needs and focus on ways of meeting those needs not covered by the MSc.

The scheme is commissioned and managed by Public Health Development within NESC. An Advisory Group meets quarterly to oversee progress and agree developments to the scheme and regular meetings are arranged with managers and mentors/educational supervisors. Terms of Reference are available on request.

Why is it needed?

Employers need to ensure that their Public Health Practitioner workforce is fit for purpose and that there is a career pathway to encourage new recruits and ongoing development for those in post. The NHS is a main employer of Public Health Practitioners, but other agencies are also employers; e.g. unitary and single tier local authorities, the Health Protection Agency and voluntary organisations. Their staff are often engaged in partnership working with the NHS Public Health teams.

In addition, there is likely to be a requirement for Public Health Practitioners to be regulated and registered in future at bands 5 and 7 of the NHS Career Framework. This scheme will contribute to the anticipated requirements to become registered as a Public Health Practitioner at level 7 on the UK Public Health Register.

Where does it take place?

- Study takes place at the university of choice by agreement
- Learning Sets and workshops are arranged by agreement with trainees at a central location within the South Central SHA area
- Placements are arranged within local organisations, agreed by all parties

Who is eligible to apply for the scheme?

Members of the local workforce in South Central engaged in Public Health work as the majority of their post are eligible to apply. They are likely to be working at Band 5 or 6 in the NHS, or equivalent level in health partner organisations. Applicants will have a first degree or equivalent qualifications and are likely to be working in Health Promotion/Health Improvement, Academic Public Health, Public Health Intelligence & Information or Health Protection roles (as these defined areas of Public Health do not have their own professional, regulatory body).
How do potential trainees apply?

An application form is completed and support is pledged by their manager for the applicant to participate. Where possible this should also be endorsed by the local Director of Public Health.

How are trainees selected?

The criteria for selection will include:

- relationship of application to the competencies in the Public Health Skills & Career Framework, NHS Knowledge & Skills Framework (KSF) requirement, National Occupational Standards for Public Health Practice (NOS)
- assessment of the appropriateness for their career advancement
- commitment to a career in Public Health
- evidence of professional development and CPD
- identification of development need within appraisal process
- fairness in terms of distribution across South Central

Participation in the Programme is conditional on the explicit support of the employing organisation/line manager. It is anticipated the manager will work with the trainee to ensure the best experience of this opportunity for the trainee and in the context of the work of the department/organisation to commission and/or deliver public health outcomes.

Trainees will be selected by a panel who will assess the ability of the applicant and their employing organisation to benefit from the scheme. Guidance from the local Director of Public Health may be sought if the application is not endorsed by them.

There are five places on the scheme this year.

Applicants who are not successful on this occasion will be offered one to one guidance and advice regarding other development programmes which may be available to them, including the opportunity to apply for a NESC education bursary when applications are next invited.

When does it take place?

Timeframe 2009-11:

- April to September 09: Application, recruitment and selection of trainees, identification of trainer/educational supervisor and assessment of training needs.
South Central Public Health Practitioner Training Scheme 2009-11

PUBLIC HEALTH DEVELOPMENT

- **September 09 to July 10:**
  Attend University, complete assignments & participate in Learning Sets (year 1)

- **July to September 10:**
  Undertake placement (year 1)

- **September to July 11:**
  Attend University, complete assignments & participate in Learning Sets (year 2)

- **July to September 11:**
  Undertake placement. (year 2)

- **September 11 to March 12:**
  Complete MSc dissertation. (year 3)

NB:

Portfolio compilation is undertaken throughout the period of the Training Scheme.

The third year (Dissertation) is not supported with backfill funding. Trainees and their line Managers are expected to negotiate agreed study leave. The trainees will however continue to be supported by the Scheme Manager and may continue to meet as a Learning Set.

For further information, please contact

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NHS Education South Central in the first instance:

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Tel. 01962 718491

For information about other development opportunities in Public Health please contact us, or the nominated Public Health Development Lead within your local NHS Public Health team, who all work closely with us.

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NHS Education South Central (NESC) is a part of the South Central Strategic Health Authority