Public Health Practitioner Training Scheme – Briefing Paper

Rationale

This paper explains the rationale for setting up the scheme and the operational details.

In the NHS, in addition to two of the three main functions of a Strategic Health Authority being strategic leadership and organisational and workforce development, the three main functions of a Primary Care Trust are:

- engaging with its local population to improve health and well-being
- commissioning comprehensive and equitable range of high quality, responsible and efficient services, within allocated resources, across all service sectors; and
- directly providing high quality responsible and efficient services where this gives best-value

Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) look to their Public Health (PH) directorates to lead the work on improving the health of the population, which is dependent on developing the public health skills of the whole workforce. In PCTs (and local authorities in some cases) a large proportion of the public health team comprises people working in health promotion/health improvement roles.

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 is comprised of those engaged in Health Promotion/Health Improvement, PH Intelligence & Information, Health Protection, Academic or Health and Social Care Quality PH roles. The career pathway for this group leads ultimately to becoming registered as Defined Public Health Specialists.

Derek Wanless stressed the need to invest in the prevention agenda if the NHS is to become sustainable in the future. It is the Health Promotion/Practitioner workforce that can operationally deliver much of what needs to be done; not least developing others to take on a public health role.

The Public Health White Paper “Choosing Health (2004)” has raised expectations of the workforce further. Many regard the Health Promotion workforce to be in crisis and it has been the subject of a national project to review the capacity of this element of the PH workforce, Shaping the Future of the Health Promotion workforce, (2005).
However, there has been no structured training scheme for Public Health Practitioners comparable to the national Public Health Specialists Training Programmes.

Up until about the year 2000, entry to the health promotion workforce specifically was through movement from first careers in other fields such as education, nursing and the voluntary sector, to a second career in health promotion as a specialism.

This workforce brought significant transferable competence and was ready for further development through CPD and secondment to Masters Degrees in Health Education, Health Promotion and more recently in Public Health.

In the last five to 10 years there has been a significant shift with more applications as direct entry from graduates with first degrees in Health Studies of some sort with or without a masters degree in Health Promotion/Public Health. While these applicants had ‘knows how’ competence, their lack of experience in a working environment and any practical ‘shows how’ competence make them unsuitable for the posts available.

Many of the experienced staff are now retiring or have become registered on the UK Public Health Register as generalist specialists through Top-Up Schemes and yet others are working towards defined registration as PH specialists, relinquishing the Practitioner roles.

This is a logical and natural progression however, there is no provision for training new starters in Health Promotion/Public Health and replacing Senior Practitioners as they retire to ensure the capacity and capability of the Practitioner workforce.

Succession planning is urgently required to ensure the regular supply of competent Public Health Practitioners within the PH workforce to both commission and provide the programmes required to contribute to delivery of the Public Health agenda.

A Practitioner training scheme was identified in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight as a way forward as long ago as 2001. A proposal was drawn up originally in 2004 and an opportunity arose to submit a bid in January 2007. The scheme was agreed with the Directors of Public Health of PCTs and the PH education committees in existence at the time of the bid. A proportion of the funding requested was agreed in the autumn of 2007 as a pilot over three years comprising two cohorts. 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 Public Health Skills & Career Framework published by Skills for Health.

Five Trainees were recruited in time to start an MSc course in October 2007. All are employed in the NHS. Their feedback and experience are 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.
Operational Details

The scheme is a unique pilot initiative funded by the South Central Strategic Health Authority through monies allocated to NHS Education South Central. Trainees are recruited or seconded for 2 ½ days a week to complete the programme over two years. Their employer is refunded the trainee’s salary in order to be able to employ backfill for the post and to relieve the trainee of half of their workload. Travel costs are covered by the employing organisation.

The programme includes:

- a part-time MSc in Public Health or Health Promotion (over two years) followed by completion of a dissertation in year 3
- 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

The Training Scheme is designed to develop the competence of the trainees towards achieving level 7 of the PH 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 facilitates ways of meeting those needs which are not covered by the MSc.

Why is it needed?

Employers need to ensure that their PH 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 PH Practitioners, but other agencies are also employers; eg District/Borough/City Councils, 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 PH, PH 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 for the applicant to participate by their Manager and endorsed by their DPH.

How are trainees selected?

The criteria for selection will include:

- relationship of application to the competencies in the PH Career Framework, KSF requirement, NOS PH Practice
- 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

Trainees will be selected by a panel who will assess the ability of the applicant and their employing organisation to benefit from the scheme.

There are five places on the scheme this year.

Funding of the pilot scheme is initially for two cohorts. The first cohort started in October 2007. A third group may be recruited to start in 2009, depending on the availability of funding for the commencement of the second year in April 2010.

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.

Applicants who are not successful on this occasion will be automatically considered for an education bursary covering fees to study the MSc course, but without the support of the PH Practitioner Training Scheme.
When does it all happen?

Timeframe 2008-11:

- **April to September 08:**
  Application, recruitment and selection of trainees, identification of trainer/educational supervisor and assessment of training needs.

- **September 08 to July 09:**
  Attend University, complete assignments & participate in Learning Sets (year 1)

- **July to September 09:**
  Undertake placement (year 1)

- **September to July 10:**
  Attend University, complete assignments & participate in Learning Sets (year 2)

- **July to September 10:**
  Undertake placement. (year 2)

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

**NB:** Portfolio compilation is undertaken throughout the period of the Training Scheme.

The 3rd 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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For information about other development opportunities in Public Health please contact us, or the nominated Public Health Development Lead within your local PCTs Public Health team, who all work closely with us.