

Practitioner Regulation

The UK Public Health Register was established in 2003 to promote public confidence in specialist public health practice in the UK, through independent regulation. The Register has now been commissioned by the four UK countries through the English Department of Health, the Welsh Assembly Government, the Scottish Government and the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety, to take forward a similar regulatory development for public health practitioners.

Public health practitioners are key members of the public health team and can have a great influence on the health and wellbeing of individuals, groups, communities and populations. At present a large proportion of the public health practitioner workforce are either not regulated at all or have their registration linked to their primary profession which may or not be related to the public health work they do.

The overall purpose of regulation is to protect the public by ensuring that individuals are fit to practise and that they continue to meet the standards set by the register.

As well as this primary purpose of protecting the public, regulation also has benefits for both the practitioner and employer. Practitioners benefit from professional recognition and employers are provided assurances of conduct and competences at different levels of the workforce.

The development of practitioner standards

In developing standards of practice for regulation the UKPHR has adopted a consultative approach which has enabled the regulation of public health specialists to be

recognised throughout the UK, providing significant public protection from unprofessional or unethical behaviour.

This consultative approach is essential as there are a number of professional bodies relevant to the practice of public health. In terms of the development of regulatory standards for public health practitioners, the UKPHR has been able to draw significantly from the collaborative work that led to the production of the Public Health Skills and Career Framework (PHSCF).

A set of draft standards for regulation was developed at two different levels: public health practitioners and public health advanced practitioners, during the spring of 2008 using the PHSCF as the source document. These draft standards formed the basis for a series of pilot events which took place between May – July 2008, the purpose of which was to check the understandability and the applicability of the standards to the work of different individuals in public health.

The pilot events involved a large number of public health practitioners from a wide variety of backgrounds across all four UK countries. Two models of the

standards at both levels – a generic model and an essential plus additional model were tested. The feedback from the pilot suggested that individuals found the generic model to be more manageable and easy to understand. Some practitioners did prefer the essential plus additional model, although the reasons for this were principally to do with professional development. Whilst such development is certainly valuable it is not the primary purpose of regulation and it was widely felt that the generic standards provided greater clarity, applicability to all groups of practitioners and would more likely lead to an integrated workforce.

The layout of the standards was found to be challenging and recommendations were made for improving this. Generally the statements within the standards were well accepted and seen to reflect the work of the public health practitioners they were meant to describe. A number of detailed points were made to improve general understanding and clarity as well as a number of gaps identified.

A parallel strand of work has also taken place which involved meetings with a variety of different regulators to discuss common regulatory issues such as; the process of registration and CPD. This has enabled us to learn from other regulators and to ensure that the regulatory system being developed for practitioners is in line with others, as well as exploring possible dual registration.

The findings from the pilot work were reported to the UKPHR Board in early September and recommendations made to focus on the process of implementation of a practitioner route to the register for 2009. The Board agreed in principle to the recommendations and a detailed consultation around the process of registration has now been developed as the next phase.

The Consultation

The next phase of development will be a focused consultation around the processes of implementing regulation.

This involves consultation on the draft process of registration (as this is different, but complementary, approach to that taken with specialist regulation); the revised draft standards for practitioners; and the applicability of the current code of practice to the practitioner workforce. The intention is to have a regulatory pathway open for practitioners in 2009.

The consultation is planned to take place from October 2008 – February 2009 and consist of the following approaches:

- Workshops with key health communities
- Events with employers and learning from other regulators and the UKPHR assessors and specialists.
- Production of illustrative examples on how different practitioners would evidence the generic practitioner standards
- National consultation events

- Exploration of the differences and risks across the proposed three levels of the PH Register

The Register is aware of the importance of putting its work on developing public health practitioner regulation into the context of developments from the Regulation White Paper *Trust, assurance and safety: The regulation of health*, February 2007. This means that this next phase of development will focus specifically on practitioners while a parallel stream of work will look at the advanced practitioner workforce and will be informed by a project being undertaken as part of the Regulation White Paper to define advanced level of practice across all healthcare workers.

Partnership working

The Register is grateful to the many public health organisations and groups that have collaborated with these developments. One key partner in these practitioner developments is the Faculty of Public Health (FPH). The FPH is undertaking a project to map the current education, training and assessment mechanisms that are used by public health practitioners, both retrospectively and prospectively. The outcomes of this project, together with the outcomes of the UKPHR's consultation, will inform decisions on the way forward for practitioner regulation.

The FPH is also exploring the potential for practitioner professional membership. Visit their website at: www.fphm.org.uk for more information.

Our own website also has information regarding the practitioner project and the consultation documents. Visit: www.publichealthregister.org.uk for more information.

If you would like to be involved or kept up to date with the developments please send your details and interest to.

zoe_clark_po@hotmail.com

PLEASE FORWARD THIS NEWSLETTER TO ANYONE WHO MIGHT HAVE AN INTEREST IN THIS DEVELOPMENT.

THANK YOU

We are very grateful for everyone involved in the piloting of the standards. The pilot events were a huge success and have greatly helped us in the development of practitioner regulation.

UKPHR
Public Health Register