National Occupational Standards for the Practice of Public Health and the Wales Centre for Health Public Health Skills Audit - Initial Findings

Three Technical Seminars in Wales

January 2005
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Introduction


The conference looked in detail at the National Occupational Standards for the Practice of Public Health (NOSPHP), how to identify the public health workforce, how to assess the current skill levels and abilities of the public health workforce and the use and evaluation of the NOSPHP (a conference report can be obtained by sending an email to anna.morgan@wch.wales.nhs.uk).

The report included a series of recommendations, one of which was to perform a skills audit of public health practitioners and to organise and facilitate regional workshops for public health practitioners across Wales on the NOS, their uses and advantages.

This report details the three conferences the Wales Centre for Health facilitated in Ruthin (North Wales), Carmarthen (South West Wales) and Cwmbran (South East Wales).

Introduction from the Welsh Assembly Government

Peter Farley
Head of Public Health Development
Welsh Assembly Government

Mr Farley stated that the Welsh Assembly Government, together with the other home countries, has supported the development of the National Occupational Standards for the Practice of Public Health; supported registration for specialists and the establishment of the UK Voluntary Register for Public Health Specialists (UKVRPHS); and supported the development of registration for 'Defined Specialists'.

Mr Farley went on to discuss two Competencies Frameworks:
- National Occupational Standards for Specialist Practice;

and a Regulatory Framework
- UK Voluntary Register for Public Health Specialists;
- Existing professional regulation e.g. National Midwifery Council

Not all public health professions have a regulatory framework. The UKVRPHS registers 'General Specialists' and is developing registration for 'Defined Specialists'. It is expected that the defined specialities will include the following disciplines:

- Health Promotion
- Health Protection
- Environmental Health
- Health Intelligence
- Health Psychology
- Health Economics
- Public Health Pharmacy
- Academic Public Health
- Public Health Nutrition

In addition to the above, the UK may need a regulatory framework for public health practitioners in disciplines and professions not regulated by other means.

Mr Farley stated that Wales needs a more coherent approach to the planning and development for the public health workforce with a more coherent approach to education and training for the public health workforce.

The Chief Medical Officer’s Task & Finish Group (Chaired by Dr Mike Simmons), has been established to develop a strategic framework for public health training and development. The final report is expected shortly.
Wales Centre for Health - An Introduction and Update

Claire Barley
Head of Training and Education
Wales Centre for Health

The Wales Centre for Health (WCH) is an independent corporate partnership centre for public health advice, advocacy, information, training, research and multi-professional development. Established under the Health (Wales) Act 2003, it currently operates in shadow form. Vesting day for the WCH will be 1 April 2005, when it will become an independent Assembly Sponsored Public Body (ASPB).

The WCH has 3 statutory duties:

• Make information about matters related to the protection and improvement of health available to the public in Wales
• Undertake and commission research
• Contribute to the provision and development of training.

The WCH recently appointed Wales' first Specialist Trainees in Public Health and is working with partners to develop a fully integrated training scheme for Specialist Registrars and individuals from backgrounds other than medicine.

The WCH established the Wales Centre for Health Public Health Training Fellowships and Bursaries Scheme to assist individuals, through funding, mentoring and support, to work towards becoming public health specialists. In 2004, it also established the Wales Centre for Health Top-Up Training Scheme for individuals working towards the portfolio route of assessment for acceptance on to the UKVRPHS.

Mrs Barley discussed the integrated learning sets and peer support events they had organised for various public health professionals and the facilitation of workshops/seminars etc. Examples included:

• Food Standards Agency Conferences
• Public Health Evidence Conference
• NOS Conferences

The professional development and continuing professional development that the WCH has been involved in to date includes:

• ATSDR (Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Atlanta, Georgia)
• Basic Course for Health Assessment and Consultation
• Landfill Gas Exposures
• Training programme for Officers with a Lead in Communicable Disease Control
• Food and Wellbeing Scoping Exercise
• Trading Standards Officers and Environmental Health Officer Nutrition Training

At practitioner level, the WCH has been actively involved in the development and dissemination of the NOSPHP. Early work of the Centre included the Training and Education Scoping Study Report. Other work included:

• NOSPHP - draft Standards and consultation process
• Implementing the National Occupational Standards for the Practice of Public Health Conference, 16 June 2004
• Completion of a public health skills audit, due to report end of March 2005.
Competency Frameworks

Maria Whittaker
Wales Manager
Skills for Health

Skills for Health is:

- Hosted by United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust
- Sponsored by the 4 UK Health Departments, independent and voluntary employers
- Licensed by DfES
- A UK-wide employer led, multi-professional, multi-agency Board

It has:

- A strong emphasis on partnership working
- 50 staff rising to 90 by March 2005
- Key themes:
  - Workforce Modernisation
  - UK-wide Labour Market Intelligence
  - "Demand-side" education/development
  - All based on the development, and management, of competences

Skills for Health described competencies as:

- Non-profession specific
- Broad definition - ability to perform to a standard and academic/knowledge underpinning
- Quality assured at a National level
- Applicable at all levels
- Transferable/transparent
- "Competences" agreed by the UK Education Act Regulatory Bodies (QCA, ACCAC etc.)
- Recognised across the UK and therefore transferable

Some practical examples of the use of public health competences:

- Development of voluntary register for specialist practice
- Scottish Public Health Practitioners
- The development of job descriptions and role specifications
- Review of public health roles in Primary Care Trust areas
- Competences used to review current and proposed roles
- Development of skills needed in "Remote and Rural Areas"
- Competences used to develop a description of the specific needs of remote areas in Scotland
- Health Improvement role of Community Health Partnerships
- Development programme for a new form of organisation
- Development of new roles from English Public Health White Paper

Links to Agenda for Change

- Linked but separate - competences are NOT necessarily linked to pay
- Skills for Health is on the Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) Board
- KSF is broad - competences are detailed
- All competences match across to KSF and the website will soon have an electronic tool to read across and drill down

How can we get the National Occupational Standards for the Practice of Public Health?

- Packs are available which include a CD Rom
- Available on our website www.skillsforhealth.org.uk
- Available in Welsh on the website
Wales Centre for Health Public Health Practitioner Skills Audit

Nicky Wilkins
Professional Adviser

The Welsh Assembly Government established the Task and Finish Group to review training and education for public health in Wales. The WCH was tasked with conducting a skills audit of public health practitioners in Wales and to report the findings and recommendations to the Task and Finish Group.

The public health practitioner skills audit will review the following professions:

- Health Promotion
- Environmental Health
- Public Health Nutrition
- Public Health Intelligence
- Health Visiting
- School Nursing
- Infection Control Nursing
- Occupational Health Nursing
- Nursing within the National Public Health Service for Wales
- Midwifery.

Each professional group will be mapped to the ten key areas of competence detailed in the NOSPHP and representative professional leads in each field will be interviewed. The initial outcomes will be tested at multi-disciplinary meetings in different parts of Wales.

The initial and emerging findings include the following:

- Some professions take on a wider role than might have been anticipated
- Scope for/interest in a wider, more proactive role for some groups
- High degree of co-operation between many professional groups
- Scope for more collaboration in some areas
- Most of areas of competence covered.

The final and detailed report is expected end March 2005.

Group Discussions around the NOS Standards

How can the NOS be used?

- Assisting in writing job descriptions
- Evolving new roles and role design
- Enhancement and demonstration of skills of health promotion workers
- Recruitment
- Help to identify gaps in knowledge and skills/measuring competency
- To inform personal development plans
- Informing need for continuing professional development
- Providing a framework which uses a common language across different professions
- Workforce planning/succession planning
- Registration of practitioners
- Providing a framework for practice which reflects evidence base and multi-agency working
- Benchmark for courses
- Quality assurance of courses and to ensure that courses meet government strategy
- Used as a driver for change
- Assisting in the area of clinical governance and accountability
- To focus training and education programmes (in line with standards and objectives)
- To ensure protection of the public and professionals
- To promote more equity in posts within and across organisations.

Benefits of using the NOS

- Standards will positively influence curriculum development
- Will lead to additional training/will enhance professional portfolio development
- Development of transferable skills - increases flexibility for individuals to work between the four countries of the UK and have recognised qualifications/competencies
- Confidence in using the standards ensures breakdown of professional barriers
- Promoting the ‘transferability’ of environmental health skills to other sectors and vice versa from other sectors
- Standardised framework that links closely to and compliments the agreed 10 competencies for public health practice
- Encourages stronger partnership working.
Additional Comments

• Currently the NOS are not well known or understood
• They are a means, not an end and should ensure/encourage life long learning
• They need to be carefully mapped to other professional standards
• Local government posts in broader public health roles, e.g. local health co-ordinators have evolved and there is no real recognition of skills involved
• There is some confusion over which standards are more relevant to a particular post than others
• Funding issues - there are no central funds for post graduate training for local government
• Needs more communication/marketing etc.
• The infrastructure of public health will need to change
• Need effective evaluation system
• Local government has a key role and this needs to be reflected.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Detailed below are the main issues, concerns and considerations which formed the basis of many of the discussions throughout the regional workshops. Against each point there are recommendations for future work and opportunities to further and enhance, the training, education and development of the public health practitioner workforce.

The standards mean different things to different professions/lack of knowledge of the standards

• An effective and inclusive communication strategy for the NOS in Wales, aligned with work being undertaken in the other UK countries should be developed
• An evaluation and review of the dissemination and understanding of the NOSPHP throughout public health professions should be conducted.

The NOSPHP are not clearly mapped to other professions

• Work needs to be undertaken to clearly align the NOSPHP to other professional standards and harmonised where possible
• Career paths should be clearly mapped by profession.

Future capacity issues

• The NOSPHP should be used to encourage employers to review the current skills of the public health workforce and inform the training and education for the future.

What about the professions not obviously public health practitioners - the wider public health family?

• A second phase of the public health skills audit should be conducted to review the wider public health family, their contribution to public health and the effective use of the NOS for this group.

They could be used to inform education

• There is a need to work closely with education providers in informing and shaping the current and future curriculum of courses
• A training and education network should be established (to include academia, voluntary sector, public health specialists and practitioners etc.) to inform curriculum development, the continuing review and development of the NOSPHP and reviewing evidence, policies and strategies in, and for, public health and their implication on the training, education and development of the public health workforce of Wales.

What about funding?

• Funding should be secured to underpin the effective dissemination and co-ordination of the embedding of the NOSPHP in Wales.

Evaluation of the NOSPHP

• An effective and efficient evaluation system be developed for the impact and use of the NOSPHP in Wales.

No formal accreditation/recognition system in place

• The viability and proposal for the establishment of a voluntary register for public health practitioners be presented and considered in detail
• A formal system of accreditation and registration should clearly align the NOSPHP across the broad public health family.
Appendix 1: Agenda of Technical Workshops

National Occupational Standards for the Practice of Public Health and the Public Health Skills Audit in Wales

Technical Seminar - January 2005

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
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<tr>
<td>9.30</td>
<td>Arrival and Coffee</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.50</td>
<td>Chair’s remarks</td>
<td>Peter Farley</td>
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<td>9.55</td>
<td>Update from the Welsh Assembly Government</td>
<td>Peter Farley</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Report on the Chief Medical Officer’s Task and Finish Group</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• UK Voluntary Register for Public Health Specialists</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Update on the defined route for registration on the UK Voluntary Register for Public Health Specialists</td>
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<td>10.15</td>
<td>Wales Centre for Health - An Introduction and Update</td>
<td>Claire Barley</td>
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<td>10.30</td>
<td>Competency Frameworks</td>
<td>Skills for Health</td>
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<td>11.00</td>
<td>BREAK</td>
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<td>11.20</td>
<td>Workshops - What the standards mean to your group</td>
<td>Group discussions</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>Workshops - How can the standards be used?</td>
<td>Group discussions</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.30</td>
<td>Facilitators meeting / LUNCH</td>
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<td>13.30</td>
<td>Initial findings from the Skills Audit for Public Health Practitioners</td>
<td>Nicky Wilkins</td>
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<td>14:00</td>
<td>Discussion Groups</td>
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<td>15:15</td>
<td>Chair’s closing remarks</td>
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Aims and Objectives

- Awareness raising of the National Occupational Standards for the Practice of Public Health
- Raise awareness of the routes to the UK Voluntary Register for Public Health Specialists
- Developing proposals for the local use of the National Occupational Standards for the Practice of Public Health and their application.

Appendix 2: Feedback from Technical Workshops

The following is a summary of the feedback received from all three technical workshops:

What did you particularly like/get from the day?

- Having a copy of the standards on CD and in written form
- Learning more about the standards and what they are for/clarification etc.
- Having the opportunity to comment on the public health practitioner skills audit
- Opportunity to network/enjoyed networking with public health professionals
- Access to multiple perspectives on public health infrastructure
- Focus on sustainability - developing the public health workforce needs more similar events
- Gained better understanding of the public health voluntary register
- Learning about different organisations
- Philosophical discussion around public health training being everyone’s business
- Exchanging knowledge
- Excellent day - very informative and good to have so much time to discuss
- Informative
- Good opportunity to share ideas
- Welcoming and open atmosphere
- Cleared up uncertainty/lack of knowledge
- Successful day - now feel process is moving on (still have a long way to go)
- Excellent to see how developments are linking together.
What would you change about the day/what would you have liked covered that wasn’t?

- More time to prepare for the public health skills audit session
- A practical insight in how to measure competency
- Fruit instead of biscuits
- More information on the skills audit
- More information on the links to Agenda for Change
- More time for specific professions to work on the skills audit
- More information on the defined specialist route
- Nothing negative
- Disappointed that the skills audit and standards guide poorly represents local government’s role in public health
- Would have liked more information on the standards before attending the events

Additional Comments

- An important framework for health promotion, particularly the skills audit
- Keep up the work and disseminate results and progress
- Disappointed that so few representatives of each profession present at such an important meeting
- Need to publicise the NOS more widely
- Education has to keep up with advances
- Thank you for a thought provoking day
- We need a definition of what a public health practitioner is
- What about a practitioner entry level to the Voluntary Register?

Appendix 3: Useful Websites and Contact Details

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health  
http://www.cieh.org

Faculty of Public Health  
(formerly the Faculty of Public Health Medicine)  
http://www.fphm.org.uk

National Public Health Service for Wales  
http://www.nphs.wales.nhs.uk

Office of the Chief Medical Officer for Wales  
http://www.cmo.wales.gov.uk/content/index.htm

Public Health Register  
http://www.publichealthregister.org.uk

Public Health Research Unit  
http://www.phru.nhs.uk

Royal Institute of Public Health  
http://www.riph.org.uk

Society for Health Education and Health Promotion Specialists  
http://www.hj-web.co.uk/sheps/

Wales Centre for Health  
http://www.wch.wales.nhs.uk

Skills for Health  
http://www.skillsforhealth.org.uk
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