

## **A personal perspective on the practitioner scheme**

The field of public health can at best be described as a broad church. It brings together a range of professionals working across multiple health and community settings. Having such a diverse workforce is absolutely necessary in order to tackle the multi-faceted nature of health inequalities and should definitely be celebrated. Bringing together professionals from a range of backgrounds can present some difficulties when it comes to regulating the workforce. Most professions such as Nursing, Medicine, Psychology and Social Work have legally required professional registration schemes and regulatory organisations in place that monitor this. Professional standards offer reassurance that those who meet them are competent in their practice and will be held to account if deemed unfit to practice. The UK Public Health Register (UKPHR) provides professional regulation to those working in public health roles from a variety of backgrounds. Initially established in 2003 the register has grown from strength to strength and has recently updated the standards and processes for registration and validation.

The programme is accredited by the Professional Standards Authority under a law passed by Parliament (the Health and Social care Act 2012) and sets standards for practitioners whose roles are not regulated in other ways". Recognised by NHS Employers, the Care Quality Commission and qualified provider schemes it offers a valuable addition to continuing professional development in order to support career choice and best practice. Indeed, if you would like to work in the field of public health and do not currently have professional registration the UKPHR offer a unique opportunity to enhance your own professional practice and make a valuable addition to your CV.

I myself applied to join the Northwest scheme in September last year during my transition from a fixed term NHS contract to the University of Bolton. I had worked in public health settings since 1997, specialising initially in alcohol and substance misuse and latterly mental health. Though I had gained a Masters Degree in Health Promotion early on in my career I missed out on opportunities to convert this into a more formal Public Health qualification. UKPHR process at last offered me a chance to rectify this.

The application process itself was very rigorous and involved a staged process where I described my practice base and the support that I would seek in order to help me through the process. Once accepted on to the programme the scheme co-ordinator communicated on a regular basis and offered a programme of workshops and support sessions with others from the cohort. The programme of support has proved invaluable and although I have not been able to attend all of the sessions the depth of knowledge from the specialist workshops have been amazing. The support sessions attended by myself and other applicants provide a great space to check in and seek peer support in managing some of the difficulties in completing the registration process; which has been a mammoth but worthwhile task so far.

In total there are thirty-four standards described in the 2018 revision which are linked to the Public Health Skills and Knowledge Framework 2016. In order to demonstrate competency across each of the 34 standards candidates are required to submit three commentaries about key projects or pieces of work that they have been involved in.

The commentaries, assessed at level 6 (final year of a degree) include a description of understanding, evidence of the knowledge base and how these have been applied. Be warned these can be lengthy and also require a range of supporting evidence from practice. I have currently submitted my first two commentaries and will begin my third and final commentary ready for submission early in the new year.

The process so far, for me, has been a real journey. Though I have worked in public health roles for over 20 years I probably was well overdue a review of my own practice. The UKPHR scheme has provided me with an opportunity to systematically reflect upon my own knowledge, understanding and skill set in relation to the practice of public health. I have had to revisit the evidence base and consider how I have applied this to the projects that I have been a part of. It has stretched me and reminded me not to be complacent – the unconscious competent can soon become the unconscious in-competent. The process has also informed my teaching. I have been able to pass on this improved knowledge base to Health and Social Care students studying on the Foundation Degree and Apprenticeship programmes at The University of Bolton.

I hope that by the end of the process I will be accepted on to the register and become one of many in the UK that has chosen to undertake this rigorous process of registration. I am absolutely sure that my practice – even now – is the better for it.

If you wish to know about the UKPHR scheme then please follow the links below.

<https://ukphr.org/>

<http://champspublichealth.com/north-west-public-health-practitioner-programme>

***Angela Woods***  
**Lecturer in Health and Social Care**

School of Health and Human Sciences  
University of Bolton  
Deane Road, Bolton  
BL3 5AB

[A.woods@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:A.woods@bolton.ac.uk)