



THE PUBLIC HEALTH SKILLS AND CAREER FRAMEWORK

The Governments of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, through each country's policy documents, have committed themselves to a comprehensive programme of action for protecting and improving the health of the UK population, and reducing health inequalities. The UK countries recognise that in order to meet their ambitious health improvement targets they need a well-informed and dynamic, multi-disciplinary public health workforce. To this end, a coherent, flexible public health skills and career framework has been developed for use across the UK.

- **Who is the public health workforce?** Public health involves improving the health and wellbeing of the population. Widening health inequalities, public interest in health improvement and protection and critical health issues, including obesity and climate change, are examples of challenges that demand a collective, strong response from the public health workforce. This workforce, comprised of specialists, practitioners and the wider workforce, spans different organisations, different professions and operates at every strategic, service and operational level.
- **Why have a skills and career framework?** There is urgent need for a mechanism that facilitates collaboration and coherence across this diverse workforce, in order to maximise their collective contribution and underpin the influence of public health in the UK. The public health career framework provides this by helping to ensure rigour and consistency of skills, competence and knowledge at all levels, regardless of professional background, and through enabling flexible public health career progression.
- **What is in the framework?** The framework is based on four core and five defined areas of competence. Each competence, and the knowledge needed to underpin it, is described at nine levels of application. The descriptions are backed by more detailed, discipline specific work, using, for example, the extensive work that has already taken place on health promotion competences and is currently taking place on public health information competences.
- **Who is the framework for?** The framework is relevant for the wider workforce, for those with strategic influence on public health and those whose operational roles impact on public health. All public health practitioners and public health specialists already working in any field of public health now, and those wishing to enter the workforce can use the framework. It is also for those involved in commissioning, organising and delivering public health training; for those involved in workforce planning and for employers.
- **How was it developed?** Skills for Health, commissioned via DH England, has led the process supported by the Public Health Resource Unit, also funded via DH England, to coordinate and provide public health professional input. Funding and support has also been made available via the DH England Implementing Healthier Choices strategy. The framework has been developed and populated through "bottom-up" multidisciplinary and multi-professional stakeholder workshops. The work draws upon the extensive range of materials already developed by different professional groups and organisations, including the wider work of Skills for Health on other career frameworks and their links with other sector skills councils.
- **Implementation** The framework has been endorsed by the four UK Departments of Health, who are supporting a programme of implementation, and by public health professional organisations and groups across the UK. The framework will be published at the end of January 2008 and formally launched by the Department of Health. Alongside this, the UK Voluntary Register is undertaking a feasibility study to develop a regulatory framework for practitioner registration across relevant professional organisations and for those without an obvious professional body. Other work is moving forward on a public health assessment framework, exams audit and higher specialist training routes in defined areas.

The “cube” below sets out in visual form what the framework is aiming to do. To download the framework go to www.phru.nhs.uk.

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