

# UK VOLUNTARY REGISTER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH SPECIALISTS

## REGISTRATION OF DEFINED GROUPS OF SPECIALISTS

### BRIEFING NOTE : September 2003

#### 1. The Voluntary Register

The Voluntary Register has been established by the Tripartite Steering Group: the Multidisciplinary Public Health Forum, the Faculty of Public Health and the Royal Institute of Public Health, which administers the Register. Its objective is to promote public confidence in specialist public health practice in the UK through independent regulation. It will achieve this by:

- publishing a register of competent Specialists in Public Health
- ensuring through periodic revalidation that Specialists in Public Health keep up to date and maintain competence
- dealing with registered specialists who fail to meet the necessary standards

Registration is designed to assure the public and employers which multidisciplinary specialists in public health are appropriately qualified and competent. It sets standards that will be recognised throughout the United Kingdom and provide significant public protection from unprofessional or unethical behaviour. The Register opened in June 2003.

#### 2. Competence Framework

Voluntary registration is currently available to 'generalist specialists' who can show competence across the ten key areas of public health listed in the box.

#### **The ten key areas of public health practice:**

1. Surveillance and assessment of the population's health and well-being
2. Promoting and protecting the population's health and well-being
3. Developing quality and risk management within an evaluative culture
4. Collaborative working for health
5. Developing health programmes and services, and reducing inequalities
6. Policy and strategy development and implementation
7. Working with and for communities
8. Strategic leadership for health
9. Research and development
10. Ethically managing self, people and resources

### **3. Defined specialist registration**

It is the aim of the Voluntary Register to encourage as many Public Health Specialists as possible to apply for full registration, as this offers flexibility and opportunities for personal development.

But some Specialists are not, and have no immediate interest in becoming, competent across all ten key areas. The next stage in the development of the Register is to test the feasibility of registering such Specialists, who also work (or who have the ability to work) at a very senior management or strategic level, but in defined area(s) of expertise. They would receive a defined form of registration specific to their particular area of practice.

The purpose of this 6-month UK-wide project is therefore to test the feasibility of registering defined groups of Public Health Specialists with particular areas of expertise. The main outcome will be generalisable methods of assessing competence for such groups. The project is developing and testing a general approach by working with five or six professional groupings, which should cover all sectors, including local government and higher education as well as the NHS:

- Health promotion
- Health protection
- Public health pharmacy
- Public health information
- Health economics
- Possibly epidemiology/statistics in academic public health

#### **The project objectives are to:**

3.1 Achieve acceptance in the public health community of the legitimacy of registering public health specialists who are not necessarily competent across all ten key areas of public health practice

3.2 Reach agreement on which of the ten key areas are generic or common competencies which must be demonstrated by all public health specialists, generalist or defined

3.3 Ensure clarity of eligibility criteria for specialist practice for the pilot groups, and for generalising to other defined specialists, differentiating specialists from senior practitioners

3.4 Describe specific defined specialist competencies for each pilot group using the 'knows/knows how, shows how' framework employed for generalist specialists, with the Portfolio Assessment Framework as the base.

3.5 Agree a generalisable assessment process

### 3.6 Agree admissible written (or oral) evidence for assessment purposes

The project commenced in July 2003 and will report in January 2004. It is already clear that the development process will extend well beyond this date for at least one pilot group (health protection).

## **4. Key issues**

The current work programme for the project is focused on:

- The standards required for defined registration in relation to generalist registration, that is the weight or quantity of evidence of competence needed
- Formalising the eligibility criteria for specialist practice
- Different options for competency frameworks for defined registration

## **5. Methodology**

The project team consists of Jenny Griffiths and Rachel Sugarman, who report to the Tripartite Steering Group (which includes the Chair of the Voluntary Register Joint Board, representatives from the Multidisciplinary Public Health Forum, Royal Institute of Public Health and Faculty of Public Health and the four UK Health Departments). The work is being reported to the Voluntary Register Joint Board as it progresses.

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Initial meetings and contacts have been made with all the pilot groups. For health promotion and public health information, as many workshops as possible will be held on a regional basis, working through established networks. Work with health protection staff, public health pharmacists and health economists is being taken forward nationally at this stage. We are concerned to secure active involvement from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as well as England.

We welcome contact from any interested specialist, or networks or groups of specialists, at any time, **preferably by e-mail in the first instance**, as we are trying to gather as many views and contributions as possible.

**Jenny Griffiths**  
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