

May 2019

Specialist Registration by Portfolio Assessment: How we implemented the new route

1. Introduction

The current Public Health Specialty Training Programme Curriculum was finalised by the UK Faculty of Public Health (FPH) and approved by the General Medical Council (GMC) in 2015. We refer to it in this report as the 2015 Curriculum.

UKPHR's Board saw the production of the 2015 Curriculum as an opportunity to address comprehensively the routes to registration for public health specialists operated by UKPHR.

At that time, UKPHR operated four routes to registration for specialists:

STANDARD ROUTE	For multidisciplinary professionals who successfully completed the Specialty Training Programme
DUAL REGISTRATION	For professionals already on GMC's Public Health Specialist Register and/or on the General Dental Council (GDC) public health specialist list
RSS (Recognition of Specialist Status)	A portfolio assessment route for professionals to establish their generalist specialist expertise.
DEFINED SPECIALIST	A portfolio assessment route for professionals whose skills and knowledge were particularly deep in some areas.

The *standards* against which applicants' portfolios were being assessed related to a variety of Specialty Training Programme Curricula from the decade 2000 - 2010.

2. Specialist registration by portfolio assessment – task & finish group

In 2015, UKPHR's Board set up a task & finish group with a remit to advise the Board how to make a single portfolio assessment route operated by UKPHR in future more equivalent to (a) the 2015 Curriculum and (b) GMC's *CESR* (Certificate of Eligibility for Specialist Registration) registration route. The task & finish group drew on expertise from a range of stakeholders, including relevant regulators.

The task & finish group led twice on UKPHR consultations about specialist registration, *first*, on all existing routes and the proposed new route and *secondly*, on its proposals for the proposed new route in detail.

On the advice of the task & finish group, UKPHR's Board decided in February 2017 that for the portfolio assessment route the Knowledge Base as stated in the 2015 Curriculum solely should be used in the assessment of knowledge and a pass of both papers 1 & 2 of Part A MFPH exam should be accepted as evidence of achievement of ALL the knowledge requirements in the new specialist assessment framework (otherwise evidence to demonstrate each and every knowledge competence should be produced for assessment).

3. Specialist registration by portfolio assessment – implementation group

Acting on the further advice of the task & finish group, UKPHR's Board settled the policy framework for the new portfolio assessment route in September 2017 and set up an implementation group to help prepare for its practical implementation. Again, a wide range of stakeholders were represented.

The implementation group, chaired by Dr Judith Hooper, was impressively active and prodigiously productive over the following 12 months. It worked to the Board's requirements that:

- (1) the new route should be opened from 01 September 2018; and
- (2) application should be a two-stage process: *first*, an application for permission to submit a portfolio for assessment at which stage criteria would include leadership and readiness; and *secondly*, submission of a portfolio for assessment (if permission were granted).

The implementation group completed the work required to enable the route to be opened on 01 September 2018 as planned by producing:

- Pre-application (permission to proceed) and guidance;
- Knowledge competencies and guidance;
- Show How competencies and guidance;
- Mapping of competencies (two ways) to the 2015 Curriculum;
- Structured reference and testimonial;
- Portfolio guidance, matrix of competencies, checklist for applicants and an assessment proforma for assessors.

All these documents are [on UKPHR's website](#).

There were seven meetings of the implementation group between January and October 2018. The implementation group had a further three meetings with UKPHR's assessors in order to involve them in the implementation process and seek their views and advice on several issues, including the redrafting of knowledge competencies from the 2015 curriculum to fit the very different assessment process. This latter task was a complex piece of work and the implementation group rose to the challenge admirably.

The implementation group also established a sounding board comprising representatives of organisations with an interest in the work of the group. Sounding board members were asked to comment on the first-stage application form, structured reference and guidance before they were approved for publication.

Subsequent to opening the new portfolio assessment route, the implementation group further assisted UKPHR by:

- Agreeing a plan for managing assessor capacity while UKPHR would be “double running” the previous portfolio assessment routes and the new one;
- Establishing a group of experienced assessors who are working with Moderators on the preapplication and portfolio assessments for the new SRbPA route;
- Helping to prepare a *Frequently Asked Questions* document, which has been published on UKPHR's website, and two webinars about this new route; and
- Working with UKPHR's Chief Executive on the Quality Assurance (QA) arrangements for the new route.

The implementation group recommended that UKPHR should hold a series of information events across the UK to explain the new route to interested parties.

At the end of 2018, the implementation group reached a natural break in its work: all the preparations for the new route had been made and it would be some time before UKPHR needed to evaluate how the route was operating.

It is intended that the implementation group will be recalled during 2019 with a view to reviewing the route in operation and leading on the evaluation of the effectiveness of the processes in place for its operation.

UKPHR's Board acknowledges with enormous gratitude the tremendous work rate and excellent outputs of the implementation group.

We publicly thank all its members, Chair Judith Hooper especially, for your professionalism, the high quality of your products and the magnificent achievement of completing the group's work to the tight deadline the Board set.

4. Specialist registration by portfolio assessment – consultations

In all, UKPHR has carried out four consultations between 2015 and 2018 in relation to the new portfolio assessment route:

- IN 2015** UKPHR sought views from a range of sources to assist the organisation in settling policies relating to routes to registration (in relation to specialist registration) and revalidation (in relation to all registrants).
- IN 2016** UKPHR sought views on the fitness for purpose of all existing routes to specialist registration and on the task & finish group's initial thinking about the proposed new portfolio assessment route.
- IN 2017** UKPHR sought views on the task & finish group's detailed proposals for reforms of retrospective portfolio assessment. Views were sought on the proposed new route and on UKPHR's proposals to close the existing RSS and defined specialist portfolio assessment routes.
- IN 2018** UKPHR sought views on proposed Specialist Registration by Portfolio Assessment Rules, which were to govern the operation of the new route.

5. Specialist registration by portfolio assessment – roadshow

UKPHR's Board accepted the implementation group's recommendation to hold a series of information events around the UK.

Two power point presentations were developed, one an overview of the change to specialists' routes to registration and the other a detailed explanation of the new route.

Working with partner organisations, UKPHR identified audiences and venues for the holding of a series of events during 2019.

At the year's halfway mark, the position is that:

- 9 events have been held in:
 - Birmingham**
 - Cambridge**
 - Leeds**
 - London (twice)**
 - Manchester**
 - Norwich**
 - Nottingham**
 - Taunton**
- Over 200 public health professionals have been in attendance
- Further events may be arranged in the second half of the year in Newcastle, Scotland and Wales.

A wide range of issues have been raised in Question & Answer sessions at the information events.

Common themes that have arisen during these information events include:

- Professionals whose public health work has to date been in a few areas of public health practice are keen to have access to experience of other areas – this raises issues about career advice and access to placements, perhaps encouraged by a job swap or brokerage service
- Professionals would welcome more support from their line managers and employers generally, for example with protected work time for preparing an application/portfolio
- Professionals would appreciate support with their applications/portfolios, perhaps from a mentor or peer support group. This is felt to be essential by both applicants and assessors
- Many questions we were asked would be answered by a close reading of the documents on our website
- These documents are helpful:

[The Standards for employers of public health teams in England](#)

[Placements in the public health system: consensus statement](#)

A learning point for UKPHR from attending these events has been that we need to engage more with employers of public health professionals. There appears to be low levels of awareness of our register and the portfolio assessment route.

6. Early experience of operating the Specialist registration by portfolio assessment route

To the end of April 2019 (8 months from the opening of the new route), five preapplications have been received, of which one has been successful.

The successful applicant has 18 months from the granting of the application to deliver a completed portfolio to UKPHR for assessment.

The four unsuccessful applicants received decision letters giving reasons for UKPHR's decisions and were offered a telephone conversation if they wanted to receive more detailed feedback. They may re-apply once 6 months has elapsed (a maximum of three preapplications is permitted).

7. RSS and defined specialist portfolio assessment routes are closing

The other portfolio assessment routes for specialist registration, RSS and defined specialist, will close. The closing date is 31st August 2019.

Applications received before the closing date will, if they are in order, be processed under the existing rules for these routes after the closing date to their conclusion.

8. Next steps

Next steps for UKPHR will include:

- Closure of the RSS and defined specialist portfolio assessment routes after 31 August 2019;
- To continue to develop the Quality Assurance framework for the new SRbPA route;
- To monitor and adjust assessment capacity required for the defined specialist and new SRbPA route as we go forward;
- To monitor and report on experience of operating the new *Specialist Registration by Portfolio Assessment* route; and
- To carry out a first formal evaluation of the new route when it has been in operation for a year.

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