



Oxford School of Public Health

A Guide for Prospective Applicants to the Public Health Specialty Training Programme

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Purpose of this guide

The guide has been developed by Oxford School of Public Health (OxSPH) Registrars. It is intended for applicants to the Public Health Specialty Training Programme. The guide includes tips and helpful resources. For up-to-date details, applicants should visit the Faculty of Public Health (FPH) website (<https://www.fph.org.uk/>).

What is the Public Health training programme?

The Public Health specialty training scheme is a five-year postgraduate training programme which aims to provide applicants with the knowledge, skills and experience needed to be an effective Public Health specialist. The scheme is open to applicants with or without a medical degree. Guidance on how to apply and details of eligibility criteria can be found on the Health Education England website, as well as information on careers in Public Health (<https://medical.hee.nhs.uk/medical-training-recruitment/medical-specialty-training/public-health/>).

Registrars learn through regular service work within a range of Public Health placements. These placements are designed to align with the programme curriculum set by FPH (<https://www.fph.org.uk/training-careers/specialty-training/curriculum/>). Registrars use an online portfolio to record their work and progress against this curriculum. As part of the training programme, Registrars must complete two postgraduate exams; Diplomate (DFPH) and Final Membership (MFPH) examinations.

Upon completion of the training programme, Registrars qualify for a Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT) and eligibility for inclusion on professional registers as a Public Health Specialist, i.e. Consultant in Public Health.

Training in Thames Valley

When Registrars start the training programme, they will discuss their individual academic needs with the Training Programme Director to ensure they are supported academically to work to the curriculum and obtain the knowledge foundation for the FPH Diplomate exam. This may involve courses, modules or a full MSc in Public Health (Masters in Global Health Sciences and Epidemiology at the University of Oxford) as appropriate. Registrars who start training with the MSc will start at ST1 level (first year). Those who already have a relevant master's degree or do not need specific academic courses enter the training programme at ST2 level (second year).

Registrars starting at ST1 will usually sit the Diplomate exam following the MSc; those starting at ST2 will usually sit this exam in their ST2 year. The Membership exam is generally sat in the ST3 year and above.

From ST2, Registrars rotate through various training placements across the Thames Valley region, gaining skills and experience in the different domains of Public Health; health improvement, health protection, healthcare Public Health and academic Public Health. Placements are arranged according to interest and educational needs.

Have a look at our web page, 'Why Oxford?' (<https://www.oxsph.org/registrars/why-oxford/>) and possible training placements (<https://www.oxsph.org/registrars/placements/>). You can also look at bios for our current Registrars (<https://www.oxsph.org/registrars/who-we-are/>) and some of our alumni (<https://www.oxsph.org/registrars/alumni/>).

Work experience and taster days

Although not mandatory, it may be helpful to complete work experience or taster days in Public Health to understand the specialty better, especially if you have not previously worked in this area.

In Thames Valley, we offer applicants living or working in the Thames Valley area taster days with the Health Protection Team subject to their capacity. Applicants can also access publicly available meetings in our local authorities using the following links:

Oxfordshire County Council:

[Browse meetings - Oxfordshire Health & Wellbeing Board](#);

West Berkshire Council:

[Health and Wellbeing Board - West Berkshire Council](#)

Bucks Council:

[Health and wellbeing board \(healthandwellbeingbucks.org\)](http://healthandwellbeingbucks.org)

Milton Keynes Council:

[What is the Health and Wellbeing Board | Milton Keynes Council \(milton-keynes.gov.uk\)](http://milton-keynes.gov.uk) –

Bracknell Forest Council:

<https://democratic.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=632>

Wokingham Borough Council:

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/council-and-meetings/meetings/films-of-council-executive-and-planning-meetings/>

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/health/health-partners/wokingham-borough-wellbeing-board/>

Regional taster events

Several regional Public Health taster events will be held for school leavers, students and others to learn more about careers in Public Health. FPH will update their page as and when they are made aware of these events (<https://www.fph.org.uk/training-careers/recruitment/regional-taster-events/>)

How do I apply?

The Public Health Recruitment Office (PHNRO) coordinates the recruitment process for training posts in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. For all information about applying for Public Health, including personal specifications and application timelines, please visit the FPH website <https://www.fph.org.uk/training-careers/recruitment/> which will lead

you to appropriate webpages for Health Education England (<https://medical.hee.nhs.uk/medical-training-recruitment/medical-specialty-training/public-health>).

All candidates should read the guidance documents on the FPH and HEE websites in order to be fully informed of the recruitment process.

The recruitment cycle commences in November each year, with successful candidates starting their first placement the following August. Recruitment is split into three stages:

1. Application - online application via Oriel Vacancies recruitment portal
2. Assessment Centre - held at Pearson Vue test centres
3. Selection Centre - online due to COVID as of 2021

Stage 1. Application

Applications to the Public Health Specialty Training Programme are made online via Oriel (<https://www.oriel.nhs.uk>).

Posts are usually advertised in November, with a closing date in December. The FPH website will include a timeline of important dates and further information about Oriel: <https://www.fph.org.uk/training-careers/recruitment/recruitment-information/using-the-oriel-system/>

Candidates are required to demonstrate they meet the eligibility criteria as set out in the person specification and entry criteria detailed on the HEE website (<https://medical.hee.nhs.uk/medical-training-recruitment/person-specifications/public-health-st1>). Candidates may apply through the medical route or the background other than medicine route:

The training programme also offers specialist training in academic Public Health through the NIHR Academic Clinical Fellowship (ACF) and Academic Clinical Lecturer (ACL) posts in Public Health. Unfortunately, at this time, these are unavailable to those without a medical degree. You can find out more information on the NIHR and Oriel websites. The application window opens in October each year for the ACF posts. In addition, all applicants for ACF must also apply through the national training process and meet the required benchmark.

Stage 2. Assessment Centre

All candidates who meet the eligibility criteria are invited to the Assessment Centre (<https://medical.hee.nhs.uk/medical-training-recruitment/medical-specialty-training/public-health/public-health-assessment-centre/>). The Assessment Centre is held at a Pearson VUE location and usually lasts 190-minutes. In that time, candidates complete a computer based, multiple choice examination that includes three components:

1. Watson-Glaser II Critical Thinking Appraisal (WGCTA II) - test of critical thinking
2. Rust Advanced Numerical Reasoning Appraisal (RANRA) - test of numerical reasoning
3. Public Health Situational Judgement test (SJT) - tests of characteristics from the person specification; managing others and team involvement; professional integrity, coping with pressure, organisation and planning.

Top-scoring applicants who meet the pass score threshold are invited to the Selection Centre.

Preparing for the Assessment Centre

The standardised test is not content-based; as such, there are no specific things you need to know for the exam. However, it is crucial to ensure that you are familiar with the format, style and internal logic of the questions asked - they are NOT common-sense and significant preparation is strongly recommended. Pearson VUE offers a generic demo to aid you in familiarising yourself with the controls and screen layout in advance of the assessment. No calculators, other stationery or paper will be permitted for this assessment. A wipeable board will be provided in the test centre.

You can find links further information and sample questions for the three components below:

1. [Watson-Glaser II Critical Thinking Appraisal \(WGCTA II\)](#)
2. [Rust Advanced Numerical Reasoning Appraisal \(RANRA\)](#)
3. [Public Health Situational Judgement test \(SJT\)](#) and [sample questions](#)

Some applicants have found working on BBC Bitesize GCSE level Maths helpful to refresh numeracy skills for the numerical reasoning section. There are also several online resources that some candidates have found useful to familiarise themselves with the style of questions.

Stage 3. Selection Centre

Top-ranked applicants from the Assessment Centre will be invited to the Selection Centre. The Selection Centre used to be an in-person half-day that included some combination of group work, a written task and a 'steeplechase' interview (six mini-interviews including a short presentation and discussion of an academic paper). Candidates are deemed appointable if they pass a threshold score at the Selection Centre.

Since 2021, due to the COVID pandemic, the Selection Centre has taken place online.

Where can I apply to do my training?

Application for the Public Health training covers training posts across the UK (England, Wales, Scotland and the Defence Medical Services). In England, Registrars train within a region. At the end of the application process, candidates invited to the Selection Centre will be asked to rank their preferred training regions. Candidates may rank as many or as few regions as they like. Posts are offered to candidates, reflecting their location preferences according to their recruitment score ranking. If you are not committed to a geographical area, consider ranking as many regions as possible to improve your chances of getting a training post.

How do I receive a place?

Depending on your recruitment score (a composite of your scores in the Assessment and Selection Centres), you will be offered one of your preferred regions. You will have to either accept, hold, or reject your place. There will be a short period where other candidates do the same, which may lead to you receiving a higher-ranked region offer (if you have not already

received your first choice). You can find further information about this process (<https://www.oriel.nhs.uk>).

What happens if I do not get a place?

Public Health is a competitive specialty. The number of vacancies changes each year, however, usually there are between 70 and 110 places available each year, with over 1000 people applying for them. Competition ratios are published on the HEE website (<https://medical.hee.nhs.uk/medical-training-recruitment/medical-specialty-training/public-health/recruitment-information/recruitment-timelines>)

It is not unusual for candidates to apply more than once to secure a place in the training programme so do not be disheartened if you do not secure a place on your first try. Feedback on each stage of the application is provided after the Selection Centre (usually late April/early May), regardless of the outcome.

Application process summary:

1. Application

Ensure you meet the eligibility criteria and have provided the necessary documentation. If you do not meet the eligibility criteria, you may want to consider alternative routes into Public Health.

2. Assessment Centre

You will receive a score at the end of the Assessment Centre. Candidates must meet a threshold to progress to the next stage. You can improve your familiarity with the format and style of questions to improve your score. See the resources included above.

3. Selection Centre

Following the Selection Centre, all applicants will receive a score breakdown for each station. You can review these and identify areas for improvement.

Further information on the application process

- Health Education England - visit HEE's recruitment page (<https://medical.hee.nhs.uk/medical-training-recruitment/medical-specialty-training/public-health>) for the most up-to-date information and be sure to review the FAQs, which contain helpful information, including details about pay (<https://medical.hee.nhs.uk/medical-training-recruitment/medical-specialty-training/public-health/2023-essential-guidance--frequently-asked-questions-%28faqs%29>)
- Ask Dr Cath (<https://www.drcath.net/>) is an excellent website created and maintained by Public Health Consultant Dr Cath. It contains helpful information about applying to Public Health and the training programme
- The Student Room - Each year, there is a new thread on the Student Room forums, which can be a valuable source of peer support. The 2023 thread is here (<https://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/showthread.php?t=7282902>).
- Choosing to Train in Public Health, 2nd Edition (Rishma Maini et al)

Further information on Public Health

This list is not exhaustive but serves as a guide for learning more about the breadth of the Public Health specialty:

- www.healthknowledge.org.uk/ - online learning resource which covers Public Health skills and competencies
- www.gov.uk/government/collections/health-matters-public-health-issues
- www.ukhsa.blog.gov.uk
- www.health.org.uk
- www.kingsfund.org.uk
- 'Public Health in a Doman' video series - <https://wessex.hee.nhs.uk/school-of-public-health/ph-careers/>
- Oxford Handbook of Public Health Practice
- Epidemiology: A Very Short Introduction (Rodolfo Saracci)
- Donaldsons' Essential Public Health (Liam Donaldson)
- Fair Society, Healthy Lives (The Marmot Review 2010) and Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On (2020) (Michael Marmot)

Frequently asked questions

How much does a Public Health Registrar get paid?

Pay is different for Registrars with and without a medical degree as they are employed under different NHS contracts.

1. Registrars from a non-medical background are employed under the Agenda for Change (AfC) -agreement. Pay is worked out as a proportion of Band 8d on the AfC payscale, which increases each year incrementally. Please see this document for information on pay (www.nhsemployers.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/pay-circular-afc-1-2007.pdf)
Pay protection is available if you currently earn more than the starting salary and should be applied through the lead employer.
2. Registrars from a medical background are employed under the Junior Doctor Contract and are paid the same as Registrars in clinical training programmes (<https://www.bma.org.uk/pay-and-contracts/pay>)

All Registrars receive a supplement for their on-call duties when they join the out-of-hours rota for their local health protection teams (usually in the second or third year of training).