



The Association of Directors of Public Health

Explainer: Where does specialist Public Health sit across the UK?

Introduction

Public health functions are not organised in exactly the same way across the UK and the nations associated with it. There are four nations in the UK, three Crown Dependencies and 14 UK overseas territories. Public health functions look very different across these 21 administrations. The purpose of this explainer is to provide a quick overview of where functions sit in different nations.

History and local circumstances mean public health can be configured differently

How governments and public services have been organised in each of these varies according to local circumstances and history. In other words, some form of devolution has historically been part and parcel of the constitutional approach of nations with links to the Crown or UK. The same could be said of how the public health functions in each of these systems are configured: while there are commonalities in professional competence and practice, there are historical and other differences in who does what across each territory and the way functions are organised in Scotland and Wales looks very different from Gibraltar, and different again from England.

When working at a national, or United Kingdom or pan-territory level, it is important to bear this in mind, so we do not become centred on one single system in our policy thinking. The divergences in administration are an important asset to policy: the rich differences allow us to compare and learn from each other on how we approach policy and other problems.

The different territories

While there are a number of ways to talk about the various territories, we will use the language currently used either by the UK Government or the Crown to describe these various administrations. They can be grouped into three categories of territory:

- 1. Crown Dependencies** – Three self-governing islands (or groups of islands) in the British Isles which are not part of the UK but have a special constitutional relationship with the King. The UK Government has some limited functions for these territories, mostly defence and international relationships. We have members across all of the [Crown Dependencies](#).
- 2. UK Overseas Territories** – 14 [territories](#) which retain a constitutional link with the UK. Each has their own Government and legislature as part of their rich history. We have members across many, but not all of these territories.
- 3. The United Kingdom** – Comprising four nations of Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England, all of whom elect Members to the UK Parliament in Westminster as well as three nations having their own devolved elected Assemblies/Parliaments and Governments. We have members across all of the UK.

Who does what: national and local tiers

While some nations (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) have executive agencies of national Government for public health purposes, not every territory does. Equally, while many territories have a Chief Medical Officer in Government providing leadership of the public health profession as well as medical professions, not every territory does. This explainer does no more than describe the various players in each system. How they work together in each territory is more complex and provides rich opportunities for comparison and learning across them.

Despite the many differences, there are a range of commonalities in specialist public health practice across these nations:

- There are common standards for senior professional practice in public health, set by the [Faculty of Public Health](#) and for environmental health, set by their respective bodies.
- Public health professionals in all systems are usually engaged in system leadership and ensuring the system works together.
- There are some common agreements on what a good system or function should look like, even if in different systems the parts sit in different places. There are two useful guides to considering the various public health functions in any system which can help make these commonalities clear:
 - The [Functions and Standards of a Public Health System](#) produced by the Faculty of Public Health, the Standard Setting Body for professional public health.
 - [What does good look like?](#) These set out what we consider to be the components of good practice in a public health system on any given topic.

It is also important to note that universities often have specialist public health capacity, linked to educating public health professionals and research. Listing these is beyond the scope of this explainer.

Public health, environmental health and port health

The table in the next section makes a distinction between specialist public health functions and specialist [environmental health](#) functions. Both of these sister professions are part of the family of public health and have a rich history. Both are vital in protecting the health of the public. In some places they are joined together in one function (as in Gibraltar), in other places they are in different organisations (eg in Wales and Scotland public health is in the NHS and environmental health is in local authorities.)

In the UK there are also [port health authorities](#) which are local authorities who have responsibilities for health controls at sea and air ports into the UK. Diverse arrangements apply in the other territories. These are also an important part of specialist public health. [Trading Standards](#) is also a vital part of protecting the health of the public, with a similarly rich history and typically in local government. A detailed analysis of these two important professions is beyond the scope of this summary explainer.

Overview of different systems

The chart below summarises alphabetically the key features of these systems. As this is a simple explainer to help people understand who has local public health responsibility in each system, a detailed analysis of the historical, constitutional, legislative and financial aspects of the functions is beyond our scope. We have grouped the UK Overseas Territories into one because their principal similarity in organisation is that

the public health function sits at the government level in each territory.

System	National Bodies	Local Bodies	Funding
Bailiwick of Guernsey (including Alderney, Guernsey, Herm and Sark)	The States of Guernsey is the public health and environmental health authority for the Island and the Director of Public Health heads a Department of the States of Guernsey.	The States of Guernsey is the public health and environmental health authority for the Island and the Director of Public Health heads a Department of the States of Guernsey.	Funding for public health is organised through main Government funding.
Bailiwick of Jersey	The Government of Jersey is the public health and environmental health authority for the Island and the Director of Public Health heads a Department of the Government of Jersey.	The Government of Jersey is the public health and environmental health authority for the Island and the Director of Public Health heads a Department of the Government of Jersey.	Funding for public health is organised through main Government funding.
England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UK Parliament is the responsible national Government, with the Department of Health and Social Care being the body responsible for public health at a national level. There is a Public Health Minister. • National public health executive functions sit across the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities in DHSC for health improvement and funding and the UK Health Security Agency for health protection. The Chief Medical Officer sits within DHSC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directors of Public Health have been located in Upper Tier local authorities since 2013 (County Councils, Unitary, Metropolitan Councils, and London Boroughs). • Environmental health departments sit in lower tier and unitary authorities with a range of statutory functions complementary to and distinct from those of the Director of Public Health. The Chief Environmental Health Officer will sit in this authority. • Public health in England was in the NHS until 2012. But there are a number of public health functions still needed by the NHS. NHS England has a national Director of Public Health and, jointly appointed with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for public health is by means of ring-fenced grant for most Directors of Public Health, with the exception that in Greater Manchester which is through business rate revenue. • Environmental health is funded through core local authority funding and council tax. • The NHS is directly funded by the Government.

		DHSC, regional Directors. A consensus statement between DHSC, NHSE, ADPH and FPH spells out the key functions for the NHS and who should provide them. ¹	
Gibraltar	The Public Health Department of the Government of Gibraltar is responsible for all public health and environmental health functions in Gibraltar, led by the Director of Public Health.	The Public Health Department of the Government of Gibraltar is responsible for all public health and environmental health functions in Gibraltar, led by the Director of Public Health.	Funding for public health is organised through main Government funding.
Isle of Man	The Isle of Man Government is the public health and Environmental Health Authority for the Isle of Man, and the Director of Public Health leads a department of the Government. There is an environmental health unit in the Isle of Man Government.	The Isle of Man Government is the public health and Environmental Health Authority for the Isle of Man, and the Director of Public Health leads a department of the Government. There is an environmental health unit in the Isle of Man Government.	Funding for Public Health is organised through main Government funding.
Northern Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Northern Ireland Assembly is the national Government responsible for public health, with a Minister responsible. • The specialist public health function sits in the Northern Ireland Public Health Agency which is an executive arm of Government. • The Chief Medical Officer sits within the Department of Health. 	Environmental health sits with the Northern Ireland Councils. The Chief Environmental Health Officer will sit in these authorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for public health is through the Northern Ireland Government. • Environmental health is funded by councils through core funding.
The 14 “Overseas territories”	Public health and environmental health functions for most of these 14 territories tend to be in the national level/territory level Government but there are nuances and differences from area to area, so it is important	Public health and environmental health functions for most of these 14 territories tend to be in the national level/territory level Government but there	Funding for public health services and environmental health services is through main

	to consult the website for the Government of the territory you are seeking to describe.	are nuances and differences from area to area, so it is important to consult the website for the Government of the territory you are seeking to describe.	Government funding in these areas.
Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Scottish Government is the national authority responsible for public health with a Minister for Public Health. • Public Health Scotland is the national Executive Agency which leads public health functions. • The Chief Medical Officer sits within the Scottish Government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Director of Public Health and their functions sit within the NHS Boards in Scotland. • environmental health functions sit in local authorities 	Funding for public health Services is through NHS Scotland and for environmental health services through council core funding.
Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Welsh Assembly Government is the national authority responsible for public health with a Minister for Public Health. • Public Health Wales is the national Executive Body for Public Health and is part of NHS Wales. • The Chief Medical Officer sits within the Welsh Assembly Government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Director of Public Health and their functions sit within the Local Health Boards in Wales. • Environmental health functions sit in local authorities. The Chief Environmental Health Officer will sit in local authorities. 	Funding for public health Services is through NHS Cymru and for environmental health services through council core funding.

Co-ordination

Due to some territories having multiple agencies which work on public health, most large systems have co-ordination mechanisms. Wales and Scotland, for example, have national networks bringing together key players. England has a further set of co-ordination mechanisms. A range of professional bodies play a key role in these mechanisms, developing policy, disseminating good practice and advocating with governments for policies which improve and protect the health of the public.

This section lists a number of the professional, standard setting and representative bodies below, for different parts of the profession. It does not cover the professional registration/regulation bodies.

Association of Directors of Public Health

We are the representative body for Directors of Public Health (DsPH) in the UK. We represent the professional views of all DsPH as the local leaders for the nation's health. Our Association has a heritage dating back over 160 years and is a collaborative organisation, working in partnership with others to strengthen the voice for public health. Every Director of Public Health within the British Isles and British

Overseas Territories has the right to be a member of our Association. Deputy directors and consultants in Public Health can become Associate Members while former DsPH can sign up as Alumni. We also have good links historically with the Republic of Ireland.

We improve and protect the health of the population by:

- Representing the views of DsPH on public health policy.
- Advising on public health policy and legislation at a local, regional, national and international level.
- Providing a support network for DsPH to share ideas and good practice.
- Identifying and providing professional development opportunities for DsPH.

Association of Chief Environmental Health Officers

[ACEHO](#) represents the voice and interests of Chief Environmental Health Officers across the UK.

Association of Port Health Authorities

[APHA](#) represents the interests of local authorities and port health authorities who have responsibility for health controls at air and seaports.

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

[CIEH](#) has been the voice of professional environmental health since 1883, sets standards for, examines and awards professional environmental health qualifications. Scotland and Ireland have their own Environmental Health Bodies. There is an agreement between all of them to mutually recognise environmental health graduates from across Ireland and the UK.

Chartered Trading Standards Institute

“Founded in 1881, the [Chartered Trading Standards Institute](#) (CTSI) is one of the world’s longest-established organisations dedicated to the fields of Trading Standards and Consumer Protection. After 140 years of progress, we remain immensely proud of our close association with the trading standards profession and the vital work it continues to do – promoting fair business practices, tackling rogue traders and, ultimately, protecting UK consumers.”²

Environmental Health Association of Ireland

[The Environmental Health Association of Ireland](#) is the professional body for Environmental Health Officers in Ireland. Has mutual recognition agreements with UK bodies.

Faculty of Public Health

The [FPH](#) sets the standards and conducts examinations for specialist professionals in Public Health. It has many international members.

Faculty of Public Health Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland

The [Faculty of Public Health Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland](#) sets standards and conducts examinations for specialist professionals in public health for Ireland but has UK and international members.

Royal Society of Public Health

The [RSPH](#), founded in 1856, is an independent campaign and educational charity providing a range of qualifications and publications with a membership often drawn from all the other professional bodies.

Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland

The Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland was founded in 1875 and awards the chartered qualification allowing a person to practice as an Environmental Health Officer in Scotland. Has mutual recognition agreements with Ireland and other UK bodies.

References

¹ National Health Service England, Delivering a quality public health function in integrated care boards. 2022.

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Delivering-a-quality-public-health-function-in-integrated-care-boards-October-2022.pdf> [Accessed May 2023].

² Chartered Institute of Trading Standards, About Us. N.D. <https://www.tradingstandards.uk/about-us/> [Accessed May 2023].