

Briefing Report on Behalf of North West School of Public Health Specialty Registrars

Introduction

This report reflects the findings of the 2013 Annual Assessment pre-visit questionnaire and a focus group conducted on 27th August 2013. The key points are noted below, with recommendations where relevant.

There were 41 survey responses from registrars from all 5 years of training and all three training zones, representing an 80% response rate. The AAV is later in the year than usual, to allow ascertainment of the impact of the transition of public health teams to local authorities. Consequently it is recognised that the survey respondents who are in their ST1 year have only been in post since August 2013. Additionally, the survey has been expanded to include sections on transition and Lead Employer.

The focus group aimed to identify common issues, and to determine which points registrars would like to be raised at the AAV, in recognition that not all would attend on the day. Ten registrars from ST2 to ST5 participated, although there were none from the Cumbria and Lancashire training zone.

1. Overall Satisfaction: 97.5% of registrars report being satisfied or above with the training programme, and also rate the quality of training as satisfactory, good or excellent. Notably 39% of registrars are very satisfied overall with the training programme, and also rated the quality of training as excellent. However, the trainee-led nature of the programme is noted to contribute to a lack of guidance at times.

2. Supervision: 100% of registrars have an educational supervisor and meet them regularly. More guidance on matching work to objectives was requested, as this is currently felt to be too self-directed, and sometimes work was felt to be solely for the benefit of the organisation rather than for personal development. Many registrars had been given work felt to be beyond their competence; however for some this was a positive opportunity. Many registrars were also given work felt to be below their competence, raising concerns about deskilling and a lack of challenging opportunities. Variability in supervision was an issue, with it being unclear what standards were expected of educational supervisors. This leads to inconsistencies in workloads, support, and in what is required to sign off learning objectives. Mixed experiences of academic supervision were reported, with some respondents having never met their academic supervisor. Some academic supervisors in Cumbria and Lancashire do not have a public health background.

Recommendations:

2.1 Ensure a minimum level for educational supervision and communicate this to both registrars and educational supervisors.

2.2 More consistent provision of academic supervision across the region, and minimum standards for meetings and supervision.

3. Lead Employer: Despite significant concerns being raised in the 2012 registrar briefing notes, this continues as a ***source of major dissatisfaction amongst registrars***. A range of issues were raised, including lack of contracts, incorrect pay during sick or maternity leave, repeated non-response to correspondence, incorrect guidance provided, and poor records of

registrars' details, leave, or years of service. Registrars felt some issues were resolved promptly, and the department was seen as under resourced. Problems affect the pre-employment process, continue throughout training and cause registrars a great deal of concern. ***A disproportionate amount of time is used by registrars in addressing issues, and it was highlighted that basic legal requirements are not being met.*** This issue is long-standing, with registrars noting that, despite repeated reassurances that the situation will improve, the problems persist.

Recommendations:

3.1 As a minimum, correct, contemporaneous records of all registrars' contact details, employment history, pay and annual leave should be kept, with a clear process for registrars to access and update this information.

3.2 All registrars should be in receipt of a contract, appropriate to their background and employment history.

3.3 Immediate discussions between the lead employer, the deanery and StR representatives to raise ongoing issues of concern which need to be resolved as a matter of urgency.

4. Placements: Placement allocation processes are not standardised across the School of Public Health (SOPH). Many positive placements were reported, however it was also reported that other placements were not clear about the role of registrars. There is balance required between ensuring placements are consistent, but also that the training programme is tailored to reflect an individual's background, skills and career interests. Long commutes impacted on work-life balance for some. Others reported lack of access to desks, phones, printers and parking or cycling facilities. Public Health England placements often challenging and were rated highly.

Recommendations:

4.1 All placements should have a clear understanding of what hosting a registrar involves and the purpose of the training programme.

4.2 Greater clarity on the process of allocation of placements is needed, particularly due to geographical distribution of training locations.

5. Transition: Registrar perceptions of the impact of transition were varied. The loss of staff and opportunities for research work were seen as negatives, however some felt that the Local Authority provided new and exciting opportunities. There was anxiety and uncertainty about the future, particularly relating to Consultant posts. The transition period was seen as limiting service work and support, although also providing insight into change management and local authority structure.

Recommendation:

5.1 Close monitoring is needed of the number and range of training placements available to ensure that loss of public health staff does not have a detrimental impact on training.

6. Bullying & Harassment: Four registrars reported incidents of bullying and harassment, two of which had not been reported. It was reassuring, however, that the two who had reported it both felt it was effectively dealt with, and one who had not reported it commented that, if they had chosen to share it, they felt they would be supported. The current bullying and harassment policies were distributed alongside the survey link, and it was reiterated

that registrars could contact the Head of School directly with any concerns. In addition, the registrar-led buddying system ensures all new registrars are now allocated a named senior registrar to offer support throughout training. This system is regularly reviewed to ensure it runs successfully, and additional training was recently arranged for those participating as buddies.

Recommendations:

6.1 Head of School and TPDs to re-contact registrars to encourage communication of any issues of bullying and harassment.

6.2 Buddies and peer support network to be highlighted to all registrars via North West Registrar group as resources for support.

7. Deanery: A number of comments were made about the difficulties arising for those who had absence, Less Than Full Time (LTFT) working or didn't progress through the programme "normally", including wanting to pursue international placements. Information about induction meetings and initial arrangements for commencing training were also felt to be complicated and poorly communicated. There was a lack of clarity about the link between the SOPH and the Deanery, and the processes for interacting with the Deanery. A number of ongoing administrative issues around maintaining updated contact details and recording of basic information such as training locations and stage of training were highlighted. These were felt to have been unresolved for many years and often have important consequences. The process for study leave approval and reimbursement was reported positively by some, but others found it slow, and on some occasions discouraged them from applying for additional opportunities.

Recommendation:

7.1 Key administrative processes such as study leave, ARCP and management of contact details/distribution lists should be reviewed to ensure that they can operate effectively and meet the needs of all members of SOPH.

8. Examination & Assessment: The Part A revision programme is highly commended, as is support for Part B examinations, particularly within peer groups. Examination periods often impact negatively on work-life balance. Some placements were unclear of examination processes. The ARCP process was often problematic, with supervisors being unfamiliar with the electronic portfolio, and feedback from the panel being delayed and at times unclear. The process was seen to be improving, and the benefit of a routine face-to-face ARCP for all was suggested. The frequency of the ARCP process during LTFT training was a commonly raised issue.

Recommendations:

8.1 Continued support from the SOPH & Deanery for the structured 16-week Part A Revision programme.

8.2 Deanery to consider provision of face-to-face ARCP panel for all registrars, although the logistical impact of this is appreciated.

8.3 The frequency of ARCP processes for LTFT registrars should be reviewed.

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