

Occupational health qualifications and titles

Updated November 2024





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Joint statement from the Faculty of Occupational Health Nursing and the National School of Occupational Health.

This joint statement has been prepared by the Faculty of Occupational Health Nursing (FOHN) and the National School of Occupational Health (NSOH) to clarify knowledge and experience of occupational health nurse education, and to explore which qualifications, supported by experience and understanding, bestow speciality and non-speciality status.

Nurse education in Occupational Health (OH) has evolved to meet the needs of the working population and the profession. Nurses entering OH practice enter from many different fields and adopt or are awarded titles which are interchangeable and do not relate to educational qualifications. This has caused confusion for those commissioning services, and partially impacts on the effectiveness of their services and the credibility of occupational health nursing professionals.

Employers have a duty under law to commission competent professionals to provide high quality service in OH to achieve their health and safety objectives including but not limited to, the promotion of good health and wellbeing and the protection and rehabilitation of employees.

It is essential to have professional unity and clarity on educational and experiential attainment of OH nurses to support employers' recruitment processes and appropriate professional development of OH staff whilst being cognisant of:

- Contemporary legal and professional regulations
- Nurse skills and competency level
- Job titles to avoid ambiguity and misinterpretation.

Nursing professionals employed in the field of OH should be able to work to a common understanding of titles for OH nursing professionals based on education and development of the necessary competencies. This statement also aims to clarify commonly used role titles and what the title signifies.

Occupational health nursing professionals and employers often adopt one of two titles, the most used terminology is either, occupational health adviser or occupational health nurse. The titles are not clearly defined in terms of education, knowledge, skill, experience, and other attributes and therefore have been adopted without clear boundaries. Title terminology often depends on the employer.

Occupational health nursing professionals are registered nurses working in an occupational health setting. All UK Registered Nurses are already on the NMC Register and as such bound by The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) Code: Professional standards of practice and behaviours for nurses, midwives, and nursing associates (NMC 2018). All occupational health nursing professionals should only undertake tasks for which they have the necessary competence evidenced for example by training, supervision, experience, and assessment of competence

The Code: <https://www.nmc.org.uk/standards/code/>

Note: Registered Nurse is a protected title. Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001.

The Faculty of Occupational Health and the National School of Occupational Health have now defined a more contemporary set of titles for occupational health professionals below.

- **Specialist Community Public Health Nurse Occupational Health (SCPHN OH)**
- **Occupational Health Specialist/Occupational Health Nurse**
- **Occupational Health Practitioner/Occupational Health Adviser**

Specialist Community Public Health Nurse Occupational Health (SCPHN OH)

This is a nurse who has undertaken a specific program of education (NMC approved) that allows entry to the 3rd part of the NMC Register. This is a protected title and can only be achieved by obtaining competencies and sign off by an approved practice teacher or SCPHN OH nurse. However, due to generic nature of the SCPHN program with other specialities (see information in section 3) this does not guarantee that all SCPHN's OH knowledge and practice is equal or more enhanced than other university educated OH professionals.



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Occupational Health Specialist/Occupational Health Nurse / Occupational Health Practitioner/ Occupational Health Adviser

Occupational health specialist/occupational health nurse

This should be a nurse who has undertaken a post graduate occupational health specialist practitioner qualification (SPQ), aligned to relevant occupational health education standards or guidance i.e. NMC, PHE and with a minimum of 2 years in this field of practice. They deliver a range of occupational health activities, making clinical judgements and providing technical advice and support as defined by their knowledge, skills and experience.

Occupational health practitioner/ occupational health adviser

This should be a nurse who is new to this field of practice or who is delivering defined occupational health activities to agreed standards*. They should have activity specific training in place or have completed the Diploma in Occupational Health Practice foundation course. It is also recommended that their work is supervised until they gain the necessary proficiencies.

All nurses should have in place arrangements to reflect on their practice with other nurses in their speciality.

* Standards are documented evidence-based practices, procedures, competencies and quality measures.

Please note that other allied health professionals may also provide technical advice and support as an occupational health adviser.

Nurses wishing to specialise in the occupational health field of practice need to be taught to agreed standards of proficiency and education or professionally agreed guidance on education.

Specialist Community Public Health Nurse Occupational Health (SCPHN OH)

Background: The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) launched the Standards of Proficiency for Specialist Community Public Health Nurses (SCPHN) in 2004ⁱⁱⁱ, which allowed Registered Nurses who had completed an NMC approved SCPHN programme and achieved the standards of proficiency to join Part 3 of the professional register. This is in addition to being on part 1 of the register as a Registered Nurse. The SCPHN title was enabled in several Public Health disciplines, Health Visiting, School Nursing and Occupational Health. The NMC also introduced a time limited transition arrangement for nurses with a specialist practice qualification to record their qualification on the NMC register or to submit a portfolio. These nurses then automatically transitioned to Part 3 of the NMC Register. Nurses who did not or were not able to take up the transition arrangement, for whatever reason, found that their speciality training was not accorded professional recognition by the NMC and thus by some employers and other professionals

The NMC 2004 Standards of Proficiency have not been without their challenges and many academic courses have now ceased (see Appendix 1). The Standards were developed as generic standards across three fields of practice: Health Visiting, School Nursing and Occupational Health. This led to many courses developing shared learning thus diluting the delivery of core OH specific knowledge. In addition, there were immense challenges for the students to obtain and retain suitable approved SCPHN approved supervision and OH practice placements. The ongoing challenges of this NMC approved programme has led to a decline in SPCHN OH numbers on the 3rd part of the NMC register. The NMC have since undergone a long process of review and consultation and have now revalidated new standards for all SPCHN fields of practice.

In May 2022 updated NMC Standards of Proficiency for SCPHN were approved and released:

<https://www.nmc.org.uk/standards/standards-for-post-registration/standards-of-proficiency-for-specialist-community-public-health-nurses2/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Nursing and Midwifery Council (2004) Standards of Proficiency for Specialist Community Public Health Nurses

These new SCPHN Standards are less generic and are now aligned with contemporary OH practice. Note: these new standards have not yet been validated at any university.

Table below shows SCPHN educational pathways and programme titles leading to:

- Registered Speciality Community Public Health Nurse -OH (SCPHN-OH)

Specialist Community Public Health Nurse Occupational Health (SCPHN OH)

Programme	HEI	Academic Route
Specialist community public health nursing	Brunel University	MSc/PG dip.
	University of Chester	MSc
	University of Derby	BSc (Hons)
	University of Western England	PG dip.
	University of the West of Scotland	MSc/PG dip.

Note:

All SCPHN courses are NMC validated.

Specialist Community Occupational Health Nurse is a protected title. Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2002/253/contents/made>

A SCPHN can only register on Part 3 of the Register once, so if already say a SCPHN-School Nurse or Health Visitor then that entry would have to be removed so that the registrant, after further approved education, could be on the Register as SCPHN-OH

Please see Appendix 1 for SCPHN Courses which are no longer running

Non SCPHN Courses Aligned with Public Health England Education Objectives

With recognition of the challenges around SCPHN OH Standards 2004, Public Health England (now United Kingdom Health Security Agency and Office for Health Improvement and Disparities) established an Occupational Health Nursing Working Group representing a range of interested parties to raise the profile and understanding of the role of occupational health nurses and to set occupational health learning within the context of current educational and practice challenges. The output was a document titled Educating Occupational Health Nurses (an approach to align education with a service vision for OH Nurses) shared with Higher Education Institutions and Lecturers for consideration in 2016.

The Robert Gordon University BSc Occupational Health and University of Cumbria Advanced Diploma and BSc Honours are based on this PHE Educational Document.

<https://vivbennett.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/90/2016/11/Educating-OHNs-final-Oct-2016-FinalNB071116.pdf>

Occupational Health – RGU

Programme	HEI	Academic Route
Occupational health	Robert Gordon University	BSc
Occupational Health: Practice Development	University of Cumbria	Advanced Diploma
		BSc Honours

Other specialist courses

Alternative contemporary non SCPHN OH focused courses were also available in the past and led to a variety of educational qualifications.

Occupational Health Nursing Certificate (RCN accredited) / Diploma Occupational Health Nursing (ENB) were taught across the UK and were recordable on the UKCC register as a specialist practice qualification provided a fee was paid. Those nurses would have automatically migrated to the third part of the register as SCPHNs. Of those that did not/ were not able to record their qualification, there was the option for two years or so at the point the SCPHN register was formed to submit a portfolio of evidence to a HEI that taught SCPHN (OH) courses to enable them to migrate across.

FOHN and the NSOH recognise the following specialist courses which ran for a number of years after the introduction of the SCPHN (OH) qualification, whose content confers the recognised knowledge and experience required of an occupational health nurse.

HEI	Academic Route
Warwick University	OH Diploma
University of Glamorgan	OH Diploma
University of Birmingham	MSc/PG Dip. Occupational Health
University of Cardiff	MSc Occupational Health

The following entry level qualification will provide a foundation for safe practice as an occupational health adviser. Diploma Occupational Health Practice with full completion of programme i.e. course, MCQ exam and Portfolio assessment or SCPHN SN or HV who has completed the consolidated practice course in occupational health.

Various providers

FOM DipOHPrac

10 days plus exams

[View courses](#)

Other post graduate courses

The following courses provide post graduate training on specific workplace health topics and are open to nurses and other allied health professionals. These are occupational health non-pathway specific courses and not aligned to recognised standards for education of occupational health specialists.

Manchester University

Master's in Public Health (OH)

[View course](#)

Distance learning 1 year full time or up to 5 years part time

University of Nottingham

MSc / PGDIP/PG Cert Workplace Health and Well-being

[View course](#)

Part-time up to 36 months

British Occupational Hygiene Society

Accredited course MSc/PG Dip Occupational Hygiene

Modular course eg Health effects of hazardous substances, ergonomics, basic principles of occupational hygiene

Wide range of courses in relation to health risk exposure.

[View courses](#)

Appendix 1

Past courses

Programme

Specialist community

public health nursing

HEI

Brunel University
Cardiff University
Glyndwr University
Leeds Metropolitan University
Liverpool John Moores University
London Metropolitan University
London South Bank University
Nottingham Trent University
(formerly Trent Polytechnic)
Robert Gordon University
Staffordshire University
Teesside University
University of Bolton
University of Chester
University of Cumbria
BSc (Hons)/PG dip./ Graduate diploma
University of Derby
University of Plymouth
University of Sheffield
University of Southampton
University Of South Wales
University of Surrey
University of Ulster
University of Western England
University of Western Scotland

University of Wolverhampton

Academic route

BSc/MSc/PG dip.
MSc/PG dip.
MSc/BSc /PG dip.
MSc/BSc /PG dip.
BSc (Hons)/PG dip.
BSc (Hons)/PG dip.
BSc (Hons)/PG dip.

BSc/Dip.
BSc (Hons)/BA
BSc (Hons)
MSc/BSc (Hons)/PG dip./cert.
BSc (Hons)/PG dip.
MSc/BSc (Hons)/PG dip.

MSc/BSc /PG dip.
BSc (Hons)/PG dip.
M Med Sci/PG dip.
BSc (Hons)/PG dip.
BSc (Hons)
PG dip.
BSc (Hons)/PG dip.
BSc (Hons)/PG dip.
Graduate diploma
Level 11 SCQF
BSc (Hons)/PG dip.

Specialist Practitioner –

Occupational Health Nursing

Brunel University
Glasgow Caledonian University
Leeds Beckett University
London Metropolitan University
London South Bank University
Robert Gordon University
Teesside University
University of Bolton
University of Bristol
University of Chester
University of Cumbria/
University of Lancaster

University of Hull
University of Plymouth
University of Sheffield
University of Surrey
University of Ulster
University of Western Scotland

University of Wolverhampton

BSc (Hons)/PG dip.
BSc (Hons)/BSc/PG dip.
MSc/BSc (Hons)/PG dip.
BSc (Hons)/PG dip.
BSc (Hons)
BA
BSc (Hons)
BSc (Hons)/PG dip.
BSc/PG dip.
MSc/BSc /PG dip.

BSc (Hons)/PG dip./
Grad Cert.
BSc (Hons)
BSc (Hons)
B MedSci.
BSc
BSc (Hons)/PG dip.
BSc (Hons)
Level 9 SCQF
MSc/BSc (Hons)/PG dip.

Note: Graduates from the above SCPHN and SPQ courses may have their qualifications recorded on Part 3 of the NMC Register
Thanks to **Anne Harris**, **Lynda Bruce** and **Kira Milne**, OH nurse educators, for their valuable input.



*Faculty of Occupational Health Nursing. Promoting excellence in the education,
research and evidence-based practice of all occupational health nurses.*