

Specialist Community Public Health Nurses (including health visitors and school nurses), and their Agenda for Change banding –

An update:



Background

In 2022 the Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC) produced new standards for post-registration programmesⁱ. These are the programmes that lead to specialist community public health nurse (SCPHN) qualifications and to community nursing specialist practice qualifications (SPQ).

One of the changes included was the requirement that 'approved education institutions, together with practice learning partners, must: (5.1) ensure that the minimum academic level for SCPHN and community nursing SPQ is at a postgraduate masters' level'. These came into effect on 1 September 2022.

This change to the minimum educational requirement to be able to qualify, register and practise as a SCPHN in the United Kingdom has a fundamental impact on the Agenda for Change (AFC) banding that must be applied to the SCPHN role.

A brief explanation on the AFC impacts

There are three routes to arriving at a banding outcome using the AFC equal pay scheme:

- Matching to a national profile;
- local evaluation via Job Analysis Questionnaire (JAQ); and
- matching/evaluating new jobs.

The AFC scheme comprises 16 different factors which through matching/evaluation are awarded different levels and scores. This score is then added together to arrive at the final band outcome. Whilst all factors are important, due to the changes made by the NMC highlighted above, this issue focuses on factor 2, 'knowledge, training and experience' (KTE).

Previously SCPHN's may have been awarded level 6 in factor 2 in recognition of the minimum educational qualification that was required before September 2022. With the minimum academic level for SCPHN now being required to be at postgraduate masters' level, it is impossible for factor 2 to be scored less than level 7.

Archival of two national profiles

Due to this change, the Job Evaluation Group, a sub-group of the NHS Staff Council, recommended that two of the four health visitor national profiles should be archivedⁱⁱ. This was because those two profiles included the requirement that factor 2 must be assessed at level 6, and this was no longer possible following the NMC change. These profiles were subsequently archived on 29 July 2025.

“...it is essential that jobs are correctly evaluated or matched under this factor [2] heading. Getting the level of KTE right helps ensure fairness and consistency and reduces equal pay risk.”
JEG Job evaluation guidance: practical guidance for matching and evaluation panelsⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ <https://www.nmc.org.uk/standards/standards-for-post-registration/standards-for-post-registration-programmes/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.nhsemployers.org/news/archived-job-profiles-health-visiting-roles>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.nhsemployers.org/publications/job-evaluation-guidance>

^{iv} <https://www.nhsemployers.org/publications/nhs-job-evaluation-handbook>

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Our initial advice to members

We encourage all SCPHN health visitor members in England, Northern Ireland and Wales and all SCPHN school nurse members across the UK to review their job evaluation outcomes, including asking for the breakdown of which level was awarded for each of the 16 AfC factors and, if matched to a national profile, which profile it was matched to and a copy of the full outcome. Your line manager and/or human resources department should be able to supply you with this information.

Whilst individuals can do this, we would encourage members to come together locally to discuss this and make sure they include their local Unite workplace representative and/or their Unite regional officer. If they are unaware of who this is, they can contact their local Unite office for the details. Members can also contact the Unite health sector nationally on healthsector@unitetheunion.org.

FAQs

I completed my SCPHN university qualification before the most recent update to the Standards for post-registration programmes and therefore did not complete studies at a master's level, does this change therefore apply to me?

Yes. The NHS job evaluation handbook (section 5.2) states: "Where the training, qualifications and/or experience requirements for a job have changed over time, the current requirements should be taken as the necessary standard to be achieved, as it is the work carried out which is evaluated. Existing job holders with the previously required qualifications should be deemed to have achieved the current qualification level through on-the-job learning and experience."

I completed a PG Dip rather than a masters. Does that mean I cannot ask for a re-evaluation?

No. The NMC has made it clear that the minimum academic qualification to be able to qualify and register as a SCPHN is at post graduate master's level.

Further, in the factor definitions and factor levels guidance in the NHS Job Evaluation Handbook^{iv}, it points people to further JEG advice on how to consider what experience is equivalent to a qualification. In this guidance it recommends panellists to consider qualifications frameworks and descriptors. In each of the 4 frameworks (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) it makes clear that PGDip's are equivalent to master's degrees.

The archived national profiles were health visitor profiles. Does this mean this information is not relevant to school nurses?

Whilst the archival of the national profiles by JEG only relates to two of the four national health visitor profiles, the reason for that was predicated on the change made by the NMC when they updated their Standards for post-registration programmes. This update equally applied to our SCPHN school nurse members. Therefore, SCPHN school nurses should follow the guidance that we are offering here as equally as our health visitor members.

My manager/employer is not willing to agree that my job has changed, what should I do next?

Whilst the NHS Job evaluation handbook states that there needs to be agreement that the demands for the job have changed, in situations where a manager/employer is refusing to recognise this, members will need to consider how this can be challenged locally. There are several routes to do this, and we would encourage members to discuss these with their local Unite workplace representatives.

My manager/employer says they don't need to respond to this change as they don't recognise the authority of the organisations making the change?

The changes came about by decisions taken by the Nursing & Midwifery Council and the NHS Staff Council.

My employer has warned me that if I try to get paid the correct rate for the job that I'm doing it will lead to cuts in the service that are commissioned. What should I do?

Agenda for Change was specifically brought in to ensure that employees who work in the NHS get equal pay for work of equal value for the roles that they perform. All staff covered by the agreement deserve equal access to a fair process and to argue against this not only undermines this but opens employing organisations to claims against them that could potentially have much greater financial implications.

Alongside the efforts that members will be making locally, Unite will continue to advocate for fair funding for public health services nationally.

I do not work for an NHS employer, does this change apply to me?

This information relates to those employees who are covered by the Agenda for Change agreement in their contract of employment. If members have different terms and conditions (for example if they work in a local authority, third sector or private employer with different terms and conditions) it is unlikely that this information is directly relevant. That isn't to say that members shouldn't think about whether the updated standards from the NMC can be used to argue for an improvement to members pay. We encourage members in this situation to get together and discuss potential next steps that can be taken.

If (SCPHN) health visitors and school nurses get re-evaluated to band 7 following this change, does this mean that current band 7 staff working in health visiting/school nursing should be re-evaluated to band 8a?

This information is focused on those members who have the SCPHN qualification and currently have a below level 7 outcome on their job evaluation outcome in factor 2. This may include health visitors or school nurses that either matched to the archived health visitor team manager (band 7) or 'senior/specialist/lead' SCPHNs that had their role locally evaluated or matched to a profile outside of the health visitor suite. These individuals should also consider whether this could lead to them asking for a re-evaluation of their current roles.

For any members that currently score level 7 (or above) on factor 2, a different conversation is needed, which we would like to have with members as well.

There are no local Unite workplace representatives in my employer, what should I do?

It is important that we have representatives for Unite in your workplace. If there isn't a rep currently in place, come together as a group of members and elect at least one, but preferably at least two, representatives.

How do I get more information or support?

Members should talk to their local Unite workplace representatives who in turn should speak to their Unite regional officer. They will be able to access further support from officials in the national health sector.

Summary

The change to the educational level of the SCPHN qualification is an important change with implications for all registrants with the SCPHN qualification. We believe that there is now a case that all jobs that require a SCPHN qualification will be matched to at least a band 7 profile.

To progress this issue we are suggesting members do the following:

- 1. Call a meeting of SCPHN colleagues. Invite a Unite representative or regional officer to give an overview of the situation.**
- 2. Request the matching outcome for your current role.**
- 3. Discuss this outcome and what you currently do with your Unite rep or regional officer. Write the request for a formal rematching of your role.**



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