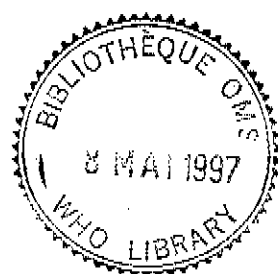




WHO

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE



SCHERFIGSVEJ 8
DK-2100 COPENHAGEN Ø
DENMARK

TEL.: (45) 39 17 17 17
TELEFAX: (45) 39 17 18 18
TELEX: 15348 AND 12000

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10336
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*GUIDELINES FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT OF
EDUCATIONAL AND
TRAINING CURRICULA
FOR ENVIRONMENTAL
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS*

Report on a WHO Working Group

Rennes, France
19-21 June 1996

1997

EUR/HFA target 18

TARGET 18

POLICY ON ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

By the year 2000, all Member States should have developed, and be implementing, policies on the environment and health that ensure ecologically sustainable development, effective prevention and control of environmental health risks and equitable access to healthy environments.

ABSTRACT

A WHO working group, comprising experts in environmental health education, met to review a guidance document on the development of educational and training curricula for environmental health professionals. The document is the culmination of extensive consultation with WHO Member States on the appropriate curricula for training such professionals in the European Region. The working group considered the scope and purpose of the document, and reviewed drafts of the chapters dealing with the basic concepts of environmental health, learning objectives, teaching methods, course evaluation and model curricula for courses on environmental health. The group's conclusions on these issues will be taken into consideration in preparing further drafts of the guidance document. In addition, the group suggested appropriate procedures for further review of the document prior to its submission for final approval at a consultative meeting of Member States.

Keywords

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
HEALTH PERSONNEL – education
TEACHING MATERIALS
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Scope and Purpose

One of the priority actions endorsed by the Second European Conference on Environment and Health, held in Helsinki from 20 to 22 June 1994, is strengthening the professional capacities of environmental health services in the Member States to deal effectively with environmental health hazards. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is working closely with Member States to assist them in developing their capacities in environmental health management. Following the Consultation on Environmental Health Services meeting in Vilnius (28–30 November 1994), the Member States adopted a proposal to implement a project dealing specifically with staffing, professional education and training in environmental health services.

Following a working group meeting to discuss and explore the options available for developing the environmental health staffing, professional education and training project, a methodology for proceeding with the project was identified. This involved building up a comprehensive picture of the fundamental tasks of environmental health services and from this identifying the specific competences required to fulfil these tasks. Working from this base, further work on the development of appropriate training curricula was addressed by the project.

Staff and consultants from the Environmental Health Planning/Ecology unit carried out missions in a number of Member States during the previous year. These missions included investigations of the scope of work carried out by environmental health services in these countries, as well as the skills and competences required to carry out these duties. A wide range of educational institutions involved in the training of professionals engaged in environmental health-related disciplines have also been consulted.

The result of this work is the development of a guidance document on the staffing of environmental health services in the European Region, and a companion document on guidelines for the development of educational and training curricula for environmental health professionals.

The purpose of this Meeting was to:

- review drafts of the major sections of the guidance document on guidelines for the development of educational and training curricula for environmental health professionals;
- approve the methodology for completing the initial draft of document; and
- agree on a review process for the final document to be submitted for adoption by the Member States.

Matters for discussion

The participants were requested to deliberate on the following issues during the course of the Meeting:

1. to decide if the scope and purpose of the document is clearly explained;
2. to ensure that the layout of the document is sufficiently clear and that all relevant issues are dealt with in the list of contents;
3. to review Chapters 1–5 of the document and suggest necessary amendments; and
4. to make recommendations on the review process for this document and to identify possible reviewers.

Findings of the Meeting

1. Scope and purpose of the guidance document

A primary concern raised was the need to clearly identify the target audience for such a document. In this regard participants considered the clear identification of environmental health services and environmental health professionals to be vital. In particular they considered the role of both the private and public sectors. The consensus was that while the public sector environmental health services were a primary target audience for this document, the increasingly important role and influence of the private sector in environmental health in many Member States would have to be addressed.

The Meeting stressed the need to make this document relevant to the development of national environmental health policy. In this regard the document had to promote the development of relevant curricula that would help Member States realize the goals set down in their national environmental health action plans. This was seen as a crucial element in the successful follow-up to the Helsinki Process.

2. Document layout and content

The Meeting felt that although the overall layout of the document was satisfactory, some important topics appeared to have been omitted, particularly a basic principle of environmental health, namely the precautionary principle. A number of disparate environmental health activities and tasks would be better grouped under the title of environmental health promotion rather than being dealt with as separate areas of environmental health services.

As this document will be one of a series of documents dealing with environmental health services, consistency with other documents will be essential. Some documents will deal with specific issues in much greater detail than could be achieved in this document.

3. Review of Chapters 1–5 of the document

Participants made a wide range of amendments to the final draft of the document. The following is a very brief synopsis of these.

Chapter 1 – Principles and Concepts

- The basic principle of environmental health services must be revised in order to include the precautionary principle and also to emphasize the central role of the health for all strategy in the document.
- The principles as discussed in this Chapter must take account of the different political situation in Member States, and cannot therefore be prescriptive as to how these principles are to be implemented.
- The possible career paths for environmental health professionals and the consequences for training needs to be revised, and the findings of the meeting on this issue will be incorporated into the final document.
- Academic freedom must be balanced against national needs in terms of addressing learning objectives in environmental health curricula.

Chapter 2 – Learning objectives

- The identification of knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for environmental health professionals was discussed at length, and an alternative method for presenting this section of the Chapter was agreed.
- Similarly, a revision of the various activities carried out by environmental health services was agreed, with environmental health promotion being accorded a more important role.
- The importance of the energy sector within the core areas of concern for environmental health services had to be highlighted.

Chapter 3 – Methods

- The importance of educational components such as libraries, documentation centres, and links with industry and professional groups needs to be highlighted.
- The possibilities for teaching methods such as peer training, tutorials and distance learning need to be explored further.
- The identification of the range of methods most appropriate for teaching particular skills would be very helpful.

Chapter 4 – Evaluation

- The importance of quality control of courses (including accreditation schemes) was discussed at length, and the main conclusions will be incorporated into the final document.
- The evaluation of teachers requires careful consideration and must be based on fairness and transparency.
- The potential role of students in the evaluation process and the balance between students' rights and responsibilities were discussed.

Chapter 5 – Model curricula

- The principle of incorporating "ladders of opportunity" between the various curricula was vigorously endorsed.
- A wide range of editorial changes were made regarding specific components for incorporation into the final document.
- The categorization of the modules into basic, holistic, applied, integrating, and optional was adopted by the meeting.
- The setting of baseline qualifications and the need for transitional courses was discussed at length, and the conclusions of the meeting in this regard will also be reflected in the final document.

4. Review process for the document

A list of 12 possible reviewers was drawn up to review the document. It was intended to have the next draft available for reviewers by the end of September 1996, with the possibility of organizing a consultative meeting for Member States to adopt the final document in November or December 1996.

Annex 1

PARTICIPANTS

TEMPORARY ADVISERS

Mr Jean-Pierre Béchac

Ecole nationale de santé publique, Rennes, France

Dr Bo Hellberg

Department of Environmental Health, Umeå University, Sweden

Mr Jean-Luc Potelon

Ingénieur sanitaire régional des affaires sanitaires et sociales, Ecole nationale de santé publique,
Rennes, France

Dr Marlene Proctor

School of Food Science and Environmental Health, Dublin Institute of Technology, Dublin, Ireland

Dr Yuri Prokopenko

Chief of Laboratory for Medico-Ecological Studies, National Research Centre for Preventive
Medicine, Russian Federation

Mr Paul Robinson

Education Officer, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, London, United Kingdom

Dr Romuald Sabaliauskas

Director General, State Public Health Centre, Lithuanian Ministry of Health, Vilnius, Lithuania

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Mr Xavier Bonnefoy

Regional Adviser, Environmental Health Planning/Ecology

Mr Martin Fitzpatrick

Short-Term Professional, Environmental Health Planning/Ecology