

Professional Development Framework

Pulmonary Rehabilitation



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A professional development framework for pulmonary rehabilitation

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Declarations of interest

Declarations of interest were completed in line with BTS Policy and are available upon request from BTS Head Office.

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List of abbreviations

AHCS – Academy for Healthcare Science

BTS – British Thoracic Society

GIRFT – Getting It Right First Time

HCPC – Health and Care Professions Council

MCID – Minimal Clinically Important Difference

MDT - Multi-disciplinary team

MRC – Medical Research Council

NMC – Nursing and Midwifery Council

PR – Pulmonary rehabilitation

NRAP – National Respiratory Audit Programme

WSDC – Workforce and Service Development Committee

Introduction

There is a strong evidence-base demonstrating the benefits of pulmonary rehabilitation (PR). This was recognised in the NHS Long Term Plan in 2019 to expand PR services and increase access to the benefits of PR for a wider group of patients¹. In addition, the Royal College of Physicians National Respiratory Audit Programme (NRAP) organisation audit in 2024 recommended that PR services should be supported to ensure that all patients with chronic respiratory disease have timely access to a quality assured PR by 2026². However, a shortfall in PR capacity already exists, with long waiting times for programmes despite only a third of eligible patients being referred.

The 2022 British Thoracic Society (BTS) document “A respiratory workforce for the future” estimated that to deliver the NHS Long Term Plan ambition, at least 1000 PR physiotherapy posts were needed - made up of 600 registered physiotherapy posts and 400 non-registered posts³. This is in addition to existing workforce vacancies, with the Respiratory GIRFT report in 2000 highlighting the existence of 1879 physiotherapy vacancies in England alone⁴. This lack of an available skilled workforce is hindering the expansion of PR services. NHS England also acknowledged this in its recent “Guidance for growing and developing the pulmonary rehabilitation multidisciplinary team”⁵.

PR services are made up of a multidisciplinary workforce. This includes both registered and non-registered clinical staff whose skills have a vital role in the delivery of PR. Currently, there is no recognised career framework for PR to support the professional development of staff and the recruitment and retention of aspiring practitioners.

The aim of this document is to create a career framework to highlight the specific skill set that is required by staff working in PR to enable the delivery of high-quality services. By demonstrating the continuum of development within specialist roles and a potential career pathway for staff in PR, it can support the growth of a skilled and sustainable PR workforce across the four nations.

It is also important to ensure that quality assured PR is delivered by an appropriately skilled and competent workforce and that there are clear lines of responsibility⁶. The service should be led by a registered healthcare professional with cardio-respiratory and pulmonary rehabilitation expertise⁷.

The career framework aligns to Agenda for Change pay bands to ensure that the expertise and experience of PR practitioners is recognised, acknowledged and reflected in job descriptions and banding of positions. Guidance on suitable qualifications/registration and examples of professionals that may be considered for roles has been provided and are for guidance only. The suggested qualifications are not mandatory but help identify those who have training in relevant health conditions and areas that may be suitable for that role. Organisations may have their own guidance on necessary qualifications and experience for roles.

The framework reflects the four pillars of practice for all health professionals:

- Clinical practice
- Leadership and Management
- Research
- Education

We envisage that the career framework will be used by staff in PR to understand the knowledge and skills required for their role, and their role within the wider team. It will help identify any gaps in core skills, so that appropriate learning and development can be accessed, and high-quality PR delivered. Individuals should work within their scope of practice, and the framework may support in determining what activities this may include.

Organisations may use the framework to help inform recruitment processes and service planning. We hope that the framework also provides a structure by which organisations may further support staff to develop in their careers, enabling the growth, recruitment and retention of a skilled and experienced PR workforce.

Method of production

In May 2020 the British Thoracic Society (BTS) published a professional development framework for adult respiratory nurses⁸. A document for nurses working in paediatric respiratory medicine was added in May 2021⁹. This document builds on this suite of resources.

The BTS Workforce and Service Development Committee (WSDC) approved the development of this document, and a Task and Finish Group was established, which met for the first time in January 2024.

How to use this document

This document provides a potential career pathway for PR Practitioners and establishes the core levels of knowledge and skills expected in practice. We appreciate that some posts will be aligned to Agenda for Change, while others will be non-NHS funded posts. In addition, in some services, such as integrated care, delivery of PR may be a component of a wider role and, therefore the Agenda for Change band will reflect the skills required of that specific role rather than those of a PR skillset alone. It is also recognised that some individuals may already possess skills necessary for a higher band as part of their particular role requirement or for example, in anticipation of seeking employment at the next grade.

We have used the term practitioner within the framework to remove any reference or inference to professional background. Broadly the titles associated with each Agenda for Change band are:

- Band 3 and 4 - Pulmonary Rehabilitation Assistant Practitioner
- Band 5 - Pulmonary Rehabilitation Practitioner
- Band 6 - Specialist Pulmonary Rehabilitation Practitioner
- Band 7 - Highly Specialised Pulmonary Rehabilitation Practitioner
- Band 8a – Clinical/Operational Lead in Pulmonary Rehabilitation

We accept that people may have professional qualifications that they maintain and may choose to use this within their title e.g. Specialist pulmonary rehabilitation clinical exercise physiologist, Specialist pulmonary rehabilitation physiotherapist. The service lead should be a registered healthcare professional, who has a clinical as well as operational background in PR⁷.

It is important to note that this is not a competency document. While this document can aid personal development, an individual's competencies, and reassessment of these competencies, should be determined and reviewed as part of a standard annual appraisal process.

The professional development framework can be used:

- To identify the knowledge and skills required for individuals applying for/ or in post
- To articulate the skillset and qualifications required for recruitment
- To support the training and development of those pursuing a career in PR
- To support revalidation in registered health care professionals
- To inform service planning (safe and effective staffing levels) and expansion of services

Supporting evidence

Evidence to support career progression may vary but could include the following and should be reviewed during the annual appraisal:

- Evidence of ongoing portfolio of competence, reflective diary, peer accreditation/review.
- Directly observed practice.
- Performance review including 360-degree feedback.
- Evidence of ongoing continued professional development by reflections and certificates.
- Audit / Quality Improvement / research completed.
- Record of publication, posters, presentations.

- Production of protocols, business plans, policies, practise innovation and needs analysis.
- Participation in committees and steering groups.
- Teaching including:
 - Teaching programmes
 - Mentorship programmes
 - Involvement with Higher Education Institutions
 - Organising meetings
 - Study days e.g. BTS Fundamentals /Advanced PR courses
 - Conferences

Review

As this is a new document, it will be reviewed by members of the BTS WSDC, two years after publication.

References

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2. Royal College of Physicians National Respiratory Audit Programme (NRAP) organisational audit 2022-24.
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<https://www.prsas.org/standards>
7. Quality Standard for Pulmonary Rehabilitation. British Thoracic Society Quality Standard. (In press)
8. A professional development framework for adult respiratory nursing. British Thoracic Society Reports, Vol 11, Issue 1, 2020
9. A professional development framework for paediatric respiratory nursing. British Thoracic Society Reports Vol 12, Issue 2, May 2021

	Core Clinical Skills	Knowledge/ Training & Experience	Leadership and management	Research	Qualifications
Pulmonary Rehabilitation Assistant Practitioner (Band 3)	<p>Demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good communication skills. • clear and accurate recording keeping. • clear instruction and demonstration of equipment to support safe exercise. <p>Assists with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the accurate recording of assessments. • conducting objective assessments, (exercise and muscle strength testing) under guidance/supervision. • the delivery of warm up and cool down exercises. • the delivery of PR classes under supervision. • supporting service users to complete health status tools including calculating and recording scores. <p>Ensures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all necessary equipment is available, set up correctly and maintained. • completion of delegated administrative duties. 	<p>Is aware of and understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • basic anatomy and physiology of the respiratory system. • common respiratory diseases and their risk factors. <p>Is aware of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the referral criteria for PR, inclusion and exclusion criteria and its components. • the physiological response to exercise, including contraindications. • how to complete referrals following instruction to other agencies under guidance/supervision. <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what PR is and is able to explain this. • the beneficial effects of supervised exercise, including after recent exacerbation. • the potential risks in the environment in which PR will take place. Takes steps to minimise these and escalate where needed. 	<p>Demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an understanding of their own role within the wider MDT and works collaboratively. <p>With assistance is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • able to manage a delegated workload, time and resources. • able to regularly review practice to improve personal performance. 	<p>Is aware of the value of research, audit and quality improvement.</p>	<p>Level 3 Qualification in Exercise Referral or equivalent (Long term conditions).</p> <p>NVQ3 or equivalent</p> <p>National Care Certificate.</p>
Pulmonary Rehabilitation Assistant Practitioner (Band 4)	<p>Demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the ability to adapt their communication approach to explain PR and the assessment process. • the ability to record assessments, recognise abnormal values and escalate where necessary. • direct support to service users to complete validated health status tools, including calculating and recording scores. • use of screening tools for psychological and nutritional status and able to assess smoking status. Is aware of the criteria 	<p>Is aware of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the importance of PR in management of respiratory disease. • standardised guidelines for performing objective measurements. • the importance and significance of validated objective measures used in an assessment. <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the physiological response to exercise (normal and abnormal), including contraindications to exercise. • the principles of exercise prescription, and progression. 	<p>Demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they can work independently within their scope of practice to complete routine elements of delegated tasks within established protocol and where they have demonstrated competence. 	<p>Understands the value of research, audit and quality improvement.</p> <p>With assistance can apply evidence to inform practice.</p>	<p>Level 4 Exercise Qualification in Pulmonary Rehabilitation.</p>

	Core Clinical Skills	Knowledge/ Training & Experience	Leadership and management	Research	Qualifications
	<p>for onward referral to appropriate services.</p> <p>Conducts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> objective assessments i.e. Walking tests and muscle strength testing and other exercise testing with supervision. warm up and cool down exercises and adapts them where necessary for individuals. <p>Assists with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the delivery of PR classes under supervision, including motivating and encouraging services users. the review and adaptation of exercise prescription, progressing or regressing the prescription informed by objective physiological measures and in line with departmental protocols. supporting exercising patients with education on pacing and breathlessness management strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the referral criteria for PR, including inclusion and exclusion criteria. local protocols for obtaining assistance when faced with an unwell patient. 			
Pulmonary Rehabilitation Practitioner (Band 5)	<p>Demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the ability to adapt communication approach to explain PR and the assessment process, including supporting the identification of goals and exploring barriers. the ability to independently conduct routine subjective assessment to ascertain any relevant medical history, current medications and assess implications for exercise. how to ascertain opportunities to optimise treatment and make any necessary onward referrals. 	<p>Is aware of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> published guidelines and standardised protocols in PR. the MCID scores for objective measures used in an assessment. the role of oxygen therapy during exercise and titration of oxygen flow. <p>Understands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the purpose of the PR assessment including identification of the individual's needs, assessment of safety, to obtain baseline outcome measures and the development of an individualised exercise plan. 	<p>Demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> they can regularly review practice to improve personal performance and articulate own development needs. able to provide support and supervision to students/those on clinical placement within scope of practice. 	<p>Can assist with research, clinical audit and quality improvement.</p> <p>Can assist with applying and communicating evidence to inform practice with guidance.</p>	<p>Registered healthcare professional (NMC, HCPC).</p> <p>Registered exercise professional (AHCS).</p>

	Core Clinical Skills	Knowledge/ Training & Experience	Leadership and management	Research	Qualifications
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the ability to independently conduct an objective assessment including assessment of health status, educational needs, muscle strength and exercise capacity at the beginning and on completion of PR within their scope of practice/competence. delivering a PR class under supervision or assisting in delivering a PR class. developing and prescribing an individualised exercise training programme appropriate to an individual's needs and goals, with supervision. reviewing and adapting exercise prescription, progressing or regressing the prescription informed by objective physiological measures and in line with departmental protocols. delivering support and education on exercise to patients in line with national recommendations, including unsupervised home programmes, and signposting to useful resources. <p>Assists in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the planning, preparing and evaluation of educational sessions and materials. the rapid assessment of an unwell individual and provides appropriate management within own scope of practice and/or summoning assistance in an emergency. 	<p>Demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in-depth knowledge of relevant anatomy, physiology and of chronic respiratory diseases and applies this to their management. knowledge of the basis of exercise training and physiological mechanisms of exercise intolerance in patients with chronic respiratory disease. understanding of the pharmacological management of patients with chronic respiratory disease, including when to signpost for further respiratory specialist review as per local guidance. 	<p>With assistance is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> able to take responsibility for own work and others they are supervising. 		
Specialist Pulmonary Rehabilitation	<p>Demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> assessing readiness, confidence, and motivation to participate in PR. Provides support and responds to concerns. 	<p>Demonstrates knowledge of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> detailed anatomy and physiology relevant to practice. 	<p>Demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> they are able to work independently and 	Demonstrates participation in research, audit and	Registered healthcare

	Core Clinical Skills	Knowledge/ Training & Experience	Leadership and management	Research	Qualifications
Practitioner (Band 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ability to independently conduct a subjective assessment, including in complex patients with multimorbidity. independent development and prescription of an individualised exercise training programme appropriate to an individual's needs and goals and ensures adaptations for risk and comorbidities are considered, and that the prescription is progressed/regressed as necessary. ability to administer and titrate oxygen. delivers PR classes independently, with support from other staff. delivering and facilitating group education sessions within the PR programme. providing informal support and counselling to patients with regard to their health including support with self-management. conducting a rapid assessment of an unwell individual and provides appropriate management within own scope of practice and/or summoning assistance in an emergency. <p>Leads on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> conducting an objective assessment including assessment of health status, educational needs, muscle strength and exercise capacity at the beginning and on completion of PR. Is able to adapt the assessment in complex patients with multiple comorbidities. delivering PR classes, and managing team members to ensure safe and effective class management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the diagnostic tests used in the assessment of respiratory disease. disease management (non-pharmacological and pharmacological) including when to refer patients for further specialist respiratory review/MDT. national and local PR standards, policies, and guidelines and applies them to practice. risks of community vs hospital settings. using behavioural change strategies and motivational interviewing techniques. <p>Understands the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MCID scores for objective measures used in an assessment and is able to interpret these in the context of the individual patient. principles of individually tailored exercise prescription including exercise frequency, duration, intensity, modality (aerobic and resistance) and applies them to practice. 	<p>contribute to the wider MDT, provide specialist input where necessary and co-ordinate patient care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> able to supervise students/those on clinical placements. supervision of PR staff below band 6. <p>With assistance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> develops leadership skills or initiatives to bring about change in response to needs of the service and its users. 	<p>quality improvement.</p> <p>Demonstrates ability to apply and communicate evidence to inform practice with guidance.</p>	<p>professional (NMC, HCPC).</p> <p>Registered exercise professional (AHCS).</p>

	Core Clinical Skills	Knowledge/ Training & Experience	Leadership and management	Research	Qualifications
	<p>Assists in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> planning, preparing and evaluation of educational sessions and materials according to local need/underlying disease. 				
<p>Highly Specialised Pulmonary Rehabilitation Practitioner (Band 7)</p>	<p>Demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> using advanced communication skills with services users, the wider team and external stakeholders. review of referral documentation prior to assessment and assesses eligibility for PR. providing counselling to patients with regard to their health including support with self-management. <p>Leads on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> conducting a subjective and objective assessment including assessment of health status, educational needs, muscle strength and exercise capacity using validated measures at the beginning and on completion of explain PR, adapting the assessment in complex patients with multiple comorbidities and needs. the prescription of an individualised exercise training (aerobic and resistance) programme appropriate to an individual's needs and goals. Ensures adaptations for risk, complex needs and comorbidities are considered, and that the prescription is progressed/regressed as necessary. delivering PR class independently and supervising other staff to ensure safe and effective class management. the planning, preparation and evaluation of educational sessions and 	<p>Demonstrates specialist knowledge of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> disease management (non-pharmacological and pharmacological) including common comorbidities and their impact on their ability to exercise. making onward referrals for further specialist respiratory review / MDTs. an understanding of emerging/alternative models of PR and their evidence base. national and local PR standards, policies, and guidelines and applies them to practice. using behavioural change strategies and motivational interviewing techniques. discussing advanced care planning and palliative care. 	<p>Demonstrates able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> lead and co-ordinate an MDT. work autonomously, support more junior staff with decision making and take responsibility for others. Deliver training, mentorship, timely recording of competencies and appraisals of staff, students and those on clinical placements. Coordinate educational supervision of staff, students and those on clinical placements. Supervision of all other staff within a PR team. involvement with data collection, and contributes to data interpretation. 	<p>Assists in presenting work at conferences and contributing to publications in peer reviewed journals.</p>	<p>Registered healthcare professional (NMC, HCPC).</p> <p>Registered exercise professional (AHCS).</p>

	Core Clinical Skills	Knowledge/ Training & Experience	Leadership and management	Research	Qualifications
	<p>materials according to local need /underlying disease (considering appropriate teaching design, health literacy, cultural adaptation, other specific learning needs).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the rapid assessment of an unwell individual and provides appropriate management within own scope of practice and/or summoning assistance in an emergency. 		<p>Assists in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> representing the service externally at local, regional, and national meetings. the development and implementation of operational protocols for service delivery and service assessment. 		
<p>Clinical and operational Lead</p> <p>(Band 8a)</p>	<p>Leads on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> organising the PR service. operational day to day management including responding to unpredictable events. risk assessments and be accountable for health and safety. ensuring annual service evaluation. reviewing outcomes of national audit programmes and making recommendations for service improvements based on their conclusions. <p>Demonstrate and leads on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> good communication with services users, the wider team and external stakeholders. ensuring adequate staffing levels and skill mix to deliver a safe and effective PR service (justify staff/patient ratios 	<p>Demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ability to lead on the provision of advice to others. confidence in working in a rapidly changing environment, and lead on dealing with planned and unplanned events. <p>Leads on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> developing relationships with stakeholders and deliver specialist education to improve both the quantity and quality of referrals to PR. reviewing emerging/alternative models of PR and delivery of evidence-based PR. ensuring inclusive and equitable access to PR. 	<p>Leads on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> co-ordinating an MDT. service participation in national accreditation and audit programmes. training, mentorship, timely recording of competencies and appraisals of staff team and students. the strategic direction of the service and be responsible for the ongoing its development and associated business cases. regular workforce planning including 	<p>Leads on applying and communicating evidence to inform practice.</p> <p>Leads on presenting work at conferences and contribute to publications in peer reviewed journals.</p>	<p>Registered healthcare professional (NMC, HCPC).</p> <p>Registered exercise professional (AHCS).</p>

	Core Clinical Skills	Knowledge/ Training & Experience	Leadership and management	Research	Qualifications
	<p>based on supervision requirements and risk stratification).</p> <p>Demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adequate processes are in place to accurately collect and record service data for benchmarking, provision of local key performance indicators and comprehensive service evaluation. leadership in improving standards of patient care. Ensure consultation with service users when planning and developing the service. Ensure learning from incidents. 		<p>recruitment and selection.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National audit lead for the service. 		