

Environmental health workforce survey report: local authorities in England



April 2021

Foreword

The results of this survey present one of the most comprehensive pictures of environmental health professionals working for local authorities at the present time. This includes the capacities and resources available within teams, the specialisms of environmental health professionals as well as the future outlook for environmental health teams in local government. The survey also captures a glimpse of the key role played by the profession throughout the pandemic.

Whilst I am still new to CIEH, I have already learned a great deal about this crucial profession as well as the key challenges it faces. The results of this survey shed in important light on the barriers and pinch points, which need to be addressed urgently if the profession is to flourish in the future.

Given the relatively high numbers of unfilled posts and use of agency workers to fill gaps in the service, training future recruits should be a key priority to ensure a steady supply of skilled, qualified and experienced practitioners in the future. At the moment, there are not enough students graduating from environmental health degrees to meet demand and not enough local authorities able to take on environmental health trainees and apprentices, in order to help graduates gain the vital practical experience and become fully qualified practitioners.

All key stakeholders have a part to play in supporting environmental health professionals so that they can continue to protect the health and wellbeing of the public. This is why we present recommendations for all stakeholders in this report, including central government, government agencies, universities, local authorities and also to us – the professional membership body.

We will play our part in promoting the value of the profession and environmental health as a career choice to attract the next generation of fresh faces into the fold. We will support employers to take on new apprentices by developing toolkits and resources to be launched later this year. We will focus on the training needs of all environmental health professionals, particularly focussing on advanced skills like leadership.

But we also call on all government departments and agencies, local authorities and universities to take on the findings of this report on board. We need central Government funding to support the next generation of Environmental Health Practitioners up and down the country in order to place this profession on a sustainable footing.

As we emerge from a long pandemic and lockdown, let us look forward to how things could be improved for the professionals who have played a such key role in keeping us all safe during the past year and long before the pandemic arrived.



Dr Phil James
Chief Executive
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

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About the survey

This report brings together the information gathered as part of a workforce survey of local authority environmental health services. Responses were gathered from team managers and heads of environmental health services within English local authorities. Responses were submitted to the survey between November 2020 and February 2021.

177 out of 320 district councils, metropolitan district councils, unitary authorities and London boroughs completed the survey. This represents 55% of these types of local authorities in England. An additional 34 local authorities also submitted partial responses, which were included in the analysis, where data was provided.

We also received a number of responses from port health authorities and county councils. However, this data has not been included in this report as the sample sizes were too small to be able to make accurate estimates and interpretations. We will be analysing and reporting on results from Wales in a separate report in due course. The information from this survey has also been fed into the cross-government review of regulatory services.



Headline findings

- We estimate that, in 2020, there were between 3,240 and 3,360 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) fully qualified Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs) working for local authorities to deliver environmental health services at district or unitary level. Each local authority (LA) employs on average around 10.1 FTE fully qualified EHPs to deliver EH services.
- In total, there are around 7,600-7,870 FTE professionals working to deliver environmental health services across England's local authorities – around 23.7 FTEs per local authority.
- This data suggests that there are more professionals working to deliver environmental health services who are not fully qualified and/or trained in environmental health than there are fully qualified EHPs.
- EHPs tend to work flexibly across many different areas, which is an attribute greatly valued by their employers. Most EHPs in local authorities tend to specialise in food safety (33%), followed by private sector housing (25%) and environmental protection (19%).
- The vast majority – 4 out of 5 local authorities - reported that they use agency staff to deliver environmental health services. We estimate there were around 510 FTE agency staff used across England in 2019/20 – an average of 1.6 FTE per LA for both years.
- 9 out of 10 (87%) local authorities told us that agency staff were used because of shortages in resources or delays in recruitment. By contrast, only 30% used agency staff because of an unprecedented demand for services and 23% due to specialist knowledge not being available in-house.
- 56% of local authorities reported that they had vacancies in their environmental health teams that were left unfilled for 6 months or more. We estimate that there were approximately 375 FTE posts left unfilled in 2019/20 for 6 months or more across England – around 1.2 FTEs per LA. The top reasons for the vacancies point to a lack of available EHPs who are fully qualified and experienced.
- Whilst the biggest proportion of environmental health departments and services seems to be unchanged (45%) during the past 6 years, 31% reported that some services have been stopped, including discretionary activities such as advice and guidance provision to businesses and any non-statutory functions. 11% of local authorities also reported that some services were outsourced, and 21% part-outsourced, in the last 6 years.
- Whilst budgets remained unchanged in around half of all local authorities (51%), more LAs reported decreases (24%) in their budgets than increases (17%) for the last full financial year, suggesting that budgets are continuing to shrink within environmental health departments.
- Nearly a third (31%) of respondents told us that, in their opinion, the delivery of some statutory environmental health duties was at risk, due to resourcing issues in 2019/20. Whilst this is not a majority, it is still a large proportion, given that these are statutory obligations for local authorities.
- Looking ahead to 2021/22, 34% of respondents expect their authority's budget for environmental health services to decrease, whilst 20% expect it to increase and 36% expect it to stay the same.

- Overall, around 8 out of 10 EHPs working for local authorities were redeployed last year in response to the pandemic. The most common activities for EHPs included: enforcing business restrictions (98%), advising businesses on trading safely (97%), developing COVID related policies and procedures (95%), managing local outbreaks (78%), emergency planning (69%) and contact tracing (59%).
- A majority of local authorities are not supporting the training of a new generation of EHPs. In 2019/20, 52% of LAs did not have a single apprentice or trainee.
- In 2019/20, 159 local authorities reported supporting 110 environmental health trainees – a rate of just 0.7 FTE of a post at each local authority on average. More worryingly, 56% of LAs told us they did not have any paid or unpaid trainees in environmental health in either 2018/19 and 2019/20.
- Not having any budget (66%) and not having capacity to mentor (52%) were the primary reasons given for not taking on any trainees. Only 20% said that no trainees were taken because there was no demand from students.
- Whilst the use of EH apprenticeships is increasing, despite the effects of the pandemic this year, the number of LAs using apprenticeships is still in the minority. 122 local authorities did not take on any apprentices in environmental health in either 2019/20 or 2020/21 – 70% of local authorities responding to this question in the survey.
- 52% of LAs said there were barriers to training and development for EHPs in their authority. Barriers cited included lack of capacity to undertake training (58%) and inadequate training budget (57%).



List of recommendations

Central Government

1. Central Government to increase financial support to local authorities in order to maintain resources within LAs for regulatory and public health work, especially following the pandemic.
2. Central Government to introduce a new role of Chief Environmental Health Officer, to work alongside and with the Chief Medical Officer in England to provide coordination and communication between government policy makers and local authorities.
3. Central Government to take forward and deliver on its upcoming recommendations from the cross-government regulatory working groups.
4. Central Government to introduce a local authority ring-fenced fund for environmental health apprentices and graduate trainees to ensure that every local authority can afford to support the salaries of environmental health (EH) trainees or apprentices.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

5. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to make an assessment of the resourcing needs across local authorities' private sector housing function, including to what extent civil penalties are being utilised and how much funding this is bringing in for enforcement teams.
6. MHCLG to set out its future policy on selective licensing schemes and respond to its commissioned review, published in 2018.
7. MHCLG to provide support to CIEH for future recruitment campaigns for environmental health.

Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

8. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to share tools and resources with local authorities.
9. HSE to acknowledge and highlight current resource shortages and the important role that LAs perform to Ministers and officials, making a case for some targeted funding in order to maintain safe levels of resource within local authorities for health and safety regulation.

Food Standards Agency (FSA)

10. FSA to continue to provide funding for training for EHPs engaged in food inspections in line with Code of Practice requirements and training specifically to deal with the impact of Brexit on the food industry and novel foods.

Local authorities

11. Local authorities to support environmental health departments to recruit graduate trainees and apprentices. These roles should not replace any of the existing permanent roles.
12. Local authorities to allocate sufficient funding to environmental health teams in order to maintain safe and effective staffing levels and keep experience and expertise in-house whenever possible.
13. Local authorities to allocate an adequate budget to provide for the continuous training and development of their environmental health teams, to ensure that their employees' skills and knowledge remain fully up to date and CPD requirements can be met.

14. Local authorities to consider introducing staff retention schemes to improve staff morale and provide recognition and opportunities to encourage existing experienced staff to stay in the public sector.

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH)

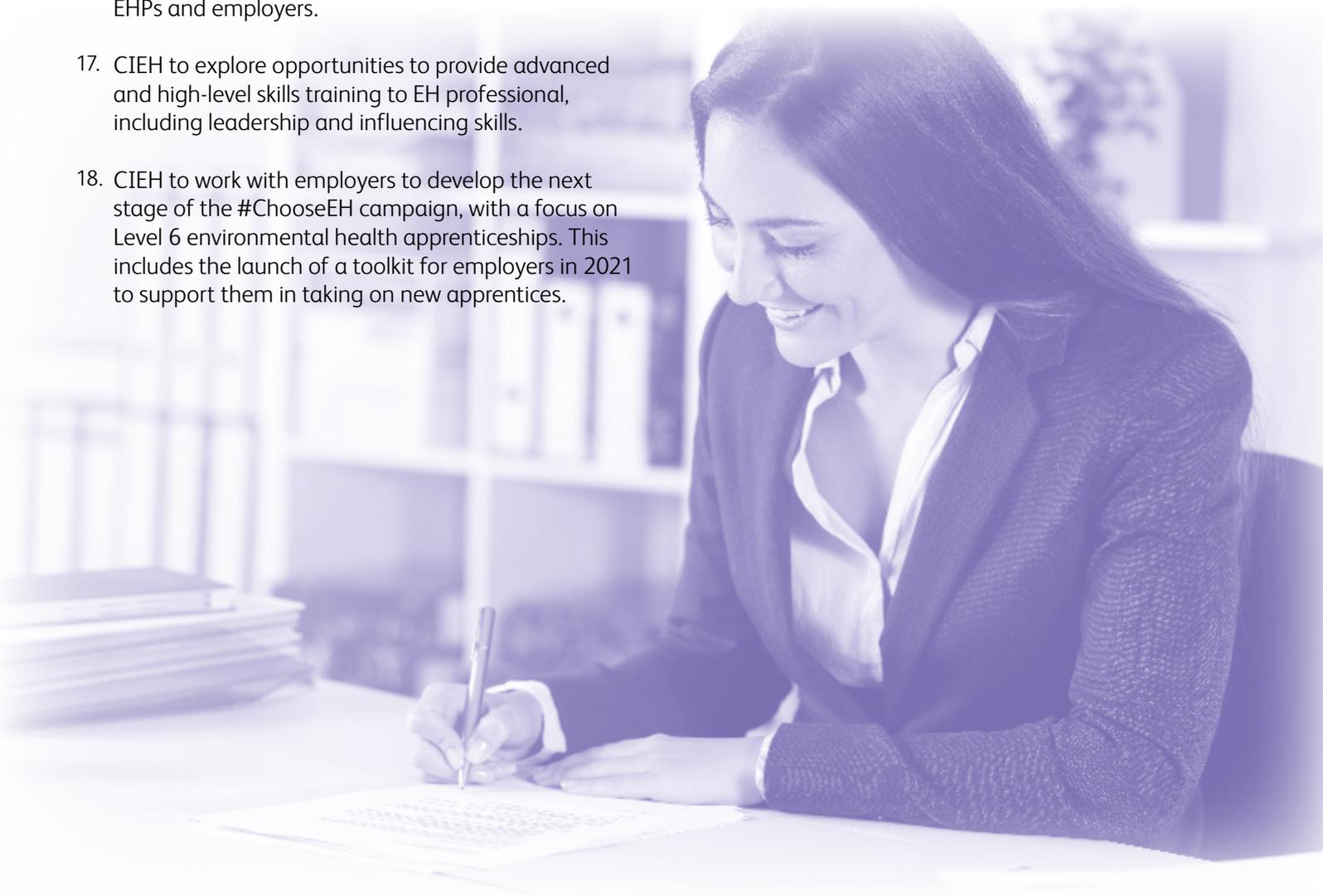
15. CIEH to continue to raise awareness of the profession through careers fairs, provision of clear and accessible information on the CIEH website and its work with the media.
16. CIEH to review the route to qualification and registration to make this more accessible for aspiring EHPs and employers.
17. CIEH to explore opportunities to provide advanced and high-level skills training to EH professional, including leadership and influencing skills.
18. CIEH to work with employers to develop the next stage of the #ChooseEH campaign, with a focus on Level 6 environmental health apprenticeships. This includes the launch of a toolkit for employers in 2021 to support them in taking on new apprentices.

Local Government Association

19. The Local Government Association to work with CIEH to promote the important role and benefit of environmental health and wider regulatory services to local political leaders and portfolio holders.

Universities

20. Universities to promote their environmental health courses to prospective students and resource courses in environmental health adequately, relative to demand.



Current capacity estimates within local authority environmental health teams

Environmental health (EH) professionals work across a very wide range of roles and specialisms. These include food regulation, health and safety at work, public health, private sector housing, environmental protection as well as many other areas. As a result, EH professionals often work across a number of different departments within local authorities. This survey sought to find out more about EH professionals working across the whole local authority so that all environmental health functions would be covered, regardless of the specific department in which these functions sit.

A fully qualified Environmental Health Practitioner (EHP) is someone who has completed a degree in EH and has completed their practical and professional assessment. EH graduates have completed their EH degree but have not yet become a fully qualified EHP by completing their practical and professional assessments. There are also a number of other professionals working within EH departments who may not have an EH qualification but are delivering environmental health services. This could include supporting staff or more specialised professionals who focus on only one area, such as food safety officers, dog wardens, contaminated land officers, licensing officers, as well as many others. However, this survey excludes staff providing administrative support for the team.

We estimate that, in 2020, there were between 3,240 and 3,360 FTE fully qualified EHPs working for local authorities to deliver EH services at district or unitary level.¹ There are a further estimated 170 fully qualified EHPs working in these LAs but not within environmental health roles. This means that around 5% of fully qualified EHPs work in other roles within local authorities. Each local authority employs on average around 10.6 FTE fully qualified EHPs in total and 10.1 FTEs to deliver EH services.

There are around 370 FTE EH graduates across England, who have completed the environmental health degree but are not fully qualified EHPs. That's around 1.1 FTE per local authority.

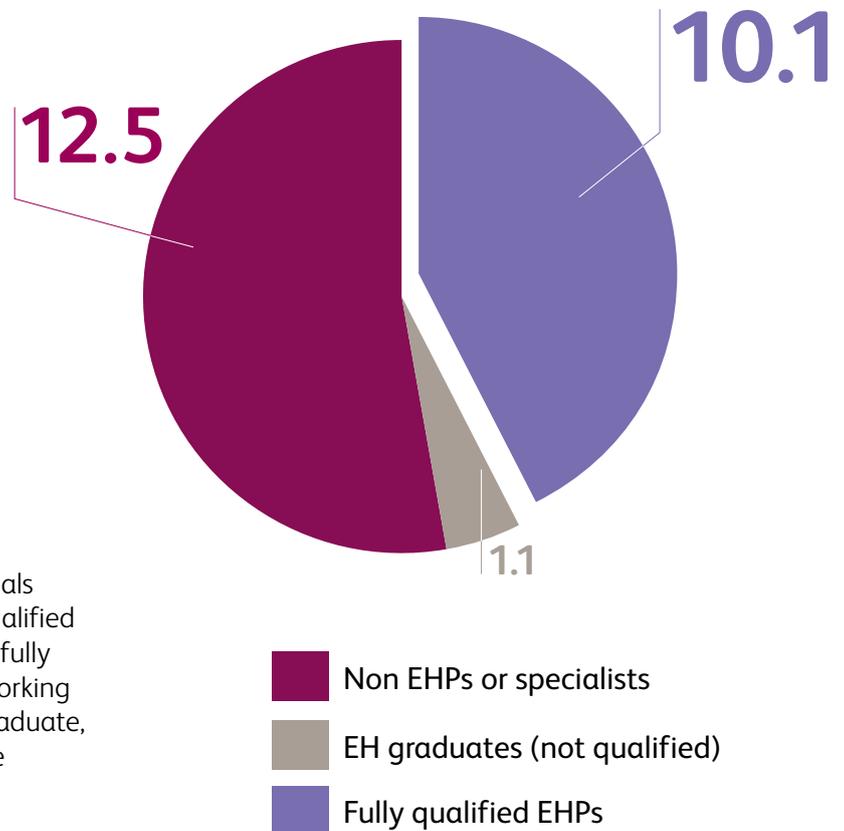
We estimate that there are around 3,990-4,140 FTE professionals, who are not fully qualified EHPs, delivering EH services across England – 12.5 FTEs per local authority.

In total, there are around 7,600-7,870 FTE EH professionals working to deliver environmental health services across England's local authorities, not including any administrative support – around 23.7 FTEs per local authority.

¹ Estimates in this section are made using data from 190 local authorities (district councils, unitary authorities and London boroughs). These local authorities represent 68% of the population in England. The range in some of the estimates in this section come from the difference in the two methods extrapolating the data - by number of local authorities and by the population served by their local authorities.

23.7
FTEs

is the average number of roles delivering EH services for a LA in England



This data suggests that there are more professionals working to deliver EH services who are not fully qualified or trained in environmental health than there are fully qualified EHPs. Around 1 in 10 EH professionals working for local authorities is an environmental health graduate, who could become fully qualified or may be in the process of doing so.

Specialisms of EHPs

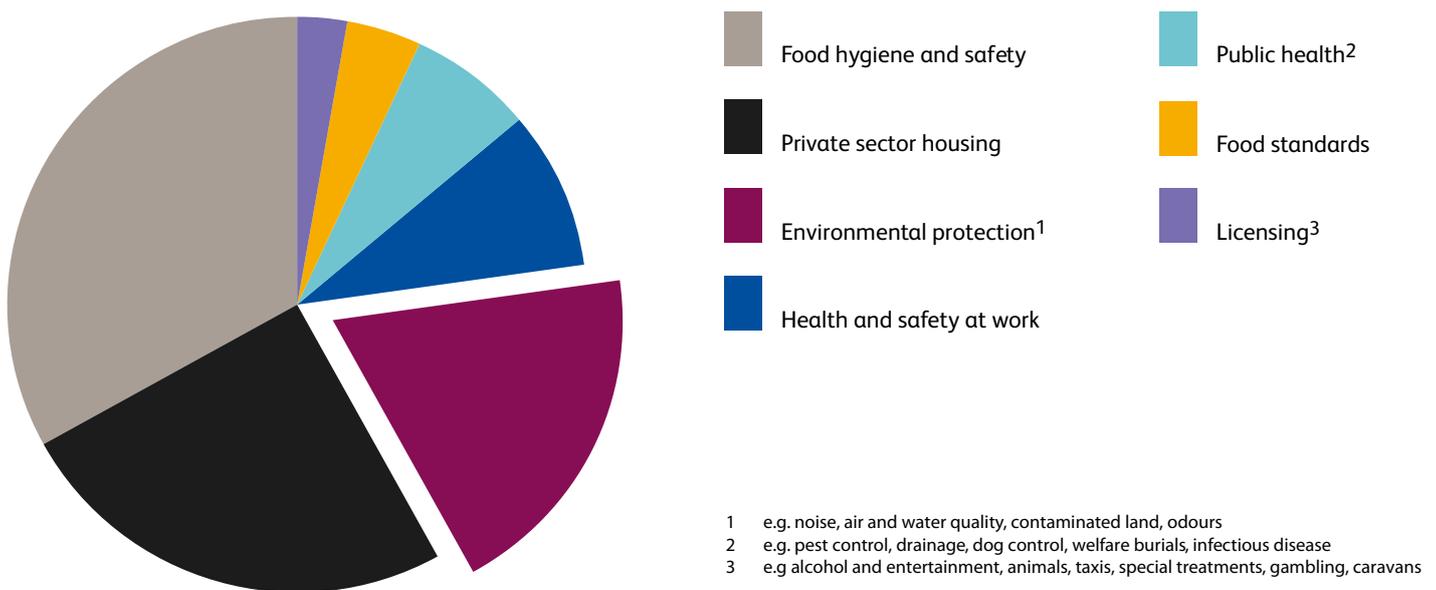
EHPs tend to work flexibly across many different areas. This flexibility is greatly valued by local authorities as pressures and priorities shift across different regulatory areas, such as the work during the recent year of the pandemic.

We asked respondents to our survey to estimate how many full time equivalent EHPs were working on each of the broad specialisms of environmental health in 2019/2020. However, a significant number of responses did not separate out the resources between food hygiene, standards and health and safety at work, due to the fact that the team worked across all of these areas. Similarly, a significant proportion also had reported that their resources were pooled between the environmental protection and public health functions. Other results showed signs of double counting in a similar pattern to the pooled resources described above.

We have therefore removed any conflicting results from our estimates to improve accuracy and were left with around 132 responses accounting for 41% of LAs, where a full break down of resources was provided. The table below uses this data to make the estimates. Most EHPs in local authorities tend to specialise in food safety, followed by private sector housing and environmental protection.

Table 1: Estimates of the split in EHPs across disciplines in England

Specialism	Percentage of the total number of EHPs working in this area	Approximate number of EHPs working in this area (FTEs)
Food hygiene and safety	33%	1,160
Private sector housing	25%	859
Environmental protection ²	19%	664
Health and safety at work	9%	316
Public health ³	7%	254
Food standards	4%	134
Licensing ⁴	3%	112



This survey shows that as few as 316 EHPs may be working on health and safety across the whole of England – around 1 full time officer in each local authority. According to data collected by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the number of officers working within local authorities to maintain occupational

health and safety has been continuously falling for the past decade across the UK. The number of FTE posts focussed on health and safety fell from 1,020 in 2010/11 to 455 in 2019/20.⁵ The number of inspections and prosecutions has followed a similar pattern in the past decade. HSE and local authorities are co-regulators in

² e.g. noise, air and water quality, contaminated land, odours

³ e.g. pest control, drainage, dog control, welfare burials, infectious disease

⁴ e.g. alcohol and entertainment, animals, taxis, special treatments, gambling, caravans

⁵ Table 3, HELA paper: Data collection – analysis of LAE1 2019/20 data from Local Authorities, HSE,

this area. Local authorities have an equally important role in health and safety as HSE and that should be recognised and resourced accordingly. HSE should provide greater tangible support to local authorities and to highlight the importance of the work that LAs do to central Government.

HSE to share tools and resources with local authorities.

HSE to acknowledge and highlight current resource shortages and the important role that LAs perform to Ministers and officials, making a case for some targeted funding in this area to maintain safe levels of resource within local authorities for health and safety regulation.

A quarter of EHPs are working within housing teams. This may be as a result of existing selective and additional licensing schemes operating across England, which finance and require higher levels of resource to operate. Civil penalties were introduced in 2016, allowing housing enforcement teams to retain fines given to landlords who rent out privately rented properties in a dangerous condition. However, there are wide variations between different local authorities' resources when it comes to housing enforcement and little information has been published as to whether these approaches work well for all local areas.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to make an assessment of the resourcing needs across local authorities' private sector housing function, including to what extent civil penalties are being utilised by local authorities and how much funding this is bringing in for enforcement teams.

MHCLG to set out its future policy on selective licensing schemes and respond to its commissioned review, which was published in 2018.

The majority of EHPs work in food safety. The numbers specialising in this area are likely to be the highest because there is a mandatory requirement for LAs to inspect all food premises. Later on in the survey, we find that future anticipated knowledge and skills gaps for EHPs are expected to be subject specific. We therefore recommend that the provision of free training for EHPs continues to be funded by the Food Standards Agency (FSA), in order to keep the knowledge and skills of EH professionals fully up to date.

FSA to continue to provide funding for training for EHPs engaged in food inspections in line with Code of Practice requirements and training specifically to deal with the impact of Brexit on the food industry and novel foods.



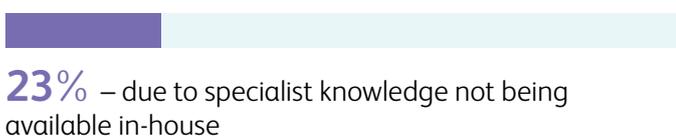
Use of agency staff and unfilled posts

For a number of years, local authorities have reported shortages of fully qualified and experienced EHPs as well as difficulties in recruitment. The survey therefore sought to find out the scale of the problem and the reasons behind this trend.

The vast majority – 4 out of 5 (80%) local authorities – reported that they used agency staff to deliver environmental health services. We estimate there were around 515 FTE agency staff used across England in 2018/19 and 510 FTEs in 2019/20. Spread across all LAs, this gives an average of 1.6 FTE per LA for both years. Our data shows 211 FTE agency staff were employed by 105 LAs in 2018/19, with 39 LAs reporting they used no agency staff to deliver environmental health services. 235 FTE posts were filled by agency staff in 2019/20 across 118 LAs, with 36 LAs reporting none being used.

4 out of 5

(80%) local authorities reported that they used agency staff to deliver environmental health services



In England, 9 out of 10 (87%) local authorities told us that agency staff were used because of shortages in resources or delays in recruitment. By contrast, only 30% used agency staff to cover maternity leave or sickness, 30% due to an unprecedented demand for services, and 23% due to specialist knowledge not being available in-house. Other reasons (13%) were also mentioned in the comments, including the need for short term resource, provision of cover for backlogs of work and only short-term funding being available for the posts. Respondents also told us that agency workers were used to undertake lower risk food hygiene inspections.

56%

of local authorities reported that they had vacancies in their environmental health teams that were left unfilled for six months or more

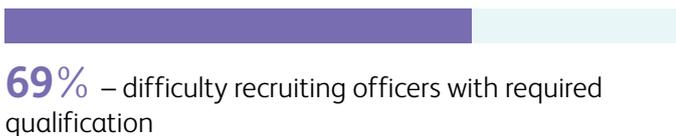
56% of local authorities reported that they had vacancies in their environmental health teams that were left unfilled for six months or more. 38% of local authorities had between 1-3 full time posts unfilled and 11% had between 3-5 full time posts unfilled in 2019/20. We estimate that there were approximately 375 FTE posts left unfilled in 2019/20 for 6 months or more across England – around 1.2 FTEs per LA. Given that there are only around 10.6 FTE fully qualified EHPs employed by the average LA in England, these numbers are concerning.

The most common reasons for posts remaining unfilled were:

- Difficulty recruiting officers with required qualification (69%)
- Difficulty recruiting suitably experienced officers (63%)
- Salary not being competitive enough to attract enough candidates (44%)
- Recruitment freeze (28%)

The top reasons point to a lack of available EHPs who are both fully qualified and experienced. The salary being uncompetitive suggests that candidates may be tempted by higher paid jobs outside of local authorities. The recruitment freeze in over a quarter of councils seems to point to financial pressures within a significant number of local authorities. The high use of agency staff could be due to a combination of a lack of available EHPs and also the result of a recruitment freeze within local authorities, meaning that permanent staff cannot be recruited even when capacity is too low to deliver key services.

Other reasons cited in the open comments to explain the unfilled posts included service restructures going on within local authorities in order to make cost savings, therefore delaying recruitment. There were also a number of instances where internal failures were mentioned, which have delayed recruitment, such as the post not being advertised and changes in recruitment processes leading to delays. Lack of interest



from candidates was also cited, especially where roles were maternity covers and fixed term posts, rather than permanent roles.

The cost of providing capacity through the use of agency staff is disproportionately high. Building a longer-term strategy for resourcing environmental health departments is vital to ensure that cost effective services are provided to local communities and there is good value for money with increasingly shrinking budgets. Longer-term resource planning can also help to achieve other objectives in the local plan – for example creating employment opportunities for local people. Taking on trainees and apprentices in environmental health could therefore be a cost-effective way to help to resource the team longer-term and achieve other local priorities.

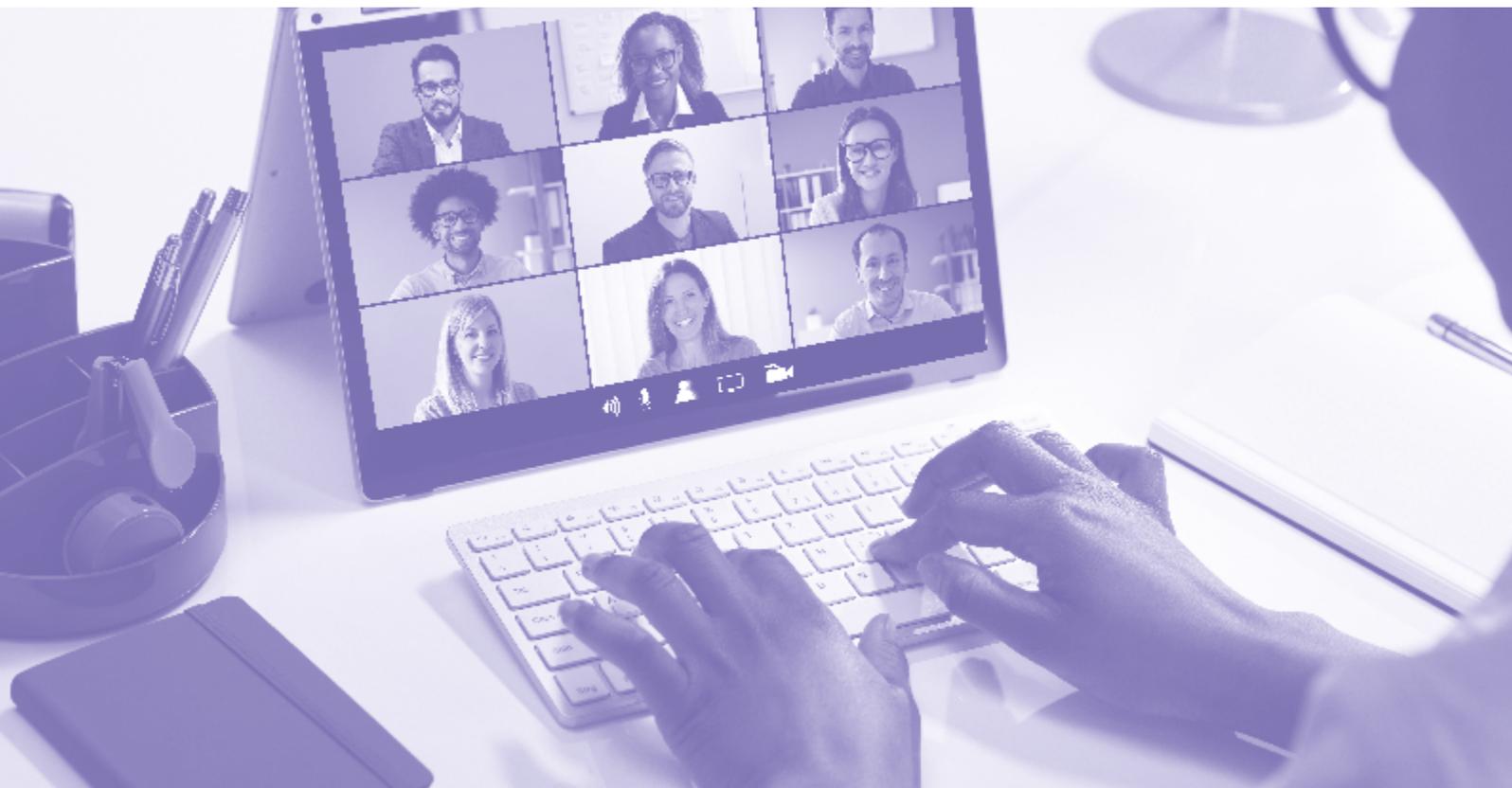
At CIEH, we will continue to raise awareness and promote the profession, especially through our ‘#ChooseEnvironmentalHealth campaign’, working with schools and with the general public. This could be given even greater impetus with stronger government support.

Local authorities to support environmental health departments to recruit graduate trainees and apprentices. These roles should not replace any of the existing permanent roles.

CIEH to continue to raise awareness of the profession through careers fairs, provision of clear and accessible information on the CIEH website and its work with the media.

CIEH to review the route to qualification and registration to make this more accessible for aspiring EHPs and employers.

MHCLG to provide support to CIEH for future recruitment campaigns for environmental health.

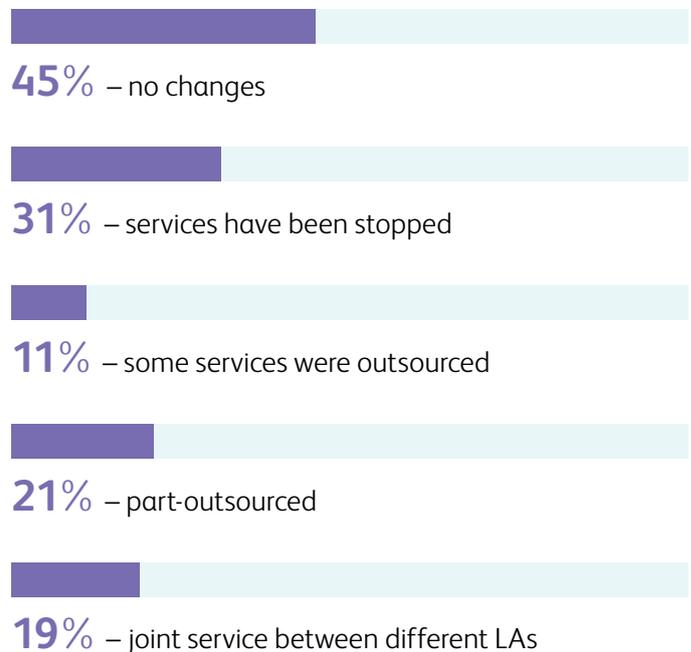


Environmental health services – structures, budgets and future outlook

Local authorities are organised in a variety of ways, resulting in a range of different structures to deliver regulatory and public protection services. This section looks at the changes to the delivery of environmental health services within the past six years. We also wanted to know about what influence EHPs have within the larger structure of local authorities and whether they are reaching some of the higher decision-making and strategic positions. We therefore asked respondents about where the most senior Environmental Health Practitioner sits within the local authority's management structure, with the Chief Executive being at level 1. This was to ascertain whether EHPs are managing to rise up the management structures within local government and thus represent and influence the local authority to support EHPs and the values of the profession in the face of financial and other pressures.



Changes to service delivery reported in the past 6 years:



The biggest proportion of environmental health departments and services seems to be unchanged. 45% of respondents reported no changes in delivery at their local authority over the past six years. However, the second largest proportion of respondents (31%) reported that services have been stopped over the past six years.

Discretionary activities were most likely to be stopped, including advice and guidance provision to businesses and any non-statutory functions (21 mentions). Respondents told us that service provision was “at statutory minimum” and that teams had “less capacity to provide advice” to the public and to businesses. Pest control services were very likely to be stopped, including animal welfare and dog warden posts (20), as well as food safety, standards and training work (17). Respondents told us that “food safety training to individuals” has had to stop and there has been a “reduction of food sampling programme”. To a smaller extent housing (12), health and safety (9) and environmental protection functions (8) were also mentioned as services that have been stopped in some way. This includes things like out of hours services for noise, cuts to the proactive occupational health and safety programme as well as proactive work around empty homes, fuel poverty and housing renewals work.

11% of local authorities reported that some services were outsourced, and 21% part-outsourced, in the last 6 years. Dog wardens and pest control services were most likely to be fully outsourced, followed by some environmental protection functions and food hygiene inspections. Food hygiene inspections were also most likely to be part-outsourced. In practice, this means contractors are brought in to do some of the food hygiene inspections to help the team to hit statutory targets, especially where these inspections were judged to be low risk. Environmental protection functions were second most likely to be part-outsourced, including permitting, contaminated land and air quality management.

19% of services were provided as part of a joint service between different LAs. The arrangements for joint services varied between different LAs. Some areas reported that whole councils or whole regulatory services had become joined (17 mentions), whilst others told us that specific individual services are being shared by two or more councils (17). Common shared services mentioned are animal welfare and pest control.

Senior roles within local authorities

The most common level of the most senior EHP within a local authority structure was level 3 (46%) followed by level 4 (25%). Whilst this is reasonably high, it also shows that EHPs reaching the top two levels of management in only 15% of local authorities. This suggests that EHPs may need extra training in leadership and strategic skills to enable them to rise up the ranks and take opportunities for promotion within their local authorities.

Table 2: Level of the most senior EHP within a LA in England

Seniority level	Number of LAs where EHPs reach this level	Percentage
Level 1	7	3%
Level 2	25	12%
Level 3	95	46%
Level 4	52	25%
Level 5	23	11%
Level 6	3	1%
Level 7	0	0%

The role of regulatory services supports businesses in meeting their obligations and thereby enhances the local economy as well as protecting public health. A relatively high number of ‘discretionary’ non-statutory services for communities and business advice have been stopped within environmental health (EH) departments due to lack of capacity and resources. Although such services were discretionary, they were vital in terms of both supporting the economy, particularly smaller businesses. In some cases, these also contributed directly to health improvement of the local communities. The provision of such services will be particularly important as we emerge from the effect of the pandemic and extended lockdowns.

Only around 3% of local authorities have chief executives with a background in EH and only 15% of LAs have EHPs in senior strategic roles. There are obvious

skills and competencies that EHPs can bring to these roles – in particular, a holistic understanding of public health and how, not only regulatory services, but other council services contribute towards improving health and wellbeing of communities.

EH teams also contribute towards the health improvement agenda, which has an overall health cost saving. Regulatory teams are also becoming increasingly involved in supporting the green growth aims of local authorities and the central Government’s aim to achieving net zero by 2050. This is already crucial and will become increasingly important if the UK is to meet its climate change targets. These key contributions need to be better recognised and appreciated. During local authorities’ budget setting process, it is therefore important that regulatory services budgets are preserved and not the first area to be considered for budget savings.

Local Government Association to work with CIEH to promote the important role and benefit of environmental health and wider regulatory services to local political leaders and portfolio holders.

CIEH to explore opportunities to provide advanced and high-level skills training to EH professionals, including leadership and influencing skills.

Budgets for environmental health work

Many sources have reported pressures on local authority budgets and even cuts to EH services since 2010.⁶ As part of this survey, we wanted to find out more about budgets for environmental health services during the past couple of years. We also wanted to find out the impact of these changes in the delivery of services and what additional budget allocations may be required to fill any gaps.

Whilst budgets remained unchanged in around half of all local authorities, more EH teams reported decreases in their budgets than increases for the last full financial year, suggesting that budgets are shrinking overall. In 2019/20, the majority of LAs’ budgets for EH stayed the same (51%), one quarter decreased (24%) and one fifth (17%) increased compared to 2018/19.

For those citing a decrease in their budgets for this year, the most common reasons for this included restructuring within LAs and decreases in central government grants affecting all departments in the LA. Many respondents also mentioned that workloads and remits have increased whilst budgets have been decreasing or staying the same, thus putting pressure on EHPs to deliver more for less. A number of comments mentioned that major cuts to posts happened in previous years and that there was growing pressure to increase income generated by the team. Even the recent pandemic has not affected these trends in some authorities:

“ Despite the extra workload due to COVID and the lack of resources to deliver core environmental health statutory functions, the services is still allocated £200K savings target due to the financial pressures placed on the authority.”

Worryingly, in a minority of EH teams, efficiency savings have been made by changing working practices and cutting costs on training, equipment and delays in recruitment:

“ Savings had to be made in training, miscellaneous items and not filling posts for months or over a year.”

A minority of teams have told us that there were no cuts because there was no more scope for reductions because resources were at a minimum. Also, agency workers were being used in the short term to plug gaps in resources.

⁶ The UK’s enforcement gap 2020, Unchecked campaign, October 2020.

For those teams, whose budgets have remained the same, the most common explanation was that whilst budgets have remained the same, workloads have gone up, sometimes as a result of the extra work created by COVID-19. However, we have also been told that other policy developments such as increasing density of housing has a big impact on the workload of environmental health teams.

“ Service budget remained same. Workload increased over 200%. COVID specific grant funding sourced from County Public Health, but have had to also restructure service work & cease certain ‘normal’ work to accommodate COVID demands.”

“ Budget has stayed the same but workload has gone up due to increases in large scale development and infrastructure projects, causing increases in planning consultations and contaminated land work. Increases in volume and density of residential development, causing increases in nuisance, dog control and pest control related service requests. An increase generally in enviro-crime and anti-social behaviour.”

Of those whose budgets have gone up, this was mostly in line with inflation or to accommodate a higher workload within the team. Although, in some instances the pandemic, a new housing licensing scheme and the need to deliver food safety controls also helped to increased resources. We have heard about smaller restructures to create savings and thus justify new recruitment into the team. Encouragingly, we have also heard about the extra recognition for environmental health teams as a result of their work to support the authority and other teams during the pandemic.

“ Redeployed an officer from another department to replace retiring officer. Money saved was used to appoint an apprentice EHO.”

“ Environmental Health has demonstrated its ability to work across the whole of the council services. We have become invaluable to Planning colleagues who provide funding, Public Health contribute to funding and as a management team we also cover School Travel, Licensing and Highways Land Registry.”

Delivery of services

31%

Nearly a third of respondents told us that, in their opinion, the delivery of some statutory environmental health duties was at risk, due to resourcing issues in 2019/20

Whilst this is not a majority, it is still a large proportion, given that these are statutory obligations for local authorities.

In terms of services most at risk of not being delivered, food hygiene and safety was cited 38 times, whilst statutory nuisance, noise and environmental protection duties were mentioned 14 times. Health and safety at work (12) and private sector housing work (12) were also mentioned. Of those who said that some duties were at risk of not being delivered, respondents estimated that a 29% uplift in resources would be needed to meet statutory duties.

Future budget expectations

Looking ahead to 2021/22:



34% – expect their authority’s budget for environmental health services to decrease



20% – expect it to increase



36% – expect it to stay the same

A number of key themes emerged when respondents to the survey were asked to provide more detailed comments on their future expectations and predictions for their environmental health team budgets.

By far the biggest area of concern expressed was about the future impact of COVID-19, especially with regards to the financial stability of LAs going forward, due to losses in income streams. Respondents have pointed out that environmental health teams often do not have ring fenced funding and are therefore able to be cut to balance overall local authority budgets. Future budgets of LAs are also a significant concern and a number of responses cite restructuring of teams and LAs as ongoing.

“ Income targets have been hard to maintain due to the pandemic and therefore monies are drawn from the base budget to cover losses; many of the sections within our service have ring fenced monies - EH does not have this.”

“ Budget situation in light of the COVID-19 is still uncertain but the expectation is that the next few years will be very challenging.”

“ All council services subject to 5% reduction in salary budgets to assist address local authority COVID-19 costs.”

“ We need to be able to raise money from interventions. In a unitary authority, EH will always be below adult and children’s services in terms of financing.”

Respondents also cited difficulties in recruiting qualified EHPs as a major concern going forward. This is expected to put further pressure on services as less experienced and qualified officers are recruited and need to be trained up and managed by a smaller pool of experienced EHPs. The high costs of agency staff was also mentioned as a factor when recruitment is proving difficult, thus putting additional pressure on limited budgets.

“ Problem is we cannot afford EHOs so getting less qualified/inexperienced officers putting more strain on the few EHOs at a time when being told to make more income”

“ Although I expect the budget to increase, recruitment is still challenging.”

“ Whilst we had no long-term vacancies in 19/20, we have these in 20/21, and the cost of agency staff to back fill is more expensive. If we continue to be unable to fill vacant posts this will be a challenge.”

The impact of COVID-19 on business as usual activity has also contributed to creating backlogs of work for environmental health teams for the coming year. In some cases, the funding that teams have received has not matched the level of extra resource used to manage outbreaks and enforcement of Coronavirus restrictions.

“ Some funding has been received for COVID-19 enforcement direct from govt but this is a fraction of the overall cost of COVID-19 enforcement delivery.”

“ There is a huge deficit of work that has led to rising non-compliance among our businesses and health inequalities in our communities. This deficit, if unaddressed, will be something we will be “paying back” for years to come in ill health and premature deaths. Budgets need to increase to bring back the determinants of health to a pre-COVID footing.”

Finally, some areas are reporting increases in budgets due to COVID-19 and the extra recognition the pandemic has given to the profession and the flexible skillset offered by EHPs being more recognised. However, there is a sense that funding is short term and teams are continuing to use creative solutions to train up and recruit where they can.

“ We are currently seeking to increase capacity and resilience in the department through the opportunities that COVID presents.”

“ There will be no increase to base budget - I have managed to get the student EH posts converted to a EHO post - but this means loss of student post.”

“ Government grants are allowing us to pay for contractors and additional EH posts in contact tracing hub - but this money is one off.”

“ We have managed to get some additional funding for two additional posts within the service, 1 permanent EHP and one fixed term post.”

The current COVID-19 pandemic has placed pressure on most businesses and organisations, including on local authority finances. However, EHPs provide a flexible skillset to their employers, which can be easily re-deployed to many different functions and roles. At a time of squeezed budgets locally, and an ever-changing set of priorities from central Government, the value that EHPs provide for their employers should be better recognised and appreciated.

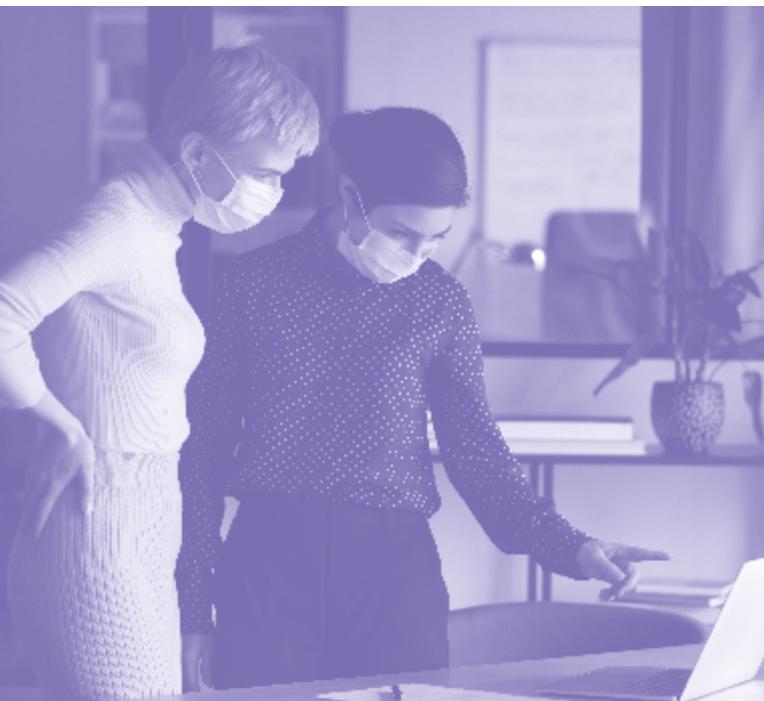
A varied skillset and knowledge base can cover a range of areas and provide some efficiency savings to local authorities. However, it is important that those working within EH departments should in turn be supported to develop their qualifications and keep their skills and knowledge up to date.

Central Government to increase financial support to local authorities in order to maintain resources within LAs for regulatory and public health work, especially following the pandemic.

Local authorities to allocate sufficient funding to environmental health teams in order to maintain safe and effective staffing levels and keep experience and expertise in-house whenever possible.

Work during the pandemic

EHPs have been working tirelessly during the course of the pandemic, using their wide-ranging skillset in a variety of settings. EHPs have been classed as key workers from the beginning of the pandemic due to the vital role they perform in ensuring businesses comply with safety and coronavirus regulations as well as providing support communities in a variety of ways. Whilst we have heard anecdotally about all the great work being done locally, the survey delved deeper to find out in more detail the extent of the response to see the full range of roles performed by EHPs during the pandemic.



Overall, around 8 out of 10 EHPs working for local authorities were redeployed last year in response to the pandemic. The most common activities for EHPs included:



This shows that EHPs have played an important role in a variety of high-level strategic activities such as emergency planning and developing COVID-19 related procedures as well as playing a key role in enforcing the Coronavirus restrictions and supporting businesses with re-opening plans.

EHPs have also been involved in a range of other activities during the pandemic, which came through in the open comments. These included contributing specialist knowledge and setting up emergency operations, including mortuaries, control of cruise vessels and contributing to outbreak control plans. They have also been involved in putting together corporate procedures and advising their local authorities on pandemic management, establishing mass vaccination centres and working jointly with Directors of Public Health.

However, EHPs have also been very involved in supporting people in the community, including calls to vulnerable people during the pandemic, doing meals on wheels visits, supporting food banks, managing food hubs as well as helping at homeless hostels and vaccination centres.

Comments have also highlighted the impact of the pandemic on environmental health teams, with many teams dealing with much higher workloads as business as usual activity had to continue alongside the Coronavirus response.

“ COVID-19 pandemic brought 31 new workstreams into the service”

“ A 50% increase in domestic nuisance related case work and construction site activity has meant that officers have had to undertake duties outside of their normal roles”

“ The Licensing, Food and Safety Team who have been dealing with COVID as well as day to day work”

EHPs have proved themselves to be adaptable and invaluable during the course of the pandemic. This is highlighted by the fact that 8 out of 10 EHPs have been redeployed during the past year to support a variety of urgent and essential work.

However, this variety of roles that EHPs perform means that there is a split in government departments responsible for different areas of EH policy making. This can also make it difficult to coordinate this vital profession at a high level. We therefore see the need for a Chief Environmental Health Officer who would work alongside the Chief Medical Officer in England, in order to feed in expertise directly to policy making from experience of EHPs on the ground and to support the future pipeline of professionals. The role should feed into the newly set up UK Health Security Agency and also provide a direct connection between central Government departments and EHPs working for local authorities. This important co-ordinating role already exists in the other three UK Nations.

Central Government to introduce a new role of Chief Environmental Health Officer, to work alongside and with the Chief Medical Officer in England to provide coordination and communication between government policy makers and local authorities.

The recent pandemic has brought the work of environmental health professionals to the fore. A cross-government working group, led by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, is currently assessing what policy changes might be needed in a number of different areas in order to support local services and skills both now and in future. We support and welcome the work of this group and would like to see positive changes coming out of this work.

Central Government to take forward and deliver on its upcoming recommendations from the cross-government regulatory working groups.

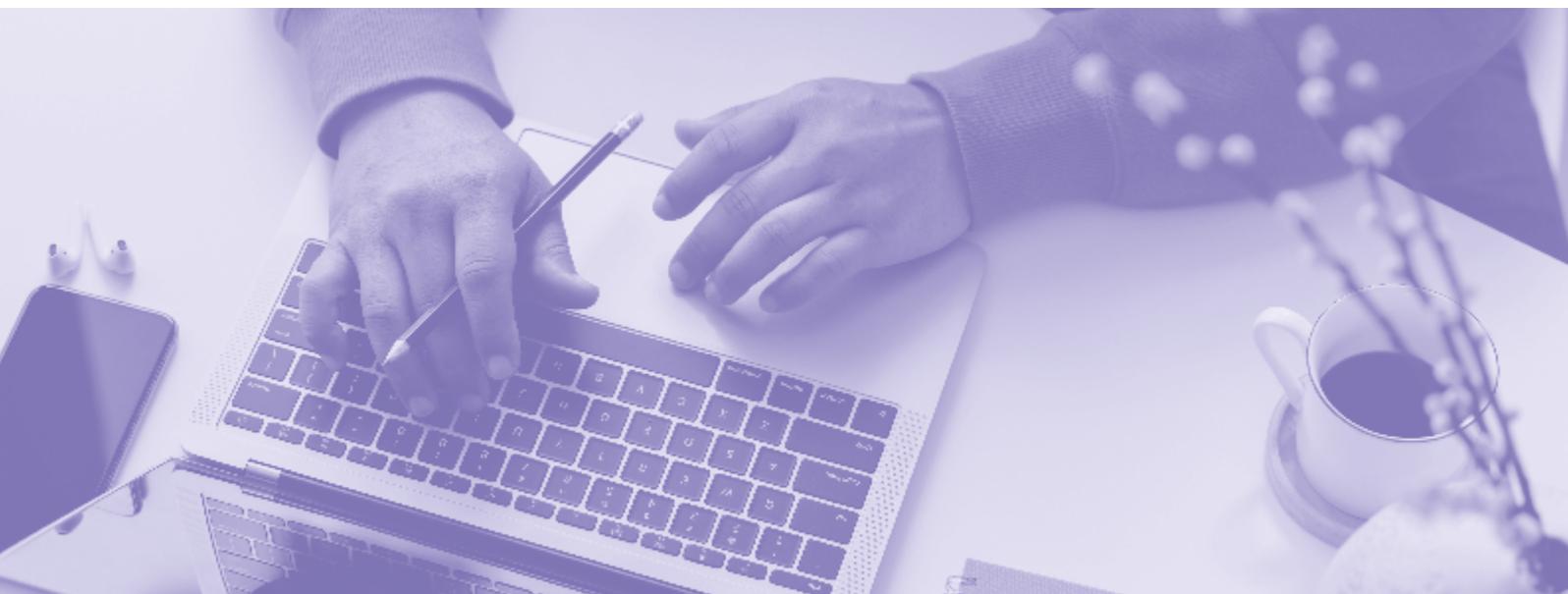
Future sustainability of the profession

In this chapter, we explore whether there are enough environmental health (EH) professionals training and qualifying right now, to ensure there is a sufficient supply of competent and experienced people to fill the needs of EH services now and in the future. We also look at whether the training and development needs of current EH professionals are being met by their employers and the types of benefits provided to those working in local authorities.

Following completion of an EH degree, in order to gain practical experience and to become fully qualified, graduates need to secure a post and demonstrate practical application of the knowledge gained during their studies. This is usually done via a trainee placement at a local authority. The length of this placement can vary between different local authorities. An apprenticeship is an alternative route into the profession. Lasting four years, it is a structured programme, where an apprentice receives teaching at a university for at least 20% of their time and works for the employer 80% of their time. Both of these routes are important to encourage more EH professionals to become fully qualified and experienced.

How many students are being trained on environmental health courses?

There are eight universities in England providing environmental health (EH) degrees and around 160-180 graduates complete their degrees every year in England. Last year, we ran a successful campaign to encourage more people to train in EH. The #ChooseEnvironmentalHealth campaign consisted of a virtual careers fair, media engagement around a-level results and awareness raising of the profession on World Environmental Health Day, as well as many assets and resources being placed permanently on our website to help people of all ages and backgrounds to consider EH as a career choice. Anecdotally, we have been told by several universities that demand for EH degrees has been increasing in recent months.

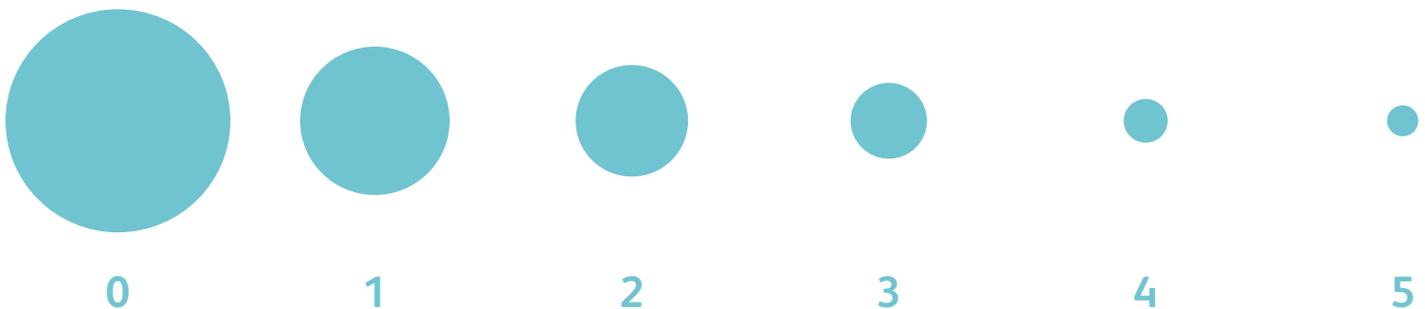


How many trainees and apprentices are trained by local authorities?

Given the high rates of unfilled posts and use of agency workers to fill gaps in the service, training future recruits is the only way to ensure a re-balancing of future skills and resources. At the moment, not enough local authorities are taking on environmental health (EH) trainees and apprentices to ensure there is a fully qualified and trained next generation of EHPs to meet demand. In 2019/20, 83 LAs out of 160 did not have a single apprentice or trainee in EH – 52%.

159 local authorities reported supporting 91 EH trainees in 2017/18, 111 in 2018/19 and 109.5 in 2019/20. These are not necessarily numbers of different trainees as placements can last for more than a year. Nevertheless, the number of trainees per LA remains very low at just 0.7 FTE at each local authority on average. More worryingly, 56% of LAs told us they did not have any paid or unpaid trainees in environmental health in 2018/19 and 2019/20. In 2017/18, 57% of local authorities did not take on any trainees, showing very little change in levels of support over the last three years.

In 2019/20, 52% of LAs did not have a single apprentice or trainee in environmental health:



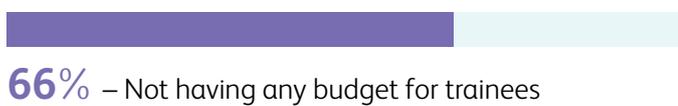
Total number of apprentices and trainees per LA

Table 3: Number of environmental health trainees supported by LAs

Number of trainees/Year	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Paid	75	83	93.5
Unpaid	32	28	16
Total	107	111	109.5

There were several key reasons given by those not able to support any trainees in EH. Not having any budget for trainees (66%) and not having capacity to mentor them (52%) were the primary reasons given for not taking on any trainees. Only 20% said that no trainees were taken because there was no demand from students.

Reasons why there were no trainees taken on:



However, there is a glimmer of hope, as the number of LAs taking on apprentices has tripled and the number of apprentices doubled between 2019/20 and 2020/21. 18.5 FTE apprentices were employed by 13 LAs in 2019/20, and 44 LAs employed a total of 61 FTEs in 2020/21. This shows that demand for apprenticeships is increasing, despite the effects of the pandemic this year.

However, the number of LAs using apprenticeships is still in the minority. 122 local authorities did not take on any apprentices in environmental health in either 2019/20 and 2020/21 – that is 70% of LAs responding to this question in the survey.

Some of the open text comments revealed that there may still be gaps in the knowledge of employers about the availability of an EH apprenticeship programme. One respondent told us that they were “awaiting development of new EH apprenticeship programme”.

The shortages reported by many teams and the difficulties in recruiting fully qualified EHPs point to the urgent need to train more new recruits. Large proportions of local authorities are not training a single trainee or an apprentice. Central government, local authorities and CIEH need to come together to support the next generation of environmental health practitioners in the public sector so that the future of the profession is sustainable. This focus would also help to provide much-needed qualifications and jobs for young people and those who may have lost their employment during the current pandemic.

Following the work done during the past couple of years by CIEH to promote the profession – especially to young people – some universities have seen increased intakes of students this year. However, this increased demand needs to be met with adequate resources within universities to be able to take on extra students and maintain good levels of teaching.

Central Government to introduce a local authority ring-fenced fund for environmental health apprentices and graduate trainees to ensure that every local authority can afford to support the salaries of environmental health trainees or apprentices.

CIEH to work with employers to develop the next stage of the #ChooseEH campaign, with a focus on Level 6 environmental health apprenticeships. This includes the launch of a toolkit for employers in 2021 to support them in taking on new apprentices.

Universities to promote their environmental health courses to prospective students and resource courses in environmental health adequately, relative to demand.

Future training needs

All environmental health (EH) professionals who are members of CIEH are required to complete a certain number of hours of continuous professional development (CPD) each year to ensure that their knowledge and skills remain up to date with new legislation and developments. This is vital for a profession covering such a wide-ranging portfolio. Whilst some EHPs choose to do their CPD in their area of specialism, others use it as an opportunity to keep on top of other EH areas so that they maintain their wider skills and can move between roles. In this section, we wanted to find out more about future service needs and how these align with anticipated gaps in the skills and training of the current EH workforce.

When asked about future service needs and pressures, 69% of LAs have told us that they anticipate gaps in the skills or knowledge of their environmental health workforce. This is not surprising, given that new regulations are constantly being added to the enforcement remit of EH teams.

Future anticipated training needs:



81% – subject specific knowledge



55% – legal training, including investigative skills



46% – leadership skills

The main anticipated training needs were related to subject specific knowledge (81%), legal training, including investigative skills, (55%) and leadership skills (46%). In terms of subject specific knowledge, environmental protection (31 mentions), food (27), health and safety (19) and housing (18) were the most mentioned. There was also a smaller number of open text comments relating to future training needs:

“ Pragmatic experience [is required in EHPs] - unlike in years gone by, we need new recruits to hit the ground running. No longer the luxury and time to mentor and support inexperienced staff.”

“ We have a graduate starting on 1st March but frankly very nervous about implementing the training programme - a strict training programme would help”

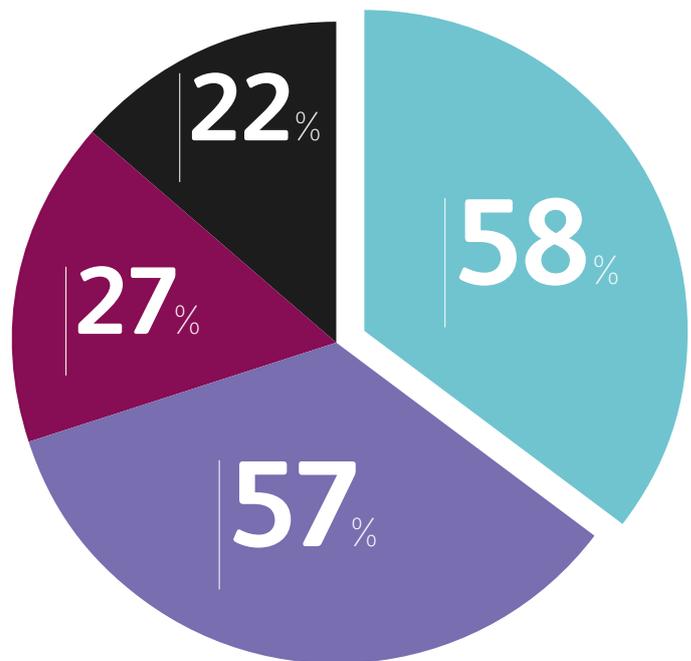
“ Availability or cost of training has nothing to do with it. Capacity and funding are key.”

52% of LAs said there were barriers to training and development for EHPs in their authority. Barriers cited included lack of capacity to undertake training (58%) and inadequate training budget (57%). To a smaller extent, the availability of training at right price (27%) and availability of good quality training (22%) were also given as reasons.

52%

of LAs said there were barriers to training and development for EHPs in their authority.

Barriers cited included:



- Good quality training
- Training at the right price
- Inadequate training budget
- No capacity for training

We also asked a question about the types of incentives the local authority offers to their EHPs to retain their experienced workforce. 97% and 92% of workplaces offered flexi time and homeworking, respectively. A much smaller proportion offered a staff recognition scheme (27%), market supplement (scarcity) payment (13%) and car allowance or lease (12%).

Whilst a lack of capacity to undertake training is an obvious barrier within teams that are under-resourced, a lack of a training budget is more concerning. Competent and experienced EHPs do leave the public sector for better working conditions and a better salary in the private sector. Local authorities could do better at retaining their existing experienced staff, by providing better staff recognition, employer benefits and training support. Only one quarter of LAs offer a staff recognition scheme and only one eighth provide an allowance for a car, which is often needed to do site visits and inspections.

Local authorities to allocate an adequate budget to provide for the continuous training and development of their environmental health teams, to ensure that their employees' skills and knowledge remain fully up to date and CPD requirements can be met.

Local authorities to consider introducing staff retention schemes to improve staff morale and provide recognition and opportunities to encourage existing experienced staff to stay in the public sector.

Appendix

List of councils providing complete responses to the survey

Amber Valley District Council	Broxbourne Council
Ashfield District Council	Broxtowe Borough Council
Ashford Borough Council	Bury Council
Babergh District Council	Cannock Chase Council
Barrow Borough Council	Carlisle City Council
Basildon Council	Castle Point Borough Council
Birmingham City Council	Charnwood Borough Council
Blaby District Council	Chelmsford City Council
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council	Cherwell District Council
Bolsover District Council	Chesterfield Borough Council
Bolton Council	Chichester District Council
Boston Borough Council	City of Lincoln Council
Bournemouth Christchurch Poole Council	City of London
Bracknell Forest Council	Colchester Borough Council
Braintree District Council	Copeland Borough Council
Brentwood Borough Council	Corby Borough Council
Bristol City Council	Council of the Isles of Scilly

Coventry City Council	Eden District Council
Craven District Council	Elmbridge Borough Council
Crawley Borough Council	Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Dacorum Borough Council	Erewash Borough Council
Darlington Borough Council	Exeter City Council
Dartford Borough Council	Fareham Borough Council
Derbyshire Dales District Council	Folkestone & Hythe District Council
Doncaster Council	Gateshead Council
Dorset Council	Gosport Borough Council
Dover District Council	Gravesham Borough Council
Dudley Council	Great Yarmouth Borough Council
Eastbourne Council	Harborough District Council
East Cambridgeshire District Council	Harlow Council
East Hampshire District Council & Havant Borough Council	Harrogate Borough Council
East Hampshire District Council & Havant Borough Council	Hart District Council
East Lindsey District Council	Hastings Borough Council
East Northamptonshire Council	Herefordshire Council
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
East Staffordshire Borough Council	Horsham District Council
East Suffolk Council	Hull City Council
Eastleigh Borough Council	Isle of Wight Council
	King's Lynn Borough Council

Kirklees Council	Manchester City Council
Lancaster City Council	Mansfield District Council
Lewes Council	Medway Council
Lichfield District Council	Melton Borough Council
Liverpool City Council	Mendip District Council
London Borough of Brent	Mid Devon District Council
London Borough of Bromley	Mid Suffolk District Council
London Borough of Camden	Milton Keynes Council
London Borough of Ealing	Mole Valley District Council
London Borough of Enfield	Newark and Sherwood District Council
London Borough of Hackney	North Devon Council
London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham	North East Derbyshire District Council
London Borough of Harrow	North Hertfordshire District Council
London Borough of Havering	North Kesteven District Council
London Borough of Islington	North Somerset Council
London Borough of Kingston	North Tyneside Council
London Borough of Lewisham	Northampton Borough Council
London Borough of Newham	Northumberland County Council
London Borough of Southwark	Norwich City Council
London Borough of Sutton	Nottingham City Council
London Borough of Waltham Forest	Oadby and Wigston Borough Council
Luton Borough Council	Oxford City Council

Pendle District Council	South Lakeland District Council
Peterborough City Council	South Ribble Borough Council
Reading Borough Council	South Somerset District Council
Redditch Borough Council	Southampton City Council
Reigate & Banstead Borough Council	Spelthorne Borough Council
Rossendale Borough Council	St Helens Council
Rother District Council	Stafford Borough Council
Royal Borough of Greenwich	Stevenage Borough Council
Runnymede Borough Council	Stockton-on-Tees Council
Rushcliffe Borough Council	Stratford on Avon District Council
Ryedale District Council	Stroud District Council
Salford City Council	Swindon Borough Council
Sandwell Council	Tamworth Borough Council
Sedgemoor District Council	Telford & Wrekin Council
Selby District Council	Tendring District Council
Sevenoaks District Council	Test Valley Borough Council
Shropshire Council	Tewkesbury Borough Council
Solihull Council	Thanet District Council
Somerset West and Taunton Council	Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
South Derbyshire District Council	Torridge District Council
South Gloucestershire Council	Wakefield Council
South Kesteven District Council	Walsall Council

Warrington Borough Council

Warwick District Council

Wealden District Council

West Berkshire Council

West Lancashire Borough Council

West Lindsey District Council

West Norfolk Borough Council

West Suffolk Council

Wiltshire Council

Wokingham Borough Council

Wyre Council

Wyre Forest District Council

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