

Developing competency - based accreditation for health promotion in Europe

Desenvolvimento de um sistema de acreditação baseado em competências para promoção da saúde na Europa

Barbara Battel-Kirk¹, Margaret M. Barry²

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ABSTRACT: *Background:* In April 2013, the inaugural meeting of the Board and Committees of the IUHPE European Health Promotion Accreditation System was held in Paris. The meeting heralded the implementation of an innovative competency-based accreditation system for health promotion in Europe. The System aims to promote quality assurance and competence in health promotion through a Europe-wide accreditation system which is designed to be flexible and sensitive to different contexts while maintaining robust and validated criteria. The System builds on the international literature on competency-based approaches to health promotion and on global capacity development initiatives such as the Galway Consensus Conference Statement ‘Toward Domains of Core Competency for Building Global Capacity in Health Promotion’¹. The System is designed to provide validated mechanisms for assuring quality in health promotion practice, education and training and a foundation for capacity development in Europe based on shared concepts and a formalised system of professional recognition. The competencies and professional standards that underpin the System are premised on the core concepts and principles of health promotion as defined in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion² and successive World Health Organisation charters and declarations³⁻⁸. The System is currently undergoing intensive piloting and will be fully operational in 2014. *Methods:* The System builds on a competency-based accreditation framework developed as part of the CompHP Project. The CompHP Project development processes employed a phased, multiple-method approach to facilitate consensus-building

with key stakeholders in health promotion across Europe. The piloting process for the System includes establishing and testing the governance structures, application processes, reporting policies and procedures to ensure that they are equitable, feasible, open and transparent. The eligibility criteria and online application system will be thoroughly tested by processing the first round of applicants from health promotion practice and education and training in autumn 2013. *Findings:* The governance structures and operating procedures for the System have been established building on the frameworks developed by the CompHP Project. The findings of the CompHP Project showed support for the development of a pan-European accreditation system and this has been translated into action with the establishment of the Board and Committees of the IUHPE European Health Promotion Accreditation System. *Conclusions:* The IUHPE European Health Promotion Accreditation System comprises a devolved model within which National Accreditation Organisations interact with a European Accreditation Organisation to ensure quality in health promotion practice, education and training in Europe. While the focus of the System is currently on the European context, there is evidence that it, and the competency frameworks which underpin it, will be useful resources for capacity building for health promotion globally.

KEYWORDS: Health promotion; Health education; Europe.

This paper summarises the development of the IUHPE European Health Promotion Accreditation System and gives an overview of its structures and processes. The System builds on the Core Competencies and Professional Standards developed by the CompHP Project and an overview of these frameworks and their development is also presented.

The piloting and implementation of the IUHPE European Health Promotion Accreditation System will not only provide quality assurance for health promotion practice, education and training in Europe but will also provide a template for similar developments in other regions.

¹ Independent Consultant, IUHPE European Health Promotion Accreditation System

² Health Promotion Research Centre, Discipline of Health Promotion National University of Ireland Galway, Co - Chair IUHPEHealth Promotion Competencies and Workforce Development Working Group.

Correspondency: Barba Battel-Kirk. BBK Consultancy, 47 Triq Gheriexem, Rabat, RBT 1909, Malta. E-mail bbkconsultancy@eircom.net

RESUMO: RESUMO: Introdução: Em abril de 2013, a reunião inaugural do Conselho de Administração e Comitês do Sistema de Acreditação de Promoção da Saúde Europeu da União Internacional de Promoção e Educação em Saúde (UIPES) foi realizada em Paris. A reunião anunciou a implementação de um sistema inovador para a promoção da saúde na Europa, baseado em competências. O sistema tem como objetivo promover a garantia de qualidade e competência na promoção da saúde através de um sistema de acreditação a nível europeu, que foi projetado para ser flexível e sensível a diferentes contextos, mantendo critérios robustos e validados. O sistema baseia-se na literatura internacional sobre as abordagens baseadas em competências para a promoção da saúde e em iniciativas de desenvolvimento de capacidades globais, tais como a Declaração consensuada da Conferência de Galway (“Toward Domains of Core Competence for Building Global Capacity in Health Promotion”)¹. O Sistema é projetado para fornecer mecanismos validados que garantam a qualidade às práticas da promoção, da educação em saúde bem como da formação e do desenvolvimento de capacidades na Europa, baseado em conceitos compartilhados e em um sistema formalizado de reconhecimento profissional. As competências e os padrões profissionais que sustentam o Sistema têm como premissa os principais conceitos e princípios da promoção da saúde definidos na Carta de Ottawa² e sucessivas cartas e declarações(3-8) da Organização Mundial de Saúde. Atualmente, o Sistema está passando por estudos pilotos intensivos, com operacionalização plena prevista para 2014. Métodos: O Sistema baseia-se em um quadro de acreditação baseado em competências, desenvolvido como parte do Projeto CompHP. O desenvolvimento do CompHP

empregou uma abordagem em etapas, com vários métodos para facilitar a construção de um consenso com as pessoas-chave da promoção da saúde em toda a Europa. O piloto para o Sistema inclui o estabelecimento e a testagem das estruturas de regulamentação, processos de aplicação, relatórios e procedimentos para garantir que eles sejam equitativos, viáveis, abertos e transparentes. Os critérios de elegibilidade e do sistema de inscrição on-line serão exaustivamente testados na primeira rodada de inscrições de iniciativas de práticas de promoção da saúde, de educação em saúde e formação, no Outono de 2013. Resultados: as estruturas de regulamentação e os procedimentos de funcionamento do Sistema foram definidas com base nas estruturas desenvolvidas pelo Projeto CompHP. Os resultados do Projeto CompHP mostraram apoiar o desenvolvimento de um sistema de acreditação pan-europeu e isso tem sido traduzido em ação, com a criação do Conselho e das Comissões do Sistema de Acreditação de Promoção da Saúde Europeu da UIPES. Conclusões: O Sistema de Acreditação de Promoção da Saúde Europeu da UIPES dispõe de um modelo descentralizado em que as organizações nacionais de acreditação interagem com a Organização Europeia de Credenciamento para garantir a qualidade da prática de promoção da saúde, educação e formação na Europa. Embora o foco do Sistema esteja atualmente no contexto europeu, há evidências de que ele e, os quadros de competências que lhe estão subjacentes, serão recursos úteis para a capacitação para a promoção da saúde a nível mundial.

DESCRITORES: Promoção da saúde; Educação em saúde; Europa (Continente).

INTRODUCTION

The IUHPE European Accreditation System that was formally established in April 2013 aims to promote quality assurance and competence in health promotion through a Europe-wide accreditation system which is designed to be flexible and sensitive to different contexts while maintaining robust and validated criteria.

The System is designed to provide validated mechanisms for assuring quality in health promotion practice, education and training and a foundation for capacity development in Europe based on shared concepts and a formalised system of professional recognition.

The System is informed by the literature, research and action on accreditation for health promotion and related fields in Europe and internationally⁹⁻¹², and builds on the CompHP Core Competencies, Professional Standards and Accreditation Frameworks¹³, that were informed by testing undertaken in academic¹⁴ and practice¹⁵ settings.

Rationale for developing an accreditation system for health promotion in Europe

The IUHPE Accreditation System was developed

in response to the need for a quality assurance system to unify and strengthen the diverse health promotion workforce in Europe.

While quality assurance issues for practice, education and training have been identified within health fields across Europe and globally, few are evident in health promotion. Until the inauguration of the IUHPE System, there had been no agreed Europe-wide accreditation mechanism to assure quality standards in reaching the health promotion goals identified in European Union health strategies¹⁶ or to support the recognition of professional qualifications as the basis for free movement and employment of health promotion practitioners across the European Member States¹⁷.

Competency-based approaches to health promotion

Competency models and frameworks have increasingly been used since the 1970's to clarify the specific requirements for effective and ethical health promotion, public health and health education practice. A small number of countries, for example Australia¹⁸, New Zealand^{19,20}, Canada^{21,22} and Estonia¹⁰, have made significant progress in delineating competencies for health promotion

practice and quality assurance systems. In the United States similar developments have focused mainly on delineating competencies for health education specialists^{23,24}.

Still fewer countries have developed accreditation or credentialing systems which formally recognise competence in health promotion practice or education and training courses that use competency-based learning outcomes to produce competent graduates. The countries which have developed such systems include the USA in relation to health education^{9,24} (e.g.), Estonia that has a fully developed health promotion specific accreditation system¹⁰ and the UK where registers for multidisciplinary public health specialists and practitioners can be accessed by suitably qualified health promotion practitioners¹⁰.

At a global level, a major initiative on competency development, the 'Galway Consensus Conference Statement on Domains of Core Competency for Building Global Capacity in Health Promotion'^{1,25}, facilitated an exchange of understanding among international partners regarding domains of core competency, standards, and quality assurance mechanisms in the professional preparation and practice of health promotion and health education specialists. The Consensus Conference provided a forum for discussion to identify the credentialing practices necessary to build capacity for health promotion, as well as systems that can assure quality in practice, education, and training.

In response to increasing interest in developing an agreed quality assurance system for health promotion in Europe, the European Region of the International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE/ EURO) set up a Sub-Committee in 2004 with the remit to: 'examine the accreditation of Health Promotion training and education in Europe within the context of professional competencies and academic standards'.

The Sub-Committee undertook a series of consultations, including a European wide scoping study²⁶ and a feasibility study on testing the implementation of a pan-European framework for health promotion accreditation²⁷.

The scoping study²⁶ found that health promotion practice, education and training were at different stages of development across Europe. There were, at that time, competency - based accreditation systems specifically focusing on health promotion in only two European countries, i.e. Estonia and the Netherlands (*it should be noted that the Dutch system is no longer in operation*).

The feasibility study²⁷ found overall support for the development of a pan-European accreditation system for health promotion and identified the key drivers for, and barriers to, the development and maintenance of such a system.

DEVELOPING A COMPETENCY-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR PAN-EUROPEAN ACCREDITATION FOR HEALTH PROMOTION

The CompHP Project

In 2008, twenty four health promotion experts from the health promotion policy, practice and academic sectors across Europe formed a partnership to develop core competencies, professional standards and an accreditation system for health promotion in Europe. A successful application for funding was made to the Health Programme of the European Union and the project, entitled 'Developing competencies and professional standards for health promotion capacity building in Europe - CompHP', ran from 2009-2012.

The CompHP Project employed a consensus-building approach based on consultation with key health promotion stakeholders across Europe using a variety of participatory methods including:

- Delphi surveys;
- Online surveys and discussion for a;
- Focus groups and workshops;
- Scoping studies and country perspective studies;
- Social media such as Twitter, Linked In and Facebook.

Developing the CompHP Core Competencies

The first stage in the CompHP Project focused on the development of core competencies for health promotion. Details of the development process for the core competencies, including an in-depth literature review on competencies in health promotion and related fields²⁸, is available in a report²⁹ and a published paper³⁰.

The CompHP Core Competencies Framework for Health Promotion¹³ provides a resource for capacity building in health promotion in Europe and can be used as a standalone document. However, it also forms the basis for the CompHP Professional Standards and, most recently, for the IUHPE European Health Promotion Accreditation System.

The CompHP Core Competencies Framework

The definition of competencies used in the CompHP Project is: a combination of the essential knowledge, abilities, skills and values necessary for the practice of health promotion¹³. Core competencies are defined as the minimum set of competencies that constitute a common baseline for all health promotion roles, i.e. they are what all health promotion practitioners are expected to be capable of doing to work efficiently, effectively and appropriately in the field¹³. The CompHP Core Competencies Framework for Health Promotion comprises 11 domains of core competency.

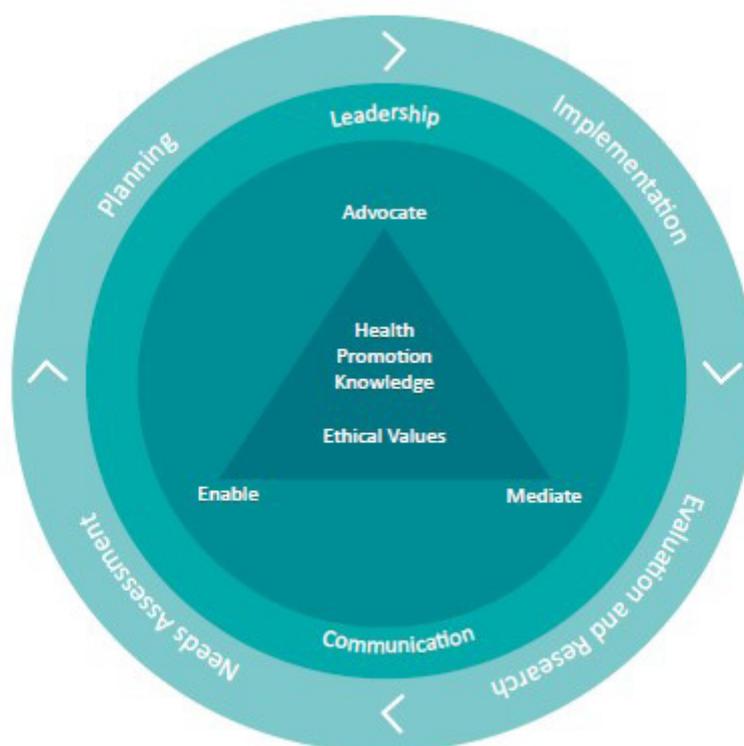


FIGURE 1. The CompHP core competencies framework

The Ethical Values and Health Promotion Knowledge domains are central to the Framework and underpin the other nine domains:

- Enable Change;
- Advocate for Health;
- Mediate through Partnership;
- Communication;
- Leadership;
- Assessment;
- Planning;
- Implementation;
- Evaluation and Research.

Each of these domains deal with a specific area of health promotion practice and their associated competency statements detail the skills needed for competent practice. It is the combined application of all 11 domains that constitute the CompHP Core Competencies Framework for Health Promotion.

The CompHP Professional Standards for Health Promotion

The next stage in the CompHP Project focused on the development of professional standards that build on the

CompHP Core Competencies Framework¹³.

The challenge in this part of the Project was to develop professional standards that could be used to describe and measure competence in health promotion for a variety of practitioners working in differing contexts and in different countries while incorporating the knowledge, skills and values for health promotion practice agreed in the CompHP Core Competencies¹³. In addition to defining criteria for competent practice, the Standards were informed by European educational standards and frameworks to ensure that they could be used to assess if courses were eligible for accreditation.

The Professional Standards were also developed using consensus-building with key health promotion stakeholders across Europe and the development process is described in full in a report³¹ and a published paper³².

The CompHP Professional Standards for Health Promotion

The nine CompHP Professional Standards for Health Promotion are underpinned by the core competencies and the professional and ethical values that are integral to health promotion practice. Each standard specifies the knowledge, skills and performance criteria required to demonstrate acquisition of the core competencies in that domain.

| Standard 3. Mediate through partnership Work collaboratively across disciplines, sectors and partners to enhance the impact and sustainability of health promotion action. A health promotion practitioner is able to: | | |
|--|---|---|
| Competency Statement: | Core Knowledge and Skills required: | Performance Criteria – evidence provided either from documentation, or assessment during work or study, of the practitioner’s ability to: |
| 3.1 Engage partners from different sectors to actively contribute to health promotion action 3.2 Facilitate effective partnership working which reflects health promotion values and principles 3.3 Build successful partnership through collaborative working, mediating between different sectoral interests 3.4 Facilitate the development and sustainability of coalitions and networks for health promotion action | Knowledge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory and practice of collaborative working including: facilitation, negotiation, conflict resolution, mediation, teamwork, networking, stakeholder engagement • Systems, structures and functions of different sectors, Organizations and agencies • Principles of effective intersectoral partnership working Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder engagement • Collaborative working • Facilitation and mediation • Communication skills • Ability to work with: stakeholders from community groups and Organizations; and partnerships, coalitions or networks for health improvement; public and private sector and civil society • Networking | 3a. Describe own role in a specified partnership, coalition or network, and demonstrate the skills or actions needed to develop, facilitate and sustain effective partnership working. 3b. Identify the range of relevant stakeholders/partners in a specified area or setting, and show how they are engaged actively in health promotion action. 3c. Show how different sectoral interests in a specified partnership, coalition or network are identified and acted upon, and demonstrate own role in mediating between sectors. |

FIGURE 2. The CompHP Professional Standards (example Standard 3)

The CompHP Pan European Accreditation Framework

The final Framework developed by the CompHP Project focused on pan-European accreditation for health promotion in Europe. This Framework was based on the CompHP Core Competencies Framework for Health Promotion and the CompHP Professional Standards¹³ and was informed by testing undertaken in academic¹⁴ and practice¹⁵ settings.

Accreditation in the context of the CompHP Project was viewed as a way of ensuring quality practice, as a Europe-wide quality seal, and as a benchmark that would enhance professional profiles and give recognition to best practice based on health promotion knowledge, values

and principles.

The development process, which is detailed in a full report³³ and a related published paper³⁴, comprised a multiple-method approach to facilitate a consensus-building process with key stakeholders in European health promotion.

FROM CompHP TO THE IUHPE EUROPEAN HEALTH PROMOTION ACCREDITATION SYSTEM

From the beginning of the CompHP Project consideration was given to the sustainability of its outputs. The final Project meeting in June 2012 brought together

key stakeholders from the European health promotion community to agree a plan for taking forward the work developed over the preceding three years. In particular, commitment was sought for the implementation of the competency-based accreditation system, based on the CompHP Project Frameworks.

As the CompHP Project came to an end in October 2012, plans were already underway to form a new partnership to implement the accreditation system. As had been proposed in the CompHP Project, the International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE) agreed to undertake the role of the European Accreditation Organisation and detailed plans were developed to implement a system that would operationalise the CompHP Pan-European Accreditation Framework.

The IUHPE Competencies and Workforce Development Working Group (CWDG)

The IUHPE Competencies and Workforce Development Working Group (CWDG) was established in late 2012 to build on the work of the CompHP Project to further develop quality assurance systems for Health Promotion practice, education and training in the context of workforce capacity development.

The CWDG membership currently comprises Health Promotion experts from the academic, practice and policy sectors from 16 EU Member States and nine other countries. Many of the CompHP Project Partners are now members of the CWDG.

The Group aims to improve the quality and effectiveness of Health Promotion within the European Union and globally and its objectives are to:

1. Support the implementation of competency-based accreditation mechanisms for Health Promotion practice, education and training, based on the findings of the CompHP Project, at the EU level and ultimately at the global level;
2. Advocate for, and actively contribute to, the implementation of agreed competency-based standards for Health Promotion practice to improve quality assurance and continuous professional development and to facilitate international mobility of Health Promotion practitioners;
3. Facilitate dialogue and coordination between practitioners, policy makers and education providers to improve the competency and effectiveness of the Health Promotion workforce;
4. Identify and implement relevant capacity development activities for Health Promotion, including the development and implementation of Health Promotion short courses, as recommended in the IUHPE integrated Work Plan.

While the scope of the Group encompasses work at

the global level, the current focus is on the European context. The Group was successful in obtaining funding in 2013 from the European Agency for Health and Consumers in the context of the European Health Programme (EAHC Operating Grant Number 2012 3203) to implement a pan-European health promotion accreditation system, building on the work of the CompHP Project.

THE IUHPE EUROPEAN HEALTH PROMOTION ACCREDITATION FRAMEWORK

Values and Principles underpinning the System

The IUHPE European Health Promotion Accreditation System is based on the core concepts and principles of health promotion outlined in the Ottawa Charter² and successive WHO charters and declarations on health promotion³⁻⁸. The ethical values and principles underpinning the IUHPE Accreditation System include a belief in equity and social justice, respect for the autonomy and collaborative and consultative ways of working¹³. Quality concepts and principles are at the core of the System to ensure that it is:

- *relevant to the European context as it is based on wide-ranging consultation and testing and on agreed core competencies and professional standards.*
- *flexible and sensitive to diverse health promotion, quality assurance systems and educational infrastructures across Europe while being robust and practical.*
- *practical and feasible by making efficient and effective use of limited resources, for example by using an online registration system.*
- *robust as it underwent intensive consultation and is based on the CompHP Core Competencies and Professional Standards⁶ which were developed through consensus building with key health promotion stakeholders across Europe and have been endorsed at national and European levels.*
- *transparent and objective so that the requirements for accreditation and registration and how decisions and assessments are made are, transparent, clear and understandable.*

Definitions

A Glossary of terms commonly used in the System has been agreed to ensure shared understanding and facilitate communication. In the context of the System the term ‘*accreditation*’ applies to the whole quality system and to the process of recognising education and training courses. The terms ‘*registration/registered*’ apply to the

process by which individual practitioners are recognised as meeting agreed criteria.

While job titles and academic course titles in different countries across Europe may not always include the term ‘health promotion’, the System is designed to be relevant to all practitioners whose main role reflects health promotion as defined in the Ottawa Charter² and successive WHO charters and declarations³⁻⁸ to promote health and reduce health inequities by:

- building healthy public policy;
- creating supportive environments;
- strengthening community action;
- developing personal skills;
- reorienting health services.

Providers of education and training in health promotion are defined as organisations which offer courses with health promotion (as defined above) as the core content.

Practitioners registered within the Framework will be eligible to use the title ‘European Health Promotion Practitioner’ (EuHP) and accredited courses can be formally described as ‘IUHPE EuHP Accredited’ on course literature.

Using the IUHPE European Health Promotion Accreditation System

The System is premised on the understanding that health promotion practitioners require specific education and training, together with Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to maintain the particular combination of knowledge and skills required to ensure quality in health promotion practice¹³.

While the purpose of accreditation for health promotion is to provide a validated, agreed and recognised framework for quality assurance in health promotion practice in Europe, it is recognised that health promotion is at different stages of development across the region. Some countries may currently not have the resources or infrastructure required to develop and maintain national accreditation organisations. For these countries, the CompHP Core Competencies Framework¹³ may be used as stand-alone document, or in conjunction with the CompHP Professional Standards¹³, as the basis for quality assurance for practice and the provision of education and training.

For countries that are ready to participate in the System it can be used to:

- form the basis for all aspects of quality assurance in health promotion practice and in education and training;
- ensure accountability to the public through the accreditation of practitioners;
- ensure that courses offered by providers of

education and training provide graduates with the required knowledge and skills for effective health promotion practice and that awards are validated based on agreed criteria;

- facilitate movement of employment across roles, organisations, regions and countries through the use of recognised qualifications and accreditation;
- add to greater recognition and visibility of health promotion and the work done by health promotion practitioners;
- provide a reference point for employers in recruitment and selection;
- ensure that there are clear and agreed guidelines and quality standards for the knowledge, skills and values needed to practice effectively and ethically.

European and national level accreditation organisations

The devolved IUHPE European Health Promotion Accreditation System comprises National Accreditation Organisations (NAOs) interacting with the IUHPE European Accreditation Board to assure quality for health promotion practice, education and training in Europe. All aspects of these organisations, governance structures, assessment and reporting systems are currently undergoing intensive piloting.

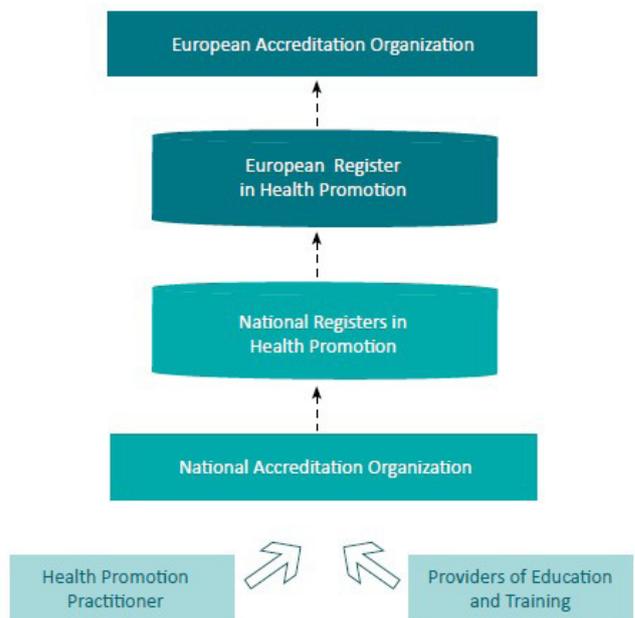


FIGURE 3. The European (IUHPE) and National Accreditation Organisations

European Accreditation Organisation in 2013, the IUHPE, through its Health Promotion Competencies and Workforce Development Working Group (CWDG), established a management and coordinating structure which constitutes the IUHPE European Accreditation Board.

The IUHPE European Accreditation Board is central to the System and will approve National Accreditation Organisations (NAOs) to grant accreditation at the European level if they meet the agreed criteria. Specialised committees have been formed to undertake specific tasks such as assessment, public relations and managing appeals should accreditation be denied or revoked. An International Expert Advisory Group will provide useful insight into the best practices of workforce development globally and technical input into the development of the Accreditation System based on their expertise and experience in the area of competency-based health promotion accreditation.

National Accreditation Organisations

National Accreditation Organisations will register health promotion practitioners and accredit Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities and courses. As there will not be a national accreditation organisation in all European countries, particularly in the early stages of implementation, health promotion practitioners from these countries can apply directly to the IUHPE Accreditation Assessment Committee for registration.

The IUHPE Accreditation Board will work with health promotion stakeholders in European countries to advocate for the development of national organisations in the context of capacity building for health promotion.

PILOTING THE IUHPE EUROPEAN HEALTH PROMOTION ACCREDITATION SYSTEM

The first stage in the piloting process for the System - the establishment of the governance structures comprising the Boards and Committees - has been completed. A detailed Handbook outlining the policies and procedures, including the criteria for assessment of practitioners and courses has been also been developed and agreed.

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A website is currently under development that will include information on all aspects of the System and links to relevant information including current research on accreditation in health promotion and related fields.

The application process for registration and accreditation within the System will also be available online. Applicants will be able to submit an application form, provide the documents required in support of their application and pay the required fee online. These systems will be tested when the first round of applications for registration and accreditation begins in September 2013.

All stages in the piloting process will be evaluated and a full report, which will inform the future implementation, maintenance and expansion of the System will be published early in 2014.

CONCLUSION

The IUHPE European Health Promotion Accreditation System is an innovative and timely initiative which builds on research and experiences of competency-based approaches to health promotion and quality assurance schemes in health promotion and related fields at national, regional and global levels.

The implementation of the IUHPE European Health Promotion Accreditation System will result not only in establishing quality assurance of health promotion practice, education and training in Europe but will also provide a template for similar developments in other regions.

The expansion of the System will be made easier by the fact that the framework and the competencies that underpin it, build on globally shared definitions of health promotion and on agreed principles and values as defined in the Ottawa Charter and successive WHO charters and declarations.

The implementation of the System in Europe will provide further insight into the complexities of accreditation across different countries, sectors and settings which will help inform the adaptations required for its successful implementation in other regions. Further information on the on the development of the System will be available on the IUHPE website later in 2013 (<http://iuhpe.org/>).

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