



# **Public Health Networks**

## **A start up guide**

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## **Introduction**

### **The need for Public Health Networks**

Recent reorganisation saw the decentralisation of health improvement staff to locality bases across the health board area. This in turn, highlighted the need for effective public health networks to ensure an equitable delivery of service from the newly devolved workforce. Virtual networks were conceived in the first instance to integrate multi-disciplinary public health work across organisational boundaries and make the knowledge and skills of geographically diverse public health specialists accessible via a common forum. The hope was that these networks would help to connect partners, encourage or facilitate a sharing of knowledge and information (both formally and informally), and allow coherent health improvement strategies to be developed and implemented at local level.

Public Health Networks do not constitute a replacement for informal networking but form a complementary communication strategy that has the potential to respond dynamically to need and to widen reach beyond otherwise unmanageable geographical or institutional boundaries. In this way, networks have the potential to bring added value to the delivery of key public health objectives.

### **Network development**

Although a considerable number of Public Health Networks are now operating throughout the UK, a definitive network model has not emerged and so networks can be configured in different ways. Those who lead the process are faced with a range of decisions about who their network serves (its potential membership), what their specific needs are and how these needs can best be met. The responses to these questions provide the context that will shape each network and the ongoing process of development.

Results of evaluative work around Public Health Networks are limited at this time but theoretical literature offers some consensus on the key considerations for any network. These include:

- network relationships (e.g. control, ownership, membership and management of networks)
- communication (e.g. pooling and sharing of expertise)
- resources (e.g. those provided and/or required by the network and by the members)

While these aspects must develop, largely, from within the network and its membership (e.g. internal relationships, management, communication, sharing of expertise), until networks are more fully established it will be difficult to draw up a model of how these aspects might be best encouraged and supported.

### **NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde**

Recent discussions amongst public health/health improvement staff in NHSGGC at early adopter network events reinforced the significance of the considerations noted above. A brief summary of key network characteristics on which there was broad agreement included the need for them to:

- reflect the strategic concerns of the parent organisation
- be supported centrally
- embrace culture change
- be inclusive by facilitating both single system and multi-agency working
- work to reduce isolation amongst the public health workforce
- facilitate the location of and access to relevant data sources
- promote information exchange
- improve communication amongst those concerned with health improvement at all levels
- develop knowledge of R&E principles
- encourage evidence-based practice
- facilitate the development of emergent leadership

#### *The role of a network*

Ideally, the work of any one network will be project based and vary in relation to the changing needs for health improvement. It should facilitate new and changing combinations of people working together; the creation of new and exploration of existing data sources; the influence of new interests and the use of evidence to inform action effectively. Working with new partners and in new ways is likely to involve network members in a range of activities some of which will have implications for skills development. This has implications beyond core network members: it

impacts on those who seek to build capacity amongst the public health workforce by providing supportive information and training resources.

The development of one of NHSGGC's *early adopter* networks identified key areas where support is required to help a network function successfully, notably IT support to utilise appropriate electronic systems; support in accessing relevant information resources, support in utilising information effectively, and co-operation from public health staff. In NHSGGC some of this support can be drawn from the Public Health Resource Unit (PHRU). This suggests that the relationship between NHSGGC networks and the PHRU is a key one.

#### *The role of the Public Health Resource Unit*

The NHSGGC Public Health Resource Unit was established in 2006 within existing resources to support the health board's public health & health improvement function and, in particular, the development of public health networks. Early evaluation of the North of Scotland Public Health Network (NoSPHN) identified four key areas of support required for the development of effective networks: learning & development; research & evaluation; information management and knowledge exchange. This informed the structure of the NHSGGC PHRU which comprises these four functions. Initial discussions around the role of the functions anticipated a range of network activities where support was likely to be required, including:

- data analysis
- database management
- development of IT skills
- website administration
- project management
- designing evaluation
- commissioning evaluation
- literature searching
- reviewing of evidence
- working with/reading statistics
- information dissemination - presentation skills
- information dissemination - writing & publication

However, at this early stage in network development it was difficult to define absolutely the level of support required and therefore what would be sustainable by the PHRU. Furthermore, if we accept that networks are by nature dynamic, then the resources required to support them will also be subject to shifts as specific project requirements emerge. For this reason it was important that the PHRU identify a range of possible working models for networks at this stage. Not only would this allow the PHRU to respond effectively to need but, if it could anticipate the kind of support required at any point in this range, then it would hope to engender a sense of

confidence within networks that they would be supported to meet the needs and interests of their members and the health improvement agenda as it changes and as new concerns emerge. However, the PHRU cannot be prescriptive in this matter and so it is equally important that it establishes effective communication with networks and that the anticipation of support needs is undertaken jointly.

NHSGGC networks have developed slowly and the full potential for dynamic working has not yet been tested. Hence, as *early adopter* networks begin to mature into *implementers*, the need to maximise the dynamic potential has been recognised. As part of this process, the PHRU has documented a strategic support package for public health networks as outlined in this start-up guide.

## **Getting started**

At health board level, networks should have a local focus working across CH[C]Ps, local authorities and other interested agencies or organisations. Initial questions to ask are:

1. who would make up the potential membership of the network?
2. what are their specific needs?
3. how can these needs be best met?

The answers to these questions provide the background that will shape each network and the ongoing process of development will be determined by the kinds of activities the network undertakes at any given time. Given the diverse and changing needs, skills, interests and situations of all possible members, a mature network will, by nature, be multi-dimensional and dynamic. It is important to remember this when working through the checklist.

## **Launching the network**

Before you officially launch the network, you should consider using the checklist within this guide to ensure you have everything in place in order to get started. You can use the Public Health Resource Unit (PHRU) for support in publicising the network for new membership and events as well as finding venues for the network to use.

## Keeping the network active

It is important to keep the network active in building and keeping momentum of projects. Recruiting new members and generating interest in the network is vital to maintain the dynamic and fluid nature of the network.

## Devolved public health network model

Figures 1, 2 and 3 - *PHRU Public Health Network Support*, at the back of this document, indicate some of the support services a network may require when performing at the various different levels. It is important to remember that devolved public health networks will respond to changing need and so may require these services in different combinations and at different times. It is worth considering the following when thinking about what the network may look like:

- Exchange of information
- Effective flow of information
- Different purpose
- Simple or complicated

The following checklist will assist in the set up and evolution of the network.

## Public Health Network Activity Checklist

(How is the network evolving?)

### Getting started

<i>Have you identified a need for a local network?</i>	For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Is there a specific piece of work or project that would benefit from collaborative work?</li><li>▪ Is there a particular problem that you are trying to solve?</li></ul>
<i>Have you generated a statement of network aims and objectives?</i>	For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ What are you trying to achieve through this network?</li></ul>

<p><i>Is there a need to share information, resources and examples of good practice with colleagues?</i></p>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Who are the colleagues that could benefit the network?</li> <li>▪ What local organisations could become involved, e.g. CH(C)Ps, local authorities, voluntary sector</li> <li>▪ Can the sharing of information and resources be supported through PHRU Knowledge Exchange and Public Health Resource Library (PERL)</li> </ul>
<p><i>Are there unmet learning needs?</i></p>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Can these needs be discussed and supported through PHRU Learning &amp; Workforce Development team?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Is there collaborative work that needs to be undertaken?</i></p>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What local organisations could become involved, e.g. CH(C)Ps, local authorities, voluntary sector</li> </ul>

**Progressing, moving on**

<p><i>Has administrative support for the network been identified?</i></p>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do you have access to administrative support?</li> <li>▪ Is the support sustainable</li> </ul>
<p><i>Has a communication action plan been implemented?</i></p>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ PHRU Knowledge Exchange can provide guidance on this</li> </ul>
<p><i>Is there access to evidence base?</i></p>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ PHRU Research &amp; Evaluation can provide access to online resources such as research guidelines, reports and documents.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ PERL can facilitate training in accessing e-library</li> </ul>
<i>Have you carried out an analysis of learning needs?</i>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Learning &amp; Workforce Development team could support this work</li> </ul>
<i>Are you prepared to share knowledge?</i>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ This could be done via network site (Knowledge Management for support with this) or via a seminar (PERL &amp; Research &amp; Evaluation)</li> </ul>
<i>Have the aims and objectives of collaborative work been outlined?</i>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do you have a broad statement of intent for the network and specific objectives of how you will achieve this aim?</li> </ul>
<i>Have you carried out a search and review of literature?</i>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have you used PERL as a resource to support you in this work?</li> </ul>
<i>Have you had consultation with local stakeholders?</i>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have you accessed PERL for resources?</li> <li>▪ Have you discussed with Knowledge Exchange?</li> <li>▪ Are you using Research &amp; Evaluation to assist in designing surveys?</li> </ul>
<i>Are you increasing capacity?</i>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are you using Knowledge Exchange to develop a contact list and become aware of other Public Health networks?</li> <li>▪ Learning &amp; Workforce Development</li> </ul>

	team could support the network in building capacity
<i>Are you undertaking or commissioning research or evaluation?</i>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have you consulted the Research &amp; Evaluation guide to commissioning research?</li> <li>▪ Have you contacted the Research &amp; Evaluation team for support in this?</li> </ul>

### **Dynamic, flourishing**

<i>Are there multiple workstrands within the network?</i>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Has there been an influence of new interests?</li> </ul>
<i>Have there been changes in network membership (fluidity)</i>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have there been new and changing combinations of people working together and the influence of new interests?</li> </ul>
<i>Has there been an extending exchange of knowledge beyond community of practice to communities of interest?</i>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Knowledge Exchange can support this work and raise the profile of the network</li> </ul>
<i>Has the PHRU seminar programme been utilised for wider dissemination of research and evaluation?</i>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have Knowledge Exchange and Research &amp; Evaluation been consulted to support with seminars?</li> </ul>
<i>Have you attained a good understanding of the evidence base?</i>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have you contacted the Research &amp;</li> </ul>

	Evaluation team for support in this?
<i>Has there been any publication as a result of the network?</i>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ PERL could be contacted to assist with special “Current Awareness” bulletins</li> <li>▪ Knowledge Exchange could assist in putting together a thematic newsletter</li> <li>▪ Research &amp; Evaluation could assist with wider dissemination via publication</li> <li>▪ Have you consulted PERL guidelines for publishing?</li> </ul>
<i>Is there use of IT for dissemination of information? (SharePoint, e-mail bulletins, newsletters)</i>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have you consulted Knowledge Exchange for set up of network site and access to SharePoint learning resources?</li> </ul>

**Contact details**

**[www.phru.net](http://www.phru.net)**

**PHRU Functions:**

**PERL**

**[perl@ggc.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:perl@ggc.scot.nhs.uk)**

**Knowledge Exchange (including IT/SharePoint/Web queries)**

**[phru@ggc.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:phru@ggc.scot.nhs.uk)**

**Research & Evaluation**

**[contactresearch@ggc.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:contactresearch@ggc.scot.nhs.uk)**

**Learning & Workforce Development**

**[phrulearning@ggc.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:phrulearning@ggc.scot.nhs.uk)**

## **References and Bibliography**

<http://www.emphasisnetwork.org.uk/index.htm>

Pensioner's forums start up guide:

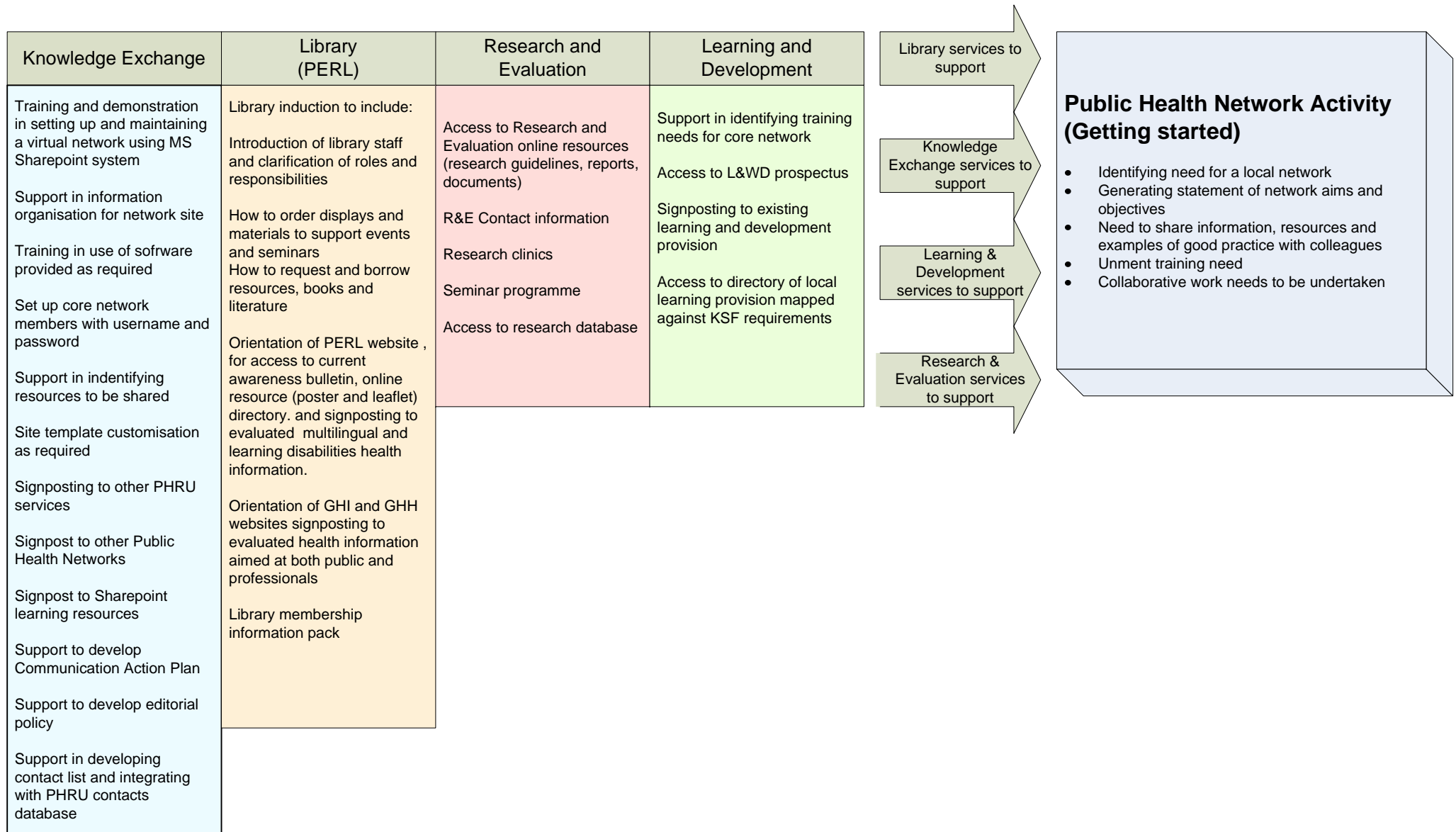
<http://www.seniorsnetwork.co.uk/forum/pamphlet2.pdf>

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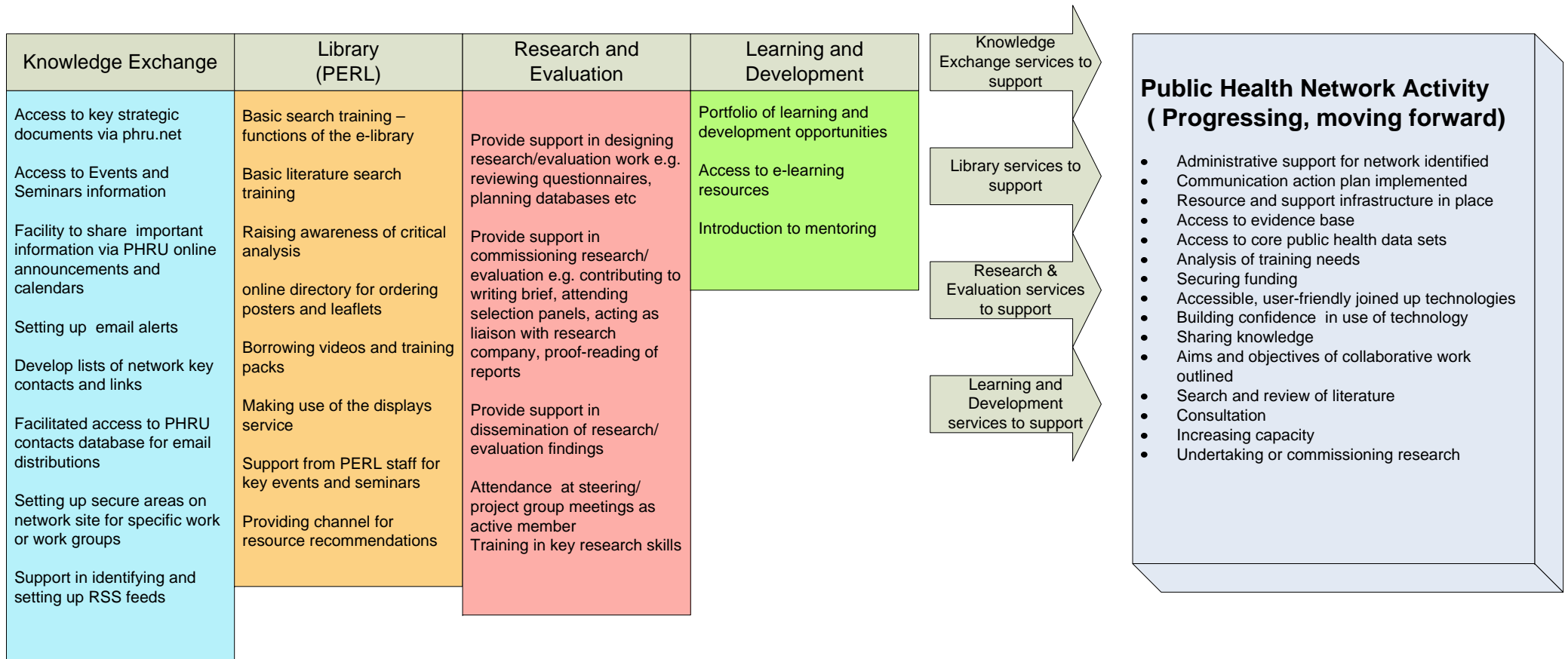
<http://www.healthscotland.com/resources/networks/scotphn/about.aspx>

<http://www.selphnet.nhs.uk/index.php?PID=0000000124>

**Fig. 1 PHRU Public Health Network Support Level 1**



**Fig.2 PHRU Public Health Network Support Level 2**



**Fig.3 PHRU Public Health Network Support Level 3**

