



Meet the Team

Ian Rampton, Port Health Officer

What were you doing before you joined Ashford Port Health?

After school, I completed an apprenticeship in a Body Shop (car repairs) going on to work for a multi franchise dealership and worked my way up to Service/Bodyshop manager.

I then followed my parents into the hospitality business, honing my skills in a very busy town centre pub/hotel, before my wife and I bought our own pub which became very successful and was great fun. It's the best job in the world but you work crazy hours. I went 3.5 years without a day off.

We sold up two weeks before the first lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic and I went off to manage a mate's pub but decided after a year of that I wanted to work normal hours and joined Ashford Port Health.

How has your previous experience helped you in your current role?

I have dealt with every conceivable type of person from Lords and Ladies to famous actors, musicians and the guy who has lost everything and just wants to drown his sorrows. You soon learn people skills!

Running a busy franchise in the motor trade certainly teaches you how to prioritise on the go. With hygiene inspections, I've run pubs and commercial kitchens so that experience was invaluable in knowing what to look for.

What do you love about what you do?

The variety of the job. You never know what you are going to come up against next! You never stop learning - and we are forever bouncing questions off each other. I can never pick what to eat when I go to a restaurant, yet with this job you have to make decisions on the go whilst backing them up with the correct bit of legislation.

Describe a typical day?

In our team, we rotate the jobs that we are responsible for. If I'm working on the Duty Mailbox (the lorries that are here on site) I work with the Official Veterinary Surgeons (OVS) and a couple of Technical Assistants who will be processing the jobs that come in.

It is up to me as a Port Health Officer to assess whether an inspection is required or a straightforward release (for the products we are authorised for) can be given. When the relevant inspection has been done, we'll validate and release the vehicle. This job can get very busy, especially in the early hours of the morning.

Other days I could be doing Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated (IUU) checks ensuring the compliance of fish that is caught. We go right back (with paperwork) to the area the fish was caught, the vessel it was caught on, then track from its starting point back to the UK checking compliance all the way. There's also checks of legal documents known as CHED-Ds, plus checks of organics and plastic melamine imports to be completed as required.

How did you train for this role?

I completed the higher certificate in Food Safety and Food Legislation at the University of Birmingham, then completed a professional discussion with the Chartered Institute for Environmental Health (CIEH). This involved carrying out close to 60 inspections on all types of food businesses, doing various write ups on them then completing a presentation to CIEH board members followed by a Q+A session.

What difference has it made being able to learn on the job?

At my age, a lot! Ashford Port Health have been very good putting us forward for the degree programme in the first place and giving us the time to study. There have been a lot of late evenings and weekends to get over the line though whilst holding down a fulltime job, which was a challenge at time, but was worth it in the end.

Tell us about a key challenge you've overcome?

I had to work out how the procedures worked for a Certification Logistics Pilot (Trusted Trader). This involved working out how to find the answers they were after. I then had to present my findings to members of DEFRA and a couple of them came down to see how it all worked. This was then rolled out nationally.

What piece of advice would you give to someone joining the Ashford Port Health team?

Prepare for the unexpected.

And for those bringing freight into the UK?

If you're unsure, ask, we're human at the end of the day with a job to do.