



Meet the Team

Andrew Burton, Port Health Officer

What were you doing before you joined APH?

I was a nightclub DJ when Covid hit. That soon stopped! So, I started working for Tesco's home delivery service then moved to the NHS test and trace team, before joining Ashford Port Health.

How has this helped you in your current role?

The time spent with Tesco came in helpful as it gave me some background knowledge on food handling. The time with Test and Trace, gave me experience of enforcement procedures.

Why you love what you do?

I came from the entertainment industry and when the Covid pandemic hit, I was inspired by all the amazing work the key workers did to change career and to do a job that gave something back to society. This job fulfils that need, I get to contribute to the nation's health and safety by doing what I do.

Describe a typical day?

That's a hard question as no two days are the same! Most days start with a handover from the previous team. We get information on consignments on site and any tricky jobs that are coming in that day, then we go through our priority lists (these direct us towards the most important high-risk jobs). During the day I will undertake inspections on consignments of fish, high risk foods not of animal origin, and consignments of organics and plastics. We also complete sampling of these commodities in line with regulatory requirements.

How did you train for this role?

To become a Port Health Officer, you must hold specific qualifications these are laid out in the Food Law Code of Practice. The route I took was to gain a higher certificate in food safety and food legislation at the University of Birmingham. Once I had completed that, I achieved the status of a 'registered food safety practitioner, by completing my Competency Development Portfolio with the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH).

This involved me shadowing food premises inspections and eventually leading the inspections. I then had to complete multiple case studies and a skills matrix. Once that was signed off, I had to attend a professional discussion, where my work was critiqued and I was quizzed on my knowledge of food safety related regulations and food borne pathogenic bacteria. I am currently in the second year of my Master of Science in Environmental Health.

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

I don't think I can do justice to how much being able to study whilst working has helped me. Ashford Port Health have helped me immensely by firstly putting me on the course and secondly ensuring that we have the time and resources to study. Senior port health officers have also made themselves available for help whenever I have needed it.

Things you've worked on in your time with Ashford Port Health?

I have been involved in detaining unfit foods that, without our intervention, would have made its way into the UK market and could have caused harm to someone.

I have also drafted and issued multiple official notices for non-compliant consignments. This is a complicated task and must be done correctly as this document may be used in court.

Another thing we do, is to help educate the agents and importers in ways to ensure that their consignments are compliant with regulatory requirements. This helps them to avoid delays to their consignments.

What's the one piece of advice you'd give to someone joining the team?

To fully embrace the culture of Ashford Port Health. We have a great team spirit where everyone helps everyone, regardless of 'rank'. We encourage personal development here and provide support to help achieve this. If you need help, ask, there's always someone willing to help.

What's the one piece of advice you'd give to those bringing freight into the UK?

Double check you have submitted all the required documents and that they are correct. One of the biggest delays for consignments is missing or incorrect documents. This is especially important on the weekends when a lot of agents' offices are closed. Ensuring you have the correct documents when you submit your CHED, ensures a smooth inspection process.