



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR  
THE PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION REVIEW  
OF THE

**Master of Public Health online**  
Usher Institute of Population Health Sciences and Informatics,  
University of Edinburgh

**Accreditation Granted January 2021 to January 2027**

AGENCY FOR PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION ACCREDITATION  
VIRTUAL SITE VISIT DATES: 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> November 2020

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## **Executive Summary**

The site visit team (hereafter referred to as "the Team") would like to thank Dr Ruth McQuillan, Dr Rose Geddes and Ms Rosemary Porteous for the logistical arrangements of the site visit and for the preparation of the self-evaluation documentation (SED), the Curriculum Validation process. In addition, the Team wishes to thank all of the participants and for their input and candour the visit. The carefully prepared and detailed documentation provided the Team with a clear understanding of the programme and a baseline from which to verify, clarify and engage in discussion and debate with various internal and external partners and stakeholders during the site visit.

### **Criterion I: Governance and Organisation of the Programme**

The online programme at the University of Edinburgh was found to have a well-established management structure and clear lines of accountability as well as established constitutional by-laws. The programme was seen as having sufficient administrative support allowing the faculty the opportunity to diversify, expand and build. Being an online programme, the organisation was found to be uniquely placed to meet the challenges of the present pandemic.

### **Criterion II: Aims and Objectives of the Public Health Programme**

The MPH is one of seven academic offerings within the Deanery which was considered by the Team to be structurally sustainable and both vertically and horizontally integrated within the University under a wider vision of post-graduate taught education. The coordination of the aims clearly streamed from the mission of the University, in terms of post graduate education, through to the objectives of the individual modules delivered. Clearly there was a strategy to develop a comprehensive online public health programme in line with the taught programmes.

The programme faculty were found to be involved in practice such as nursing, and were able to integrate their professional experience with the learning of the programme. The faculty meet regularly, once a week on occasion, which was found to be one facet of a highly collegial and appreciated faculty.

The programme was viewed as particularly progressive which was highlighted through several activities, including, practice based learning with SLICC (Student Led Individually Created Course), the incorporation of rapid reviews including the unit's COVID19 active response as an emerging issue as well as future plans to integrate group thesis work. The programme aims were tailored around a broader understanding of the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals as a global vision for the work of the University.

### **Criterion III: The Curriculum**

During the meeting with students, the body had expressly mentioned the desire for a greater sense of online community, or electronic propinquity. The programme was clearly aware of the situation and had outlined deep concerns with equity of access (by either time-zone or connectivity). There was a proactive endeavour by the programme to find solutions, such as investigating clustering the students around time zones and student peer-led synchronous learning. The Team recognised the challenges associated with providing live synchronous learning and recommended that the programme continue to strive for innovation, enabling students to communicate via distance which may, in time, resolve itself, through better global connectivity and greater familiarity with online learning, brought around in part through the present COVID19 pandemic.

The Team felt that the programme was extremely competent in enabling students to combine their research with real world interventions through SLICC which enabled students to have adequate time to learn and synthesise skills for research. The programme also integrated other methods including systematic reviews and rapid reviews into their programmatic output. The programme in Edinburgh is clearly learner-centric and allots sufficient time for student prior learning, synthesis and skills building, before embarking on research or SLICC.

The programme was seen as being tailored to the needs of their student base and includes a wide range of online focussed pedagogic activity including, discussion boards, short writing activities, personal reflection, group projects, critical writing and reading as well as practical exercises. The learning examples comprised of synchronous and asynchronous presentations including collaborate sessions which highlighted some advanced use of technology which were clear and interestingly presented and which were evidently in line with the teaching and learning strategies of the programme. The Team recognised that the highly professional finish to the learning materials was, in a significant way, attributable to the support of the programme's Learning Technologist.

### **Criterion IV: Students and Graduates**

The programme integrates student monitoring through a University wide EUCLID system (Edinburgh University Complete Lifecycle Integrated Development) and the team positively noted the inclusion of the personal tutor, Programme Director and administrator. Alongside a balance in student workload, the programme was seen to be able to maintain low attrition rates where problems were seen and caught before they escalated. The Team were informed that

structural changes concerning personal special circumstances were in place and would be moved centrally within the university. As such the programme was urged to continue providing the (highly appreciated) flexibility to students to ensure student progression.

The students appreciated and felt well supported within the programme which was commendable for an online programme. Extra student support is provided by the programme through the University.

The programme had highlighted that they had just begun their alumni surveys in regard to graduate monitoring and were overcoming issues deriving from the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations) such as an inability to contact students without their express permission. **As a recommendation the programme is encouraged to collect data and keep in contact with their alumni.** The Team also made note of the student body being presently employed and were aware that for alumni, the programme was leading to career progression.

#### **Criterion V: Human Resources and Staffing**

The programme was found to have a good and well appreciated collegiate faculty team who were appreciated at each level, from the Deanery through to the students and administration. This was considered as a major asset of the programme. The faculty clearly brought in a wealth of international experience and insights in to their teaching. This was further supplemented through the use of external expertise throughout the programme which was encouraged to continue.

The faculty stressed that at particular periods of the academic calendar there was a very heavy burden of marking which often encroached on the subsequent teaching calendar. For this, the Team recommended that the programme should endeavour to seek support for marking during those periods.

Many of the faculty are on short-term often flexible timed, Teaching Fellow contracts which are quite unique in traditional research environments. Although the contract types were seen as suitable for online delivery the Team were aware of the potential of these contracts to impact flexibility, sustainability, career progression as well as morale of the faculty. Therefore, the Team recommends attention to promotion and progression opportunities for contracted teaching faculty.

Due to the part time nature of many contracts, part-time faculty were often dedicated to teaching. This was seen as barrier for many of the faculty to develop their research careers and

the Team recommends that the programme should place focus on dedicated support and protected research time for these faculty.

The programme was very well supported through the fulltime programme administrator and learning technologist.

### **Criterion VI: Supportive Services, Budgeting and Facilities**

The programme was found to have good learning resources and student support in their use. There were some areas regarding equity which have been addressed previously. However, the Team understood that these were issues that were both outside of the control of the programme but which had been taken into consideration by the programme.

### **Criterion VII: Internal Quality Management**

The programme clearly has adequate systems in place which are tried and tested and part of a system for quality assurance cycle as a University requirement. The Team were aware of the challenges of integrating practitioner stakeholders given the programme's international character and there was an internal desire for greater stakeholder involvement. As a recommendation, the programme would benefit from greater input from practitioner stakeholder involvement as the programme is aware.

There is a system within the programme for student and staff feedback which includes staff student liaison committees (SSLC) which operate bi-annually along with module and programme leaders, a Board of Studies and Board of Examination. Although SSLC reports are published, the Team noted that there was no apparent feedback to the present or future cohort (closing the loop). **As such, the programme is encouraged to "close the loop" to ensure that feedback and any ensuing actions are fed-back to the present and future cohorts**, for example, using a "you said, we did" approach.

The programme highlighted areas in which the module content had been changed based on evaluations but had also reported low PTES (Post Graduate Taught Experience Survey) uptake which the programme is encouraged to explore opportunities to improve as part of their marketing strategy. **The programme is also recommended to explore innovative ways of engaging with students to receive their feedback.**

## Summary of Conclusions

<b>Criterion I: Governance and Organisation of the Programme</b>	
Sub – Criterion 1.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 1.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 1.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 1.4	Met
<b>Criterion II: Aims and Objectives of the Public Health Programme</b>	
Sub – Criterion 2.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 2.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 2.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 2.4	Met
<b>Criterion III: The Curriculum</b>	
Sub – Criterion 3.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.4	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.5	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.6	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.7	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.8	Met
<b>Criterion IV: Students and Graduates</b>	
Sub – Criterion 4.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 4.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 4.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 4.4	Partially met
Sub – Criterion 4.5	Met
<b>Criterion V: Human Resources and Staffing</b>	
Sub – Criterion 5.1	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 5.2	Met
<b>Criterion VI: Supportive Services, Budgeting and Facilities</b>	
Sub – Criterion 6.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 6.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 6.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 6.4	Met
<b>Criterion VII: Internal Quality Management</b>	
Sub – Criterion 7.1	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 7.2	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 7.3	Partially Met
Sub – Criterion 7.4	Met