



APHEA

Agency for Public Health
Education Accreditation

SITE VISIT REPORT FOR THE
INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION

REVIEW OF

**School of Health and Related Research,
University of Sheffield (ScHARR)**

Sheffield, United Kingdom

Executive Summary

Accreditation granted March 2018 to March 2024

AGENCY FOR PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION ACCREDITATION
SITE VISIT DATES: November 29th to December 1st, 2017

SITE VISIT TEAM:
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Executive Summary¹

The review team would like to express their gratitude for the hospitality of SchARR and the observed overall quality of the school. All the meetings were conducted in an open and congenial manner which was appreciated by the review team.

Criterion I: Governance and Organisation of the Institution

The review team found a commendable 'esprit de corps' at the school and an impressive collegiality between all staff. There was a clear approach to the organisational structure and the opening presentation of the visit clarified changes that have been recently put in place. There is evidence of self reflective processes taking place on a systematic basis within the school which have been translated into processes of change. As a recommendation the review team would encourage the school to continue to monitor the effect on the value of the changes taking place on an ongoing basis, for example, the changes to the learning and teaching committee structure. The integration of SchARR within the main university body was noted and it is evident that SchARR is well respected among the university community.

The school's ability to actively respond to the needs of the public health community was evident and was found to be a strength at SchARR. The self-evaluation report pointed to weaknesses in the representation of students and stakeholders within the management of the school and the review team would reinforce the need to strive for more formal integration of external stakeholders. This was seen to be of value to both the external stakeholders and the school. The review team would recommend exploring formalised mechanisms for strategic partnerships with local stakeholders.

During the visit and within the self-evaluation documentation process, the student representative selection process required further clarity. During the meeting with the students, they had made suggestions and recommendations which they felt could aid this clarity. The impression given was that students were selected through a central university process at the beginning of the semester to which students recommended the potential to delay this selection process until later in the first semester. This would give students more time to settle in to their course and school. The second recommendation would be to invite representatives from previous years to come and speak to the

¹ This section is to be published online at www.aphea.net and publicly available.

present cohort. Finally, a more individualised process to find representatives was recommended, for example the school could look to make further use of its personal tutor system.

Criterion II: Aims and Objectives of the Public Health Institution and its programmes

The marketing and promotion of the school was found to be comprehensive and the university and school websites were singled out for being both comprehensive and easy to navigate.

The mission of ScHARR, was found to be clear, concise and well communicated with an emphasis on research-led teaching which was deemed by the review team to be commendable. The mission statement however, might benefit from a review and refresh to ensure that the activities of the school are clearly reflected in the mission statement. The review team found evidence of the school performing many more activities than was evident within the mission. For example, the school may wish to place further emphasis and inclusion of its consultancy and outreach work.

Criterion III: Programmes

The review team noted that ScHARR had recently undertaken an internal review, the preliminary findings of which were shared with the visiting team. The programme coordination of the school was found to be impressive as was the case with the programme leaders, administrators and technical support.

The components of the curricula were found to be consistent with the final qualifications publicised for the programmes offered at the school. It was evident that a great deal of commendable work had been undertaken in the development and implementation of the MPH online and in particular the TEL (Technology Enhanced Learning) support platform design. The visiting team would encourage the school to consider increasing the range of optional modules on the MPH online programme, such as, economic evaluation, health care financing, sociology and social determinants of health and disease. The site visit team would reinforce the schools' continued efforts to

increase recruitment for the online programme. In this regard, a greater amount of central support from the university may be of assistance.

The team would recommend the school continue to ensure that their curricula are directed by research with consideration of the broader public health environment as well as individual research interests.

The final academic qualifications of the programmes were found to be adequately translated into learning objectives. It was also found that a broader range of learning objectives including additional transferable skills were included in the programmes but, following from student interviews, were not fully appreciated as skill learning by the student body. As such, the recommendation was to reference more explicitly the transferable skills (in addition to the academic skills) and to emphasise their relevance to their future work and careers within the learning objectives of the programmes.

The review team had the opportunity to physically visit some of the resources available to the school which included the Mathematics and Statistical Help (MASH) unit which was found to be a great resource for the students at the school and across the university. Several of the students mentioned the value of this resource, and it is commendable that such a resource is available supported by the university. However, the visiting team would support the school in ensuring that there is not an overreliance on this valuable resource as a substitute for internal school programme tuition in biostatistics.

Significant evidence was found of students continuing their academic studies after graduation both within SchARR and externally which demonstrated the academic value of the programmes and the collegial bond generated with the students.

The system in place at the school encompasses faculty as having the joint responsibility of being the research supervisor as well as an examiner on the dissertation. The review team would suggest that this may require some further consideration by the school to avoid any potential for conflict of interest both for or against the student. As such, more distance and anonymity in the grading procedure for dissertations might be an area the school may wish to further investigate.

In relation to their written work, science and research, students were found to be fully informed on matters of plagiarism, fraud and referencing. This was reinforced at the outset of the first semester through specific exercises provided by SchARR which was found to be commendable by the review team. The team were also conveyed a very positive impression as to the opportunities available for students to participate in international research and learning activities. Some of these opportunities were found to be reliant on the students' ability to raise funds for areas such as flights and accommodation to which the team would support the school in their search for further funding opportunities to aid equity in student participation.

Criterion IV: Students and Graduates

The review team was made aware during the visit that the school had reduced the IELTS score (The International English Language Testing System) as part of the admission criteria. The team would support the school's efforts in monitoring the impact of the IELTS score reduction on quality and student performance, particularly around the assessments, so that the school does not find it is lowering standards.

A personal tutor system is applied in the school covering both academic and pastoral care and was found to be highly commendable by the review team as well as an example of good practice. It was evident that the processes involved permeated throughout the whole of the school with all of the school faculty and administrative staff aware of the processes.

During the visit, the review team had found a very healthy relationship between the central university careers service and the school careers advice service. The team was also made aware of the various surveys and data collection processes conducted which was seen to carry the potential to enhance the school's procedures. The team would reinforce the school's ambition to use student testimonials integrated through various social media to draw on the student experience and furthermore to investigate potential to integrate that with the emerging alumni group.

In regard to the monitoring of alumni, the reviewers found evidence of the development of a new alumni group within the school. The alumni that spoke to the review panel

were very positive about ScHARR and the impact of the programmes on enhancing and safeguarding their careers. Many of the alumni interviewed were found to have continued their relationship with the school after their studies and this was viewed positively by the review team. Although embryonic, the team felt that the alumni group will require further resources and support from within the school but also centrally from the university. The school is encouraged to attempt the replication of the positive relationship witnessed between the school and university's careers service.

The school was found to operate clear exit strategies for students involving the accrue of credits toward the acquisition of postgraduate certification, diplomas and degrees. The team had also noted that there was an ongoing process of increasing the flexibility of the programmes to allow students the possibility of returning to complete the full range of credits required for the issue of a master degree. In addition, the school offered in-service training which the reviewers would draw attention to the need for ongoing funding to secure this appreciated service.

Criterion V: Human Resources and Staffing

In the self-assessment documentation, provided by the school, the reviewers were introduced to several concerns centring on human resource issues. As such, an explicit attempt was made to investigate and explore these issues. The visiting team found that some of the issues had already been resolved since the submission of the self-evaluation report, such as the recruitment pause on faculty posts during a period of review by the central university. Furthermore, the team encountered a positive working relationship between the HR responsibilities of the school and the Central university. Some of the evidence for this centred on a proactive approach to informal guidance on career progression, the availability of promotion workshops, the undertaking of women focused workshops and also the opportunities for faculty training in teaching. This was not witnessed to be a one-way relationship and ScHARR was held up as an exemplar within the central university.

The review team also found that the school had integrated a departmental staff development day which was considered to be good practice as academic, research, administrative and support staff could all participate. Also highly commendable was a

process introduced at the school for the peer review of teaching, through inviting colleagues into the teaching environments for the purpose of quality improvement. It is also noted that school had introduced a new process entitled "value the teaching" to which all faculty on teaching and research contracts were required to undertake teaching qualifications as well as encouraged to consider the centrality and importance of teaching within their careers, irrespective of whether they were predominantly researchers or teachers. Staff on alternative contracts were encouraged to undertake teaching qualifications.

The lectures of external contributors on the programmes were recorded through lecture capture and these were available for review as required. Evidence was found of staff actively reviewing and monitoring the quality of these external contributions. This was regarded as very positive and the review team would encourage the school to maintain the ongoing monitoring of external contributors. The visiting team also explored the potential for PhD students and junior researchers to be given recognition and/or academic credit for their contributions. For example, the school may wish to integrate student led teaching within a learning module or to be recorded on their Diploma Supplement for the purpose of increasing their future career options and potential advantage when applying for academic positions and their general 'marketability'.

Criterion VI: Supportive Services, Budgeting and Facilities

The review team noted that the school has both in-house library services as well as access to the central university facilities. Innovative mechanisms, such as a "live-chat" for students and librarians was also found to have been installed. Furthermore, the school employed an open policy whereby alumni could come into the school and make use of the facilities. Alumni welcomed this strategy.

The visiting team were given a presentation and oversight of the online learning platform. However, the team were unable to gain access to the on-site centralised teaching facilities as they were in use and the design layout of the teaching facilities entailed a disruption of the learning. Conversations with students, however, confirmed the adequacy of learning spaces. The team would recommend that future reviews would

include visits to the learning spaces while in session so that they can demonstrate face-to-face learning in action.

Representatives from the central university student support services were interviewed as part of the process and the visiting team gained a good oversight of the well-structured and well-resourced services available to students. It was also made clear during the visit that staff at SchARR were aware of where to direct students concerning welfare and support.

Criterion VII: Internal Quality Management

As part of the quality management systems within the school, students appreciated the mid-semester evaluations. However, during the interviews it was found that some of the students seemed not to fully comprehend that positive feedback is as valuable to academic staff as negative feedback. They indicated that they were less likely to provide feedback if they were satisfied. As such, the visiting team recommends that the school endeavours to encourage students to provide both positive and less positive feedback. The visiting team also investigated the low student experience survey feedback, as highlighted in the self-evaluation documentation. Several areas were recommended for potential future activity including, the use of both online and hardcopy survey forms, issuing the feedback request forms during the last contact session attended by the students, encouraging the student representatives to promote the survey with their contemporaries and the potential for a more individualised approach through the personal tutor system.

During the meetings it was made evident that the school maintains good informal relations with stakeholders. Many of the stakeholders were alumni from the school who view SchARR very positively. However, it was noted that there were potential issues with the formal and systematic integration of stakeholders within the school and its management. As such, the review team explored the potential for further formalisation with a caveat that the school should aim to retain many of the collegial benefits and interactions that were found within the present (healthy and positive) informal structures. Within the stakeholder meetings, the review team explored potential activities that the stakeholders may wish to be involved with. The following list are

suggestions that the school may wish to consider for further exploration. The first was the potential of a stakeholder board comprising the representatives present, who were predominantly from local government and health services, but also to consider the potential for the involvement of civic society, public health associations and other public health focus groups from the communities served by the school. Secondly, further exploration of the formal interaction of stakeholders within the existing management structures of the school, for example in teaching committees or boards. The third area would be to pursue a more systematic stakeholder needs assessment on an ongoing basis. Finally, some of the stakeholders present during interviews had highlighted the potential for work placements, volunteer schemes and internships. During the meetings the review team recognised that the school had engaged in some of these activities previously but stressed the potential to revisit them on an ongoing basis given the evident interest of the stakeholders to collaborate in these areas.

Throughout the validation process and accreditation site visit, the review team were given the impression that there is a large number of modules available. The visiting team would recommend the school review and refresh the mechanisms and strategies in place for module integration, management and mapping. This applies, in particular if there are modules similar in content or materials as well as those modules in which only a few students register. The objective would be to investigate the possibilities for module integration to avoid overlap as well as further potential efficiencies in resource management.

Concerning further quality processes, the visiting team appreciated that on the first day of the review they were presented with the preliminary results of the periodic review process undertaken by the school which demonstrated clearly that the school took the issue of quality reviews seriously. Finally, given the diversity and number of internal and external staff involved in the school the review team would encourage the school's continuing efforts to ensure standardisation of their mechanisms for marketing and quality assurance processes.

Summary of Conclusions

Criterion I: Governance and Organisation of the Institution	
Sub – Criterion 1.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 1.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 1.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 1.4	Met with comments
Criterion II: Aims and Objectives of the Public Health Institution and its programmes.	
Sub – Criterion 2.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 2.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 2.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 2.4	Met
Criterion III: Programmes	
Sub – Criterion 3.1	Met with comments
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 with comments
Criterion IV: Students and Graduates	
Sub – Criterion 4.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 4.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 4.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 4.4	Met
Sub – Criterion 4.5	Met
Sub – Criterion 4.6	Met

Criterion V: Human Resources and Staffing	
Sub – Criterion 5.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 5.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 5.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 5.4	Met
Sub – Criterion 5.5	Met
Sub – Criterion 5.6	Met
Sub – Criterion 5.7	Met
Sub – Criterion 5.8	Met
Criterion VI: Supportive Services, Budgeting and Facilities	
Sub – Criterion 6.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 6.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 6.3	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 6.4	Met
Sub – Criterion 6.5	Met
Criterion VII: Internal Quality Management	
Sub – Criterion 7.1	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 7.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 7.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 7.4	Met

