



SITE VISIT REPORT FOR
THE PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION REVIEW
OF THE

BSc in Public Health
Abu Dhabi University, Abu Dhabi,
United Arab Emirates

Accreditation Granted July 2021 to July 2027

AGENCY FOR PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION ACCREDITATION
VIRTUAL SITE VISIT DATES: 1st, 2nd, 14th & 17th June, 2021

SITE VISIT TEAM:
Professor Colleen Fisher (Chair)
Associate Professor Costas Christophi
Mr Tom Kuiper
Dr Julien Goodman (APHEA Director)

Executive Summary

The site visit team (hereafter referred to as "the Review Team") would like to thank all those involved with the site visit and for the preparation of the self-evaluation documentation (SED), the Curriculum Validation process, and candour of all participants during the visit.

Criterion I: Governance and Organisation of the Programme

The Review Team found a compassionate leadership and faculty that not only strengthened the programme but was clearly appreciated and valued by the students. The vision that the leadership has put forward was embraced by all involved within the programme and provided a sense of team spirit moving forward together.

The programme is clearly responsive to the external environment and stakeholders. The stakeholders expressed a positive desire to be involved both in the organisation and in the content of the programme. Currently their involvement is largely limited to hosting students on internships and participation and, for a few stakeholders, on the Advisory Board. The Review Team would emphasise that stakeholders, along with alumni, provide a rich source for involvement more broadly in a programme. Genuine engagement with stakeholders and alumni is advantageous in ensuring the ongoing alignment of the curriculum to the local and international circumstances. Consequently, the Review Team would suggest to the programme to consider ways to further and formally engage a broader range of stakeholders in the management and/or governance of the programme and College and to consider the appointment of influential stakeholders as adjunct / external faculty.

Students felt included in the programme processes and that they played a large role in decisions. However, it was also noted that the students, although invited into organisational committees, took on more advisory or observational roles. As such, the Review Team would recommend that the programme endeavour to be more explicit and incorporate the students actively as members in the governance at relevant departmental meetings, academic and curriculum committees, as well as the annual advisory board.

Criterion II: Aims and Objectives of the Public Health Programme

The programme in Abu Dhabi was found to be quite distinctive in the UAE as it was only one of two bachelor programmes offered and was considered a more generalist degree whereas the other was considered more focussed, concentrating on nutrition.

All stakeholders were clearly informed and aware of the aims of the programme and a strength was found in its “togetherness” with a highly motivated faculty and a student base fully appreciative of the “big family” feel to the programme.

In terms of community outreach, the programme was praised for its focus and activity in this area. The Review Team were introduced to several outreach activities and the students clearly appreciated and were enthusiastic about these, including how these could not only applied in the UAE but also how they could be translated to other countries. They were also appreciative of the skills they had learned through participating in these events. However, the element of research within the programme was less clear. The programme was commended for the adoption of research assistants, but at a programme level, especially with regard to faculty, it wasn't apparent how much dedicated focus on home-grown research there was. As a result, the programme is recommended to commit to locally based research, along with engaging students as research assistants, to strengthen and continually update the local context of the curriculum and promote the concept of public health within the community and UAE as a whole.

One of the main challenges encountered by the programme and its graduates was a lack of understanding of public health within the national setting. This permeated many areas, including recruitment of students into the programme, but notably with graduate employment as well as internships. As such the programme finds itself having to continually try and “get the public health message” across. The Review Team was very sympathetic to this situation. Some recommendations would be to develop internal research capacity as well as to ensure that the internal University structures are informed about the concepts of public health.

Finally, the Review Team found that the nexus between research undertaken by faculty and its inclusion in the curriculum was unclear. As a recommendation, the programme is encouraged to make explicit use of current faculty research as examples in courses to ensure that students are exposed to cutting edge research. An added latent advantage of this is that research findings can be translated to policy and practice through the professional work of graduates which was seen as important given the national context of public health.

Criterion III: The Curriculum

The programme was clearly multidisciplinary and the Review Team was informed how the programme was centred around the main components of public health and adhered to the National Qualification Framework.

The programme offers an internship for its students. Previously it had also provided project work but, upon the recommendations of the national accrediting agency, had withdrawn this option. Internships are coordinated centrally through the University's careers service and the programme continues to arrange memorandums of understanding with internship sites outlining the learning outcomes the students are expected to achieve. The programme also incorporates foreign internship providers (for example in Jordan) which was found to add to the internationalisation of the programme. Clearly the internships are important to the programme and they were evidently appreciated by students and employers alike.

At a national level there is little understanding of public health which raises concern over the provision of internships and the Review Team would recommend that the programme engage a dedicated internship coordinator who could ensure good fitting internships, advocate for the programme both centrally and externally, and reduce faculty workloads. In time, as alumni grow, the programme may wish to use this group as a cadre of potential employers and hosts for internships.

The programme maintained access to central services, such as visa compliance, but no explicit mobility scheme existed within the programme. The programme is working on long-term collaboration with other universities globally which should allow for student mobility. Students were also able, if chosen, to consider internships outside of the country.

Similar to many sectors in the UAE, the programme employs “expat” faculty. The benefit to the programme is that the faculty bring with them considerable international experience. Meetings with students clearly demonstrated their appreciation of the international context and how they were able to reflect on the new knowledge in their home context.

Criterion IV: Students and Graduates

A centrally based ‘Academic Success Center’ exists to assist student academic progression through academic tutors, course assistants, and an innovative peer tutors and mentoring system. The students described positively the supportive faculty, in terms of academic and career

support, with one student referring to “one big family.” Such good relations and student staff camaraderie are clearly a strength of the programme and one that should be protected as the programme and college matures.

Centrally, the university monitors their graduate population and informally, the university keeps in contact through their social networks. The Review Team emphasises that Alumni provide a rich resource in, such areas as, hosting students on internships, marketing of the programme (by word of mouth and through testimonials) and returning to the campus to provide guest lectures and / or tutorials. As such, the programme should strive to formalise alumni contact at a college / programme level through introducing an alumni association for public health students, encourage graduates to connect and keep in touch and undertake satisfaction surveys earlier than graduation.

Criterion V: Human Resources and Staffing

The faculty were found to be enthusiastic, well-informed and a qualified cadre of staff and the Review Team was impressed by the multi-disciplinary, international variation and culturally diverse composition of staff. However, as an observation, the programme faculty appear to be quite junior. To this end, the programme is recommended to consider appointing a Professor of Public Health (or similar) to drive the public health agenda and recognition within the UAE (it is worth restating that ADU is the only university with a broad public health programme) and simultaneously build research capacity and attract students. Engaging future faculty with a public health background would be beneficial as they could not only teach across a number of courses, but also to help promote the understanding of public health in the community and advance public health research.

The Review Team was also made aware of concerns over the pressures on faculty workload and would stress that the programme takes care to protect faculty and create a healthy working environment whilst safeguarding equity for students across campuses.

Criterion VI: Supportive Services, Budgeting and Facilities

The Review Team applauds the swift and suitable reshaping of the services from onsite to online due to COVID19, securing a smooth transition to online access of the facilities for staff and students.

Students interviewed expressed their content with the learning resources available, outlining that they have open access to an online library and anything not there can be requested from the library.

Due to the ongoing pandemic restrictions on travel a physical site visit was prohibited. As part of the APHEA COVID19 Response, this virtual site visit process will require the programme to host at least two members of the Review Team as a formality.

Criterion VII: Internal Quality Management

The Review Team ascertained that a solid and robust quality assurance system is in place consisting of a range of qualitative and quantitative indicators (including benchmarks) to evaluate the quality of the programme, both on the level of modules/ semesters as well as on the programme level. The quality assurance system is supported firmly via a logical and fair Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle in which the responsibilities for the different actors in the cycle are clearly described and visible.

The Review Team would recommend to safeguard maintaining the response rate on evaluations of both staff and students on the present average percentage (69% last year compared to 61% overall ADU and in the current year – to date – 75% for public health student against 63% ADU overall).

Interviews and meetings highlighted that a committed and active Advisory Board is installed (although due to COVID 19 last met in 2019). The recommendations would be to consider an annual or bi-annual onsite evaluation about the content of the programme among the external stakeholders and to encourage members of the Advisory Committee, including internship providing institutes and alumni, to act as trailblazers for a better understanding of public health within the local community.

Summary of Conclusions

Criterion I: Governance and Organisation of the Programme	
Sub – Criterion 1.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 1.2	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 1.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 1.4	Met with comments
Criterion II: Aims and Objectives of the Public Health Programme	
Sub – Criterion 2.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 2.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 2.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 2.4	Met with comments
Criterion III: The Curriculum	
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 with comments
Sub – Criterion 3.6	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 3.7	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.8	Partially Met
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 with comments
Sub – Criterion 4.5	Met
Criterion V: Human Resources and Staffing	
Sub – Criterion 5.1	Partially Met
Sub – Criterion 5.2	Met
Criterion VI: Supportive Services, Budgeting and Facilities	
Sub – Criterion 6.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 6.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 6.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 6.4	Met
Criterion VII: Internal Quality Management	
Sub – Criterion 7.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 7.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 7.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 7.4	Met