



APHEA

Agency for Public Health
Education Accreditation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR THE ACCREDITATION REVIEW OF

Master of Science in Public Health



جامعة حمدان بن محمد الذكية
Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University

Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University,
Dubai,
United Arab Emirates

Accreditation granted December 2018 to December 2024

AGENCY FOR PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION ACCREDITATION
SITE VISIT DATES: October 16-18, 2018

SITE VISIT TEAM:
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Executive Summary

The site visit Team (hereafter referred to as "the Team") would like to thank all those involved with the Master of Science in Public Health (MScPH) at the Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University (hereafter referred to as "the MScPH Programme") for the preparation of the self-evaluation documentation (SED), the Curriculum Validation process and the logistical preparations and hospitality during the visit. The carefully prepared and detailed documentation provided the Team with clear understanding of the MScPH Programme framework 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 Team acknowledges that the MScPH Programme is supported by a robust and effective system of governance and management, with clear lines of accountability. Moreover, it was evident that learners are encouraged and supported in providing feedback on the Programme, through formal and informal channels that have a bearing on its organisation and development. Feedback from learners, and from frontline Faculty staff, is clearly acknowledged and acted upon by the University and the Faculty/School. Through consultation with learners, it was evident they feel empowered to informally express their views on Programme operations, which are listened to. It is also evident learners have the opportunity to be represented at the University level. However, the Team does suggest there might be the opportunity to further improve the Programme's governance by introducing additional formal and informal mechanisms that enable the voices of learners and academic staff to be heard and represented at school and programme levels. For example, the School and Faculty could consider establishing Faculty-learner liaison and representation committees that feed into School and Faculty decision making, with learner representation at the various committees within the University.

Criterion II: Aims and Objectives of the Public Health Programme

The Programme has clear aims and objectives, which translate effectively into teaching, learning and knowledge exchange. The Team would encourage the Programme to further consider how the MScPH Programme might evolve and develop to best serve and reflect broad national and international Public Health needs and impacts, in addition to considering its significant location and responsibility in preparing learners for employment. This should involve consideration of how to further develop the Programme's important mission in

operationalising the broad social, economic and environmental determinants of health, in addressing health and social inequalities, and in seeking to address the health needs of, and the health impact pertaining to, vulnerable and minority populations (e.g. people affected by migration, displacement, conflict, violence, poverty). In light of this, the team would urge some re-consideration of changes in the current determinants focused course.

Criterion III: The Curriculum

The Team acknowledges the extensive efforts of the Faculty to develop the Programme during the years leading up to this accreditation, especially the strong commitment and dedication of academic staff and their associates, who have evolved a strong and up-to-date curriculum in partnership with key stakeholders within the region. It is evident that the Faculty is working towards greater alignment of the MScPH curriculum with international Public Health standards, which we strongly support. The Team noted the following:

1. Learners and alumni acknowledge and endorse the informal, consultative efforts of the Faculty to evolve and further develop the curriculum, with the shift from 45 to 36 credit hours, consistent with national norms.
2. The Team recognises the value of practical experience / work experience as an important opportunity for skills development among learners and therefore endorses the Faculty's prioritisation of Capstone experience and Public Health practicum within the curriculum, especially given that learners are predominantly part-time and working within the field. Although not a recommendation for change, the Team recommends that Faculty explore possibilities for giving more time to the practicum and increasing its credit bearing, and to investigate the potential to increase the range of culminating experiences available to learners.
3. Research methodologies and methods education and training are a crucial element of an MScPH programme, and must prepare Public Health graduates with competencies to be able to carry out effective primary and secondary research across a multidisciplinary field. Current research methods provision in the Programme provides a good foundation for learners who do not plan to undertake a dissertation project, particularly where opportunity is given for students to engage in applied research. The Team felt there is scope to enhance teaching of research methodologies and research project skills and thereby optimise provision for Master's in Public Health graduates through bringing research teaching "in-house", delivered by research active Faculty Public Health academics rather than by the Business School. This will enable the course to continue to evolve to best meet learning needs of public health

graduates, particularly in its delivery of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, primary and secondary research project skills and issues of research governance and ethics.

Research teaching should be underpinned by a strong Public Health ethos that is concerned primarily with undertaking social research within real world contexts and must continue to provide opportunities for students to engage in applied research. The Team acknowledges that these developments are under discussion and strongly supports innovation in this area as an essential requirement for this important postgraduate Programme in Public Health.

4. The Team encourages consideration of further development of its synchronous and asynchronous teaching methodologies to enhance the teaching and learning experience in line with pedagogical principles. This could mean introducing shorter, more active, engaging synchronous learning experiences, complemented with innovative asynchronous learning packages. This might mean providing ongoing/in-service academic support and development opportunities to enable teaching staff to feel empowered by and comfortable with online learning techniques. The vision is therefore to maintain and innovate such that the Faculty is fully equipped to further develop their world class blended learning experience where learners and Faculty are able to engage in active debate that advances Public Health learning in the UAE. This vision is evidently one that is shared by current learners, alumni and academics.

5. The Team was very impressed with the IT/Smart facilities of the University and the clear investment and infrastructure that enables blended learning to function highly effectively within the School. However, the Team would like to emphasise that teaching and learning – and therefore the human academic resource – are fundamental to the success of an online or blended MScPH Programme. Faculty academics must continue to be supported and nurtured in advancing their pedagogic, research and technical (IT) skills, capabilities and capacity. The Team would also suggest academics be supported in endeavours and opportunities to network with national and international colleagues also engaged in blended and distance learning where it may be possible to share knowledge and experiences relating to innovative online teaching and learning methodologies. Such synergy between academics who are facing similar challenges in their respective universities can bring both improvements and excellence to Public Health education within the region.

6. Information on assessment processes was included in the curriculum validation, the self-evaluation documentation as well as through interviews conducted on-site. To this end, the

Team supports the Faculty in its review and development of the new curriculum with its new assessment strategy.

Assessments were found to be varied and in line with the educational philosophy of the Programme, which centred around a multidisciplinary curriculum. Assessment processes were clear and transparent, and individual assessments were mapped against learning objectives and consistent with those of many other institutions internationally. Feedback on assessments is provided to learners within two weeks, which was found to be adequate.

The Team recommends regular, on-going review of assessment and moderation processes that demonstrate fairness and transparency in marking and feedback processes, and that considers how to further evolve measures of internal moderation (within marking teams) to manage occasions where there are marking discrepancies.

Criterion IV: Students and Graduates

It was evident that the University has robust and transparent recruitment and admissions policies and procedures. It employs appropriate entry criteria for applicants to the MScPH programme, which are monitored carefully and thoroughly within the School. Learners and alumni informed us that the MScPH Programme had provided more opportunities than they had expected, was stronger academically than they had anticipated, and had for some exceeded their aspirations and expectations.

The University has a well-developed and robust student records system that monitors learner GPAs (Grade Point Averages) effectively as they move through their Programme, and which Faculty academics have direct access to throughout a learner's time on the MScPH. In this regard, learners felt well supported by the Faculty in terms of monitoring their progress and support to facilitate their progress.

The Team investigated the support available for learners specifically in terms of pastoral and academic support provided by the Programme, School and University, in relation to health or disability related disruption and family or social difficulties that could potentially impact on academic progress. Learners did not express any concerns that their needs were not being met, and gave some insightful examples of occasions where the University had been appropriately supportive.

In terms of future marketing of the MScPH Programme, the Team recommends that this should be tailored specifically to the Programme's needs, market niche and aspirations. This is especially important given its unique qualities as a multiagency, multidisciplinary subject

area, its postgraduate status as an academic Programme, and its high salience across the professional realms of health and social care, environmental health, and policy and government. It is essential to continue to market the strengths and resilience of the MScPH Programme and to draw upon testimonials of learners, alumni, stakeholders and employment partners. This is important in terms of maximising visibility of the MScPH among external agencies, employers and competitors.

The Team commends the commitment of the University, the School and the Faculty towards being accessible and responsive to learners, especially via its state-of-the-art Smart technology. This includes the innovative SAWTI system, whereby learners, Faculty, and staff have access to a real-time, electronic wall and can post questions, suggestions, ideas, comments, complaints and issues. This system provides an important facility for learners to actively engage at any time with Faculty staff. However, the Team noted the potential for demands on staff to become heavy, even excessive, when responding to learners' needs. This may impact negatively on staff workload and their ability to participate effectively in meeting diverse and competing demands and responsibilities, especially when managing complex teaching and research responsibilities. In this regard, the Team recommends that Faculty academics continue to be supported via University workload policies such that they are able to actively support learners' needs and requests whilst being able to manage their workload demands.

It is recognised that formal and informal mechanisms for learner feedback are in place in terms of course feedback; it is suggested that the Faculty and School consider additional consultation mechanisms for acquiring learner and academic staff feedback via informal and formal committees, including learner and alumni associations for active and former learners. During discussions with learners and alumni, it emerged that the most effective medium of communication was through mobile telephone, since email addresses tend to be changed more regularly.

Criterion V: Human Resources and Staffing

The Team commends the passion and dedication of the MScPH Faculty who demonstrate a strong collegiate spirit. The MScPH is supported (and led) by a small, well-established and experienced team of academics, who are supported by an equally dedicated and experienced adjunct Faculty, who share a wealth of research and practice expertise. Moreover, the Faculty is well linked with key stakeholders across government, employment and other higher education institutions in the region. The Team recommends that the core full-time Faculty

based at the University continues to be supported and resourced as the 'nucleus' or hub of the programme, as opposed to any shift towards a predominantly adjunct, part-time Faculty. It was felt by the review team that continued integrity, sustainability and identity of the MScPH will depend upon maintaining a stable base and visibility within the University that can serve and coordinate the programme over the long term.

Priority must be given to research and knowledge exchange, which is a core function and aspiration for postgraduate education. This will, moreover, enable the MScPH to maintain real world relevance, credibility and synergy, providing opportunities for Faculty academics to continue to build their research skills and capabilities, and to engage in research careers that directly inspire their teaching and mentoring of learners. The Team acknowledges that Faculty academics are actively involved in research and knowledge exchange.

Furthermore, the Team recommends continued support for Faculty academics to be able to engage and lead in pedagogic related research, scholarship and innovation, and thereby inform and drive new developments in blended teaching and learning methodologies within the School.

Criterion VI: Supportive Services, Budgeting and Facilities

The Team was extremely impressed with the resources that support the Programme, particularly the sophisticated IT/Smart infrastructure, which is highly integrated and advanced. The Faculty and learners have excellent access to online teaching and learning systems including a well-resourced e-library and support from learning technologists. The Team would like to emphasise that teaching, learning and research Faculty are at the heart of the function of the University and that the Smart infrastructure is essentially the vehicle through which learning is facilitated. It is therefore important to ensure that academic staff are fully supported in terms of their capacity to undertake and demonstrate excellence in research and teaching, which the systems and support services are designed to facilitate.

Criterion VII: Internal Quality Management

The School has an impressive and effective system of quality management, with clear processes, policies and lines of accountability. This system operates at the University level and is accessible and applicable at a programme level. Moreover, it is clear that Faculty academics and learners understand and interpret these systems appropriately. It is evident that the MScPH Programme is served by a robust quality assurance system.

Nonetheless, it is evident that the University tends to prioritise and depend heavily upon learner satisfaction indicators rather than in seeking critical engagement and discourse concerning pedagogic and research principles at the programme level. The Team believes that learners and academic staff are primary stakeholders within the University upon which high quality learning, teaching and research depend. Therefore, their representation should be on parity with other stakeholders, especially with regard to present and future Programme, School and University developments. In this light, the School should consider innovative measures to best solicit and consult on pedagogic and research quality at the programme level, beyond the level of learner satisfaction. One approach could be to develop alternative discourse-based feedback mechanisms, using peer and learner feedback on teaching, learning and pedagogical process that is supportive and critically engaging; such innovation could inform staff appraisal, staff mentoring and curriculum developments.

Summary of Conclusions

Criterion I: Governance and Organisation of the Programme	
Sub – Criterion 1.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 1.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 1.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 1.4	Partially 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 with comments
Sub – Criterion 2.4	Met
Criterion III: The Curriculum	
Sub – Criterion 3.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.4	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 3.5	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.6	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 3.7	Met
Sub – Criterion 3.8	Met
Criterion IV: Students and Graduates	
Sub – Criterion 4.1	Met
Sub – Criterion 4.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 4.3	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 4.4	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 4.5	Met
Criterion V: Human Resources and Staffing	
Sub – Criterion 5.1	Met with comments
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 with comments
Sub – Criterion 7.2	Met
Sub – Criterion 7.3	Met with comments
Sub – Criterion 7.4	Met