



APHEA

Agency for Public Health
Education Accreditation

SITE VISIT REPORT FOR THE
INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION

REVIEW OF

Netherlands School of Public and Occupational Health (NSPOH)

11 Churchill Avenue,

3527 GV, Utrecht,

The Netherlands.

Executive Summary

AGENCY FOR PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION ACCREDITATION
SITE VISIT DATES: May 11-13, 2016

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Executive Summary

Criterion I: Governance and Organisation of the Institution

NSPOH is a well-run organisation with strong lines of communication which the accreditation team viewed very positively. Student representatives described feeding into NSPOH at different points but the accreditation team felt there were even more opportunities in terms of where and how students could input into decision making processes. The office environment which has been created in Utrecht works very well and feels a creative and positive environment. NSPOH has developed positive relationships with students and stakeholders and the transition to the building in Utrecht ensures accessibility between students and staff. There was a welcome openness and the management structure did not appear overly hierarchical, which led to staff and stakeholders feeling able to approach the Director of NSPOH for example.

Professional stakeholders are positively involved in school governance activities but there may be areas involving relationships with professional municipalities which could be strengthened. The academic work placements seem an exciting development in terms of practical training environments and there may be further opportunities to strengthen the links in this area. NSPOH may wish to consider the formal involvement of the students on the board and whilst this may not be possible for some students studying more intensely, others studying over longer time periods could contribute potentially. Feedback from student representatives suggested that the different course cohorts of NSPOH had not had opportunities to meet together or engage collectively in activities such as feedback and governance. This may be a further area to explore, to enhance student interaction and involvement.. Of particular note was the very positive responses the alumni representatives of NSPOH gave in relation to how their respective programmes had enhanced their career prospects and trajectories. NSPOH may wish to consider drawing on such alumni testimonies and examples of how their training and education as impact case studies to further promote courses.

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

A new strategy was still in the process of being developed for NSPOH at the time of the accreditation visit, and the 2013 to 2015 was used for reference pending its replacement. This revealed a very clear and explicit mission for NSPOH but it was noted that some aspects could be enhanced particularly in the area of internationalisation. It was noted by the accreditation team that although many examples were identified of NSPOH providing teaching that had an international dimension (through the use of international speakers and experts and students at the summer workshop) much more could be done to enhance this across curricula. Of particular note was that teaching is currently in Dutch and there may be many opportunities to expand the student body if Anglophone teaching were used.

It was evident that NSPOH had considered the role of academic research in relation to its educational provision although currently the emphasis remains on pedagogy and practice. There may be further opportunities to enhance the research activities of staff who provide teaching. Although arguably reflecting the organisation of public health in the Netherlands and its workforce, it was noted that there was an emphasis in NSPOH to the provision of medically related teaching. Given the diversification in the public health workforce globally, there may be opportunities to build on this further within NSPOH. NSPOH was noted to be responsive to changes in knowledge within the curricula with examples noted of addressing contemporary issues such as the Zika fever, migrant health and antimicrobial resistance. To ensure this continues and indeed enhance it further, it was felt that future strategic planning could involve external stakeholders more, particularly in areas such as the public health systems and youth services.

Continuing professional development provision had begun to use blended learning which was welcomed by the accreditation team although a more strategic rather than current organic stimulus for this would be advised. Some multidisciplinary training involving different health professionals was identified but there may be scope for NSPOH to enhance this and, again, align itself with pedagogical evidence of the benefits of such training in health and related settings. In this respect, NSPOH was viewed as having a very significant potential role to influence the direction of future workforce development and structure.

Criterion III: Programmes

The team had a positive perspective on the programmatic output of the school which included a focus on transversal (transferable) skills. The alumni session in particular gave a strong sense that the school was helping to develop people after studies which was encouraging, particularly in vocational settings. From the current student body there was a reassuring sense that the school is offering personalised support, which begins before the students apply to the school and includes an understanding of what was involved in the programme. This came across as a responsive and sensitive way of interacting with students.

Specialist training was well received by associations and professional groups. The MPH stream in particular was viewed positively but there appeared to be opportunities to increase the numbers of students on this programme of study. Phase 1 was seen as a core part of the mission and was working well with integration being a key aspect and, as such, the accreditation team had no concerns. A developmental opportunity exists in increasing teaching for nursing staff, either individually or linked to previously mentioned interdisciplinary teaching activity. Developments in the curricula for health insurance physicians and occupational health were identified positively, illustrating a responsiveness to feedback. There appeared to be further opportunities to expand teaching and training to staff working in youth health services, based on relevant marketing and analysis.

The research dissertation programme came across well and the team felt that the changes over the past two years had been helpful, such as the peer-to-peer work which was deemed excellent. However the accreditation team felt that there were issues around the governance of research, in particular ethical review and approval, which was noted to be improving but still reliant on students' workplace procedures and supervisor oversight. The team thought that, to ensure that projects progress smoothly, the school would find it helpful in having more control and oversight over the ethical approval procedures. The use of workplace supervisors was viewed positively in one sense, in giving students real-world experiences, but could potentially lead to variability in procedures, ethics and governance and a lack of clarity in relation to overall responsibility for these research aspects? The team found that the school had integrated a team of three staff to conduct the research trajectory which was a good development

but again questions may be raised over who has the ultimate responsibility for governance of research undertaken by students.

NSPOH demonstrated a welcome response to new teaching innovation which was appreciated by the team. The team had seen clear examples of innovation in teaching such as blended learning which was going very well. The accreditation team received feedback that NSPOH had supported and encouraged students to present at international conferences which was considered an excellent activity in supporting and empowering students to disseminate their work.

It was noted that currently there may be too much separation between the different streams and programmes within NSPOH and opportunities to integrate these more. This reiterates the point made elsewhere that NSPOH has a potentially important role in influencing future workforce practices through inculcating and championing new modes of learning together across disciplines and professions. Integration between health insurance and occupational physicians was seen as an obvious example of where this could be further developed.

The team witnessed the wide range of continuous professional development (CPD) activity which can be seen positively as response to the market needs but arguably there was a sense that the output was very wide. In terms of organisation the resources this requires may be inefficient and an area that the school may wish to focus upon and review the current offering. This was linked to the notion of extending to other markets especially within the English-speaking markets where CPD training and blended learning could be provided for non-Dutch trainees. Another example was the three-day summer school provided by the school which demonstrated that the school had an intention or at least ambition of pursuing an international market which was seen as an important opportunity for the school to consider further investment.

The accreditation team had explored the inclusion of primary care and felt that this aspect of public health was not emphasised much currently and this may provide avenues for the school to explore further in terms of marketing analysis making links.

The supervision models of the school had been viewed positively and found to have been widened from a focus on secondary epidemiological projects to more primary

empirical work which was welcomed by the team. The team questioned whether this aspect could be enhanced further.

The linkage to academic workplaces was seen as an exciting issue as they help bridge research and practice and the team felt that the school may wish to consider building upon this model further.

Criterion IV: Students and Graduates

It was evident from the meeting with the alumni that they were very proud to have studied at the school and as an organisation. There are several other areas the team wished to highlight including the emergence of international research presentations as well as the personalised support introduction into the course which was seen as reassuring to prepare the students. The team developed a sense that the school and its setting is specifically designed to reduce barriers between staff and students. This gave an overall impression of a flat structure where faculty, staff, students and participants were brought together.

Given the positive feedback from both the students and alumni the school may wish to consider the use of personal testimonies on the website, for example to highlight and parade the positive viewpoints which clearly came through during the meetings. The school may also wish to contact and re-contact alumni in order to highlight these testimonies. With regard to the previous areas of integration and multidisciplinary, the students also felt they would benefit from being exposed to some of the areas that were contained within the different streams and programmes of the school.

Criterion V: Human Resources and Staffing

The team recognised and highlighted how well the school worked with regard to resourcing and staffing. For example, the newly introduced staff who are dedicated to supporting the research trajectory was seen as a positive response to support projects and research. There was also evidence found of staff support budgets where staff could undertake courses and training with financial support from the school. NSPOH staff

expressed how well they felt they were able to talk to, and gain support from, peers and also management staff. The accreditation team felt that the NSPOH should be particularly commended for promoting this environment.

A further recommendation that relates to staffing concerned important opportunities to promote much more the range and experience of the staff working at the school, particularly through enhancements to the NSPOH website which currently provides only limited contact details for staff. This would demonstrate the strengths contained within, from teaching and research interests as well as the links within the wider public health community.

Criterion VI: Supportive Services, Budgeting and Facilities

The building that houses the NSPOH was considered by the team to be very open and creative space which facilitated communications and relationships. One of the areas that had been acknowledged was that the school was a non-for-profit organisation which remained within a market led setting. If the school were a commercial enterprise they would have installed account managers whose responsibility would include seeking out new business contracts. It was unclear to the visiting team where this responsibility lay within the school at present and whether this responsibility lay directly with the director or distributed throughout members of staff. This is an area that the school may wish to consider for future activity exploration.

A particular area of concern noted by staff and students was the lack of access to electronic journals for some students. The provision of electronic literature is a requirement for the employers within the medical speciality programmes which ensures the majority students were able to access these resources through their workplace, However, for some students the situation vis-a-vis their employers remained unclear and some students were found using ad hoc arrangements with colleagues, friends and family. It was noted by the team that the NSPOH is taking steps to quantify the extent of this problem, and are addressing this situation in the short, medium and long term.

Changes in income streams over recent years were noted by the team, which raised questions as to whether the school could focus on developing areas such as primary

care or with other professional specialities. The evident links within the healthcare system as well as physically within the larger building structure where many health associations also have offices were considered as opportunities to explore. In addition to the educational aspects of the school the team also questioned whether the school could consider using the strength of its staff to develop the potential of a consultancy income stream.

The team felt that the school was potentially by nature inclined to be rather modest. Whilst self promotion may feel a somewhat alien concept the team concluded that the school could do more to profile their work. A good example of this was seen as the above mentioned summer school and the staff profiles on the website.

During the meetings it was discovered that the school issued computer tablets to the participants and students and this had continued for some years. Although the team appreciated that this was a positive attribute in the past it was also acknowledged that its efficacy was rather questionable in more recent times given that many of the students and participants possessed their own devices and appeared able to access course-related content satisfactorily. As such it was felt that the school should reconsider the distribution of the hardware and reconsider distributing the budgets elsewhere.

Criterion VII: Internal Quality Management

There was clear evidence of quality processes with committees, scrutiny and external input. The formative feedback processes in place were found to be going well and evidence had been provided of recent changes within programmes where there had been issues. The only comment the team felt necessary was to focus on the development of the new strategic plan.

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
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 with comments
Sub – Criterion 6.3	Met
Sub – Criterion 6.4	Met
Sub – Criterion 6.5	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