

Educational Evaluation 2020/2021

Reviewer report of the Master's
Programme in Global Health at
Uppsala University

Introduction

The review committee consisted of the following members:

1. Linnea Berg, student representative
2. Erik Fries, Professor emeritus
3. Peter Korp, Associate professor
4. Asli Kulane, Associate professor
5. Lars Löfquist (chair.), Associate professor
6. Katarina Pettersson, Associate professor
7. Elling Tufte Bere, Professor
8. Malin Wallgren, student representative

The committee has based its report on an analysis of the department's self-evaluation of the program as well as other documents including master theses, course examinations, list of type of teachers' position and time invested in teaching. The review committee also carried out a site visit including interviews with students, alumni, teachers, the Programme Director, head of the department and administrative staff, on October 1st 2021.

Summary

General strengths

1. The programme is well thought through and the staff has a clear view of strengths, weaknesses and possible improvements.
2. The programme is highly appreciated by the students.
3. The staff has a strong scientific base.
4. There is a substantial methodological focus in the programme.
5. The programme includes numerous teaching methods and forms of examination.

General weaknesses

1. The relationships between different levels of learning outcomes (i.e. general for all master programmes, programme, semester and individual courses) are not entirely clear.
2. Ad-hoc teaching staff reduce stability of the programme.
3. Differences in educational background amongst students make it hard for the teachers to set an appropriate content level for the teaching.
4. There is a gap between knowledge expectations in the programme and the skills that future employers value.
5. The students' experiences of internationalisation can be strengthened.

Suggestions for improvement

1. Clarify the relation between learning outcomes on different levels with the links from the general outcomes to the specific course.

2. Strengthen stability in teaching staff, no ad-hoc teachers but permanent teaching staff (including *biträdande lektorer*).
3. Implement more stringent selection criteria for student applicants to ensure adequate levels of English, for example interviews.
4. Promote student exchange to increase internationalisation.
5. Conduct a stakeholder survey to identify an optimal balance between theoretical knowledge and practical skills sought by future employers.

The 11 aspects of quality

1. That the study programmes shall comply with the provisions of the Swedish Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434) and the outcomes described in the Qualifications Ordinance, Annex 2 to the Swedish Higher Education Ordinance (SFS 1993:100), as well as programme-specific objectives, i.e., that actual learning outcomes correspond to expected learning outcomes.

Strengths:

- Courses are explicitly planned according to programme learning objectives.
- Learning objectives are clear according to the student-feedback.
- The whole curriculum has been reviewed in 2018.
- The curriculum describes a good process after the 2018 review. E.g. inclusion of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- The programme does not attempt to meet all the SDG but focuses on the relevant ones.
- The teaching staff explicitly seeks to align learning objectives with Swedish Higher Education Ordinance.

Weaknesses:

- The diversity of the student group's education backgrounds makes it difficult to teach the content at an adequate level.
- There is no exact overlap between the learning outcomes in the course syllabuses online, the learning outcomes in Self-Evaluation Appendix 1 nor the course guides.
- The relationship between SDGs and the learning outcomes are somewhat unclear.
- There seems to be partial overlap between semester 1 and semester 2 reported by students.

Suggested improvements:

- Clarify the relation between semester learning outcomes in the syllabus, the learning outcomes in the Self-Evaluation and learning outcomes in the course guides. Strive to use the same formulations everywhere.
- Clarify the transition between semesters, and the difference between semester 1 and semester 2 to the students.
- Review how the learning outcomes of each course is relevant to the SDGs.
- Consider implementing even more stringent selection criteria for applicants to ensure an adequate level of English, such as a short interview.
- Consider adding a sustainability focus beyond "Agenda 2030" but also clarify what is clearly beyond the programme's expertise and focus.

2. That the content and teaching activities are founded on a scientific basis and proven experience.

Strengths:

- Strong scientific basis among the staff.
- Course goals and content are based on global health core competencies.
- Reading lists with updated research articles.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bloom's taxonomy is used to identify the learning outcomes for the teaching. • The didactic approach with critical thinking and "out-of-the-box" thinking. • PhD students present their projects providing an opportunity for the students to obtain knowledge about up to date research. • Students have influence on the course literature.
Weaknesses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There seems to be no systematic strategy to continuously assess and develop the teaching skills of both permanent and temporary staff. • Some teaching challenges are not directly addressed as didactic challenges linked to didactic solutions. E.g that students are not reading the literature is a common issue. • There is a gap between the complexity of tools presented in the methodology course and the statistical skills of the students. • Teachers experience that it is difficult to find unbiased and updated reading material on an appropriate level.
Suggested improvements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage all staff to take part in regular pedagogical and didactic workshops. • Conduct training on didactic methods to meet particular teaching challenges. • Consider using other types of statistical software. R might be difficult for many and especially those without good knowledge about this kind of programme. • Provide study questions for the students to consider in reading the literature.

3. That teaching focuses on the learning of students/doctoral students.

Strengths: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The content is relevant and interesting to the students. • The programme includes numerous teaching methods and forms of examination. • Students are trained in their ability to give feedback through peer-review. • Students are provided feedback on graded assignments. • The student programme handbook is a good tool to provide clear expectations. • The Internship course is appreciated by students and by employers. • Tutor groups have been established to provide support to students. • A clear majority of the students in each cohort completes their thesis and apply for the degree.
Weaknesses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are critical towards the amount and forms of group work. • The module "Theory course" seems too narrow since theories are included in all the courses to some degree which should be clear to students. • Repetition of content in different courses. • Some students are unsure of the assessment criteria and content of examinations (especially when courses may deal with a wide variety of topics).
Suggested improvements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the beginning of the first course the students should get more detailed info about what they are expected to learn - one way of indicating this is making the learning outcomes and examination criteria clear to the students, another way is providing past examination questions. • Consider changing the name of the module "Theory" to "Elective courses". • Group work is used throughout the programme, however, it is relevant to consider less group work and more individual type of assignments.

- Clarify the benefits of peer to peer learning and group work to students.

4. That the intended learning outcomes are examined using appropriate methods and in a legally certain manner, and that progression is ensured.

Strengths:

- The progression in the programme is clear: For example, the first semester is about facts and the second semester is about analysis.
- The progression is particularly clear in some courses, such as Method course 1-3.
- Survey of prior knowledge of students is made.
- Clear grading criteria for the master thesis.

Weaknesses:

- Even if there is a clear focus on critical thinking skills in the programme, it is not entirely clear how these critical thinking skills are progressing in the programme.
- Group work, how it is conducted and examined.
- Some students want a clearer progression within the introductory courses (where a large variety of topics are covered in quick succession).

Suggested improvements:

- Clarify how critical thinking skills should be improved during the programme, for example by applying Bloom's cognitive taxonomy and communicating this to students.
- Regarding group work, make sure individual contributions are examined.
- Improve balance between students with little vs. or more prior knowledge, for example by introducing different difficulty levels in the examination in each course.

5. That staff involved in the study programme possess relevant and up-to-date expertise in the subject matter, that they have pedagogical and/or subject didactic expertise, and that there is sufficient teaching capacity.

Strengths:

- Strong scientific base of the staff.
- Teachers are researchers in the field of Global health, and their research is encouraged.
- Most of the staff have permanent positions.
- Most teachers have long experience of higher education teaching.
- Teachers support each other and have a well functioning team.

Weaknesses:

- Teaching staff is partly engaged ad hoc.
- Teachers' career development can be clearer and promoted.

Suggested improvements:

- Continue to strengthen the programme by ensuring teaching capacity in core areas.
- Clarify career development for the teachers.
- Actively promote teachers to apply for the "Excellent teaching" promotion.
- Promote ERASMUS and Linnéus Palme scholarships.

6. That internationalisation, international perspectives and sustainability are promoted.

Strengths:

- Programme is given in English.
- Explicitly includes the SDGs.
- International students are admitted on separate dates to give time available for visa etc.
- Students and staff are diverse and are encouraged to share personal and professional experiences to provide global experience.
- The cultural diversity within the student group is highly valued by both teachers and students.
- The programme is international in both structure and topic.
- Staff have used opportunities for international teacher exchange.

Weaknesses:

- The SDG's are included in the programme, however, it is unclear how these goals are included in the programme, on what level they are analyzed and how the goals are linked back to the different courses in the programme.
- The students' perspectives on internationalisation in and beyond the programme could be investigated in more detail.
- Even though the programme is international, the actual internationalisation in the form of student exchange is limited.

Suggested improvements:

- Make it clearer how the critical discussion about Agenda 2030 is included in the programme.
- Increase the sustainability focus, beyond Agenda 2030, but also clarify what parts that are beyond the programme.
- Promote ERASMUS exchange, Linnéus Palme scholarships and Minor Field Studies among the students.
- Invite guest lecturers to provide more perspectives.

7. That a gender equality perspective is integrated into the study programme.

Strengths:

- Gender perspectives are included in the in many different ways both in being a topic in global health but also in the actual running of the programme.

Weaknesses:

- Mainly female students and no clear plan to recruit more men.
- Handling of cultural/linguistic differences not mentioned (see 10. too),
- Students "often not aware of the formal mechanisms to handle discrimination and harassment" (p.18)
- The role of culture and gender relations is not captured in the learning outcomes in the course syllabuses for any of the four semesters.
- It is unclear if and how relevant non-public health research is used to address cultural differences.

Suggested improvements:

- Consider strategies to recruit more men
- Information about procedures to counter discrimination should be easily available.

- The cultural dimension of gender relations and how these can be addressed should be included in learning outcomes and examined.

8. That the study programme meets individuals' and society's needs for learning and professional knowledge and prepares students for future careers.

Strengths:

- The programme has a concrete and valuable connection to the alumni and to employers which is shown in the Alumni survey.
- Students have the opportunity to discuss issues regarding future employment, professional knowledge and recommendation letters.
- The focus on the global health core competencies is a smart strategy for students internationally "competitive".
- There is an opportunity for doing an internship in the programme.

Weaknesses:

- The Alumni report for the self-evaluation report shows mixed results. Several alumni are dissatisfied with the balance between theory and practical skills. Unclear what they would like to improve.
- There seems to be a gap between the needs of employers and the programme's content and theme. Employers ask for more generic skills in administration and methodology, but the programme is about global health.
- Some students would like to see more elective courses to better find a fit with their study level and previous studies.
- Students have expressed that the teaching in software resources and methods is too basic and brief.

Suggested improvements:

- Continue to strengthen students' preparation for work life, career opportunities etc. throughout the programme.
- Review employer expectations about the balance between global health knowledge and generic skills.
- Consider more ways to include elective courses and/or adaptation to the profile of particular student groups.

9. That students/doctoral students have influence on the planning, implementation and follow-up of the study programme.

Strengths:

- Programme staff seeks student feedback to improve the programme.
- Student representatives meet monthly with the programme coordinator.
- Student representatives are included in the Medical Master Council.

Weaknesses:

- There is a difference between formally engaging the students and actively promoting their engagement. The first is clearly done in the programme but it is less clear to what extent the second is done.
- Unclear if students have easy access to course evaluation reports.
- Unclear how students can affect the teaching in the programme and MMC.

Suggested improvements:

- Actively engage students in other parts of the programme such as course planning and in feedback sessions.
- Make sure that course evaluation reports are easily available to all students.
- Showcase examples of how students can affect the programme.

10. That all students and doctoral students are provided with an accessible and fit-for-purpose study environment.

Strengths:

- University services are greatly appreciated, especially Student Health Services, sun-therapy room, and disability support.

Weaknesses:

- Students experience that there is some lack of information, about courses, reading lists etc.
- No permanent physical place where the students can meet informally (each other and tutors) outside of classes.
- Group work is consistently used but it is unclear how it is supposed to work.

Suggested improvements:

- Consider inclusion of student support services on course pages.
- Supply reading lists earlier.
- Provide clearer formal guidance for how group work is supposed to work.
- Investigate options for moving the Department to place with space for teaching or creating an on-campus meeting-area for students and teachers

11. That continuous follow-up and improvement of the study programme is carried out.

Strengths:

- There are regular teacher meetings to develop the programme.
- There is an active use of course evaluations and ways to seek students' input for the programme.
- Collaborative work has improved students' experiences with the research method courses.

Weaknesses:

- Limited collaboration between students and staff to jointly identify avenues for improving the program.
- Limited participation in the course evaluation survey.

Suggested improvements:

- Consider physical evaluations or a common time-slot for evaluation in the last session of a course in order to improve the number of evaluation answers.

Closing reflection

The reviewer committee has focused on the overall strengths and weaknesses in the master programme. One issue that makes it more difficult to analyse the programme's development over time is that the programme has recently changed focus from International Health to Global Health. Moreover, the latest student cohorts have been affected by the pandemic and the fact that classes were conducted online. These two factors will affect this review.

We can note that the self-evaluation report is very detailed, consistent and well-written. The additional documents of course examinations examples and thesis examples show that the master level teaching and learning is sustained. The report notes a wide range of issues in relation to the 11 quality aspects including both strengths and weaknesses. We take special notice of the lists of the improvements that are already identified in the report. The interviews with teaching, administration and students provided an important addition to the written report and provided important insights. It is clear that the programme has a strong institutional home and a dedicated staff which is the foundation for keeping the education sustainable.

We have found that there are some gaps between the teachers, administration, students and alumni in how the programme is understood and what parts can be developed more. One such gap is the relation between expectations in the programme and future employees. Some employers seem to be most interested in the generic skills of the students and the students themselves would like to see more preparation for the post graduate situation. We believe that this is a dimension that needs to be analyzed in detail to find ways to keep the programme relevant also in the future.