

Program Evaluation of master's program in Public Health at Sahlgrenska Academy (submitted 2023-10-18)

Evaluation team members: Flemming Konradsen (Professor in Global Health & Director of the School of Global Health, University of Copenhagen), Helena Johansson (Docent vid institutionen för socialt arbete, Göteborgs Universitet), Elisabeth Bengtsson (Senior Advisor/regionutvecklare in Public Health/Ledningsstöd, Västra Götalandsregionen), Niklas Zethraeus (bedömaregruppens ordförande, Docent/programdirektör för Mastersprogrammet i hälsoekonomi, policy och management, LIME, Karolinska institutet).

The assessment group's statement is based on course material and conversations with the program director as well as on interviews with program staff in connection with a site visit in Gothenburg (12-13 October 2023). The purpose of the external assessment is to determine whether the program meets eight quality criteria, which have been established in the University of Gothenburg's quality criteria policy (see below 1-8). For each quality criterion, there are 1. reflections, recommendations (strengths and shortcomings) and 2. proposed solutions from the assessment group (i.e. how any shortcomings can be addressed).

Quality criteria 1. Achieved study results match intended learning outcomes and the qualitative targets of the Higher Education Ordinance. *Att de faktiska studieresultaten motsvarar lärandemål och högskoleförordningens Examensmål.*

Reflections, recommendations (strengths and shortcomings)

A strength of the program is the diversity of the program, including the international study environment, and that fact that students come from different parts of the world with different working experience, competence, and educational background, which implies a great potential to learn from one another and to share different perspectives. This can be further utilized in the teaching during the program through deliberate pedagogical efforts. The pedagogical approach of teaching in the program, including the requirement of active participation of students and group work, needs to be introduced to the students during the start of the program. (see also assessment criteria 2).

A challenge of the current program relates to the very different prior competencies and skills students have at the start of the program in e.g., statistics, epidemiology, economics, and qualitative methods. In the future, the program needs to a greater extent to set aside time to individualize the teaching so that every student's competence is sufficiently high in different subject areas, so all students have the same possibility to reach the learning outcomes. Although students are encouraged to prepare courses before the courses start (e.g., when preparing for biostatistics), time needs to be spent during the courses as well. If time needs to be spent on repetition, which otherwise could have been spent on the course content, this may also have an impact on the possibility of reaching the learning outcomes of the program. Some students also express worries that if the requirements are set too low this will affect the quality of the program. It is also viewed as challenging by teachers on how to balance the extra time needed to improve the skill set of students to a reasonable level without having consequences on the learning outcomes in the different courses.

Another weakness of the program is the relatively high drop drop-out high rate (about 30%) during the first year. This negatively impacts the quality of the program. Further it affects the students' perception of the program. If there is a group of students that are not committed and motivated to continue the program this may have an impact on e.g., group work of the program, and the ability to reach the intended learning outcomes also for students not dropping out from the program. Furthermore, during lectures (not mandatory) there usually is about 40-50% attendance.

There are also concerns expressed by teachers about the administrative burden and the need for additional support (e.g., with administration tasks in Canvas and Ladok). At the same time administrators (program and course administrators) express concern about the high administrative burden, which, e.g., can be explained by the high number of courses available for students, particular during the third semester (different internships, and elective courses). There is a high turnover of administrative staff, program leader/coordinators, and to some extent also among teachers. This may to some extent be explained by an inadequate support system.

Another concern relates to weaknesses in the application process. Only 10% of students applying to the program are eligible and finally assessed for admission. E.g., last year 80 out of 800 students were eligible, whereof 40 started the program. It needs to be decided by the program leadership (with the support from admission unit) what assessment criteria and the level of requirements the program should apply in the future application process.

A weakness of the program is that there is no clear information about what is expected or required from selecting a specific track of specialization (health economics or health equality), i.e., students

can choose among many different courses and internships (on third semester). Students can apply for an internship during the third semester (15 or 30 credits). Even though students gain working experience and can apply what they have learned during the first year of studies, this comes at the cost of gaining less insight and knowledge about methods, principles and theories related to the different subject areas, which may imply lowering the chances of students to reaching the learning outcomes and the objectives of the program (e.g., to critically review, evaluate and analyze).

Proposed solutions from the assessment group (i.e. how any shortcomings can be addressed).

We recommend the program leadership to initiate a process to clarify the vision, goal, and specialization of the program. Clarify what methodological knowledge and skills the students are expected to gain during the program. This should be discussed in the context of other master programs given at the university and elsewhere, and should include future employers, taking into consideration the current and future needs of the labor market. The process of updating the current program may result in a full reform of the learning outcomes and vision of the program.

We suggest the program, for each specialization, to do a mapping of how intended learning outcomes (ILOs) are reached by the teaching activities and ways of examination and to view the link of ILOs to the local goals (for each track) and global goals of a master's program in general. We suggest an improvement of the information about the expectations in beginning of program, and to clarify the tracks of specialization for the health economics and health equality specializations. It can also be considered to add the track of specialization to the graduation certificate. The prerequisites to be eligible for the degree project course should be revised. E.g., if doing a degree project within the health economics area the two health economics courses should be mandatory and a prerequisite.

It also needs to be further clarified the reasons for the high drop-out rate. In this process it is important to closely monitor (e.g., by scheduling meetings with students not continuing the program) and follow-up the study results during the first year (e.g., by the study counselor and program leaders). A high drop-out rate may have severe consequences on group work and program quality.

The application process of students has to be reconsidered. The admission of students could be more selective, and it can be considered to modify this process and put more weight on the motivational letter or restrict the number of student places. Further it can be considered to use individual tests, interviews, specify eligible pre-requirements, and live language tests. This may reduce the high drop-out rate during the first year and will improve the quality of the program.

It should be further clarified, in job descriptions, the roles of different people involved in the program to handle the administration tasks more efficiently. There is a high turnover of administrative staff and to some extent also among teachers. This may to some extent be explained by a somewhat dysfunctional administration support system, and there is a need to improve the collaboration.

Quality criteria 2. Teaching is focused on student-centered learning. *Att undervisningen sätter studenternas lärande i centrum.*

Reflections, recommendations (strengths and shortcomings)

Even if the program syllabus states that pedagogy is inspired by principles of student-centered learning (page 7 education plan and homepage), it is not clear if teachers in the program have the same interpretation of student-centered learning and how it can be applied in the different courses. It is not a general understanding of the meaning of student-centered learning among teacher and students in the program. Therefore, steps need to be taken by program leadership to systematically support the implementation of student-centered learning involving the faculty and students.

Proposed solutions from the assessment group (i.e. how any shortcomings can be addressed).

Emphasize and facilitate an ongoing discussion in the pedagogical support forum where course leaders, teachers and faculty of the program can discuss different pedagogical issues, e.g., how to define and facilitate the implementation of student-centered learning. This is beneficial for all, in particular newly employed teachers and course leaders. Based on diversity of students, this process should be supported by pedagogical methods and using different pedagogical tools. The pedagogical approach should be clarified in the beginning of the program.

Quality criteria 3. The content and form of teaching rests on scientific and proven experience. *Att undervisningens innehåll och form vilar på vetenskaplig grund samt beprövad erfarenhet.*

Reflections, recommendations (strengths and shortcomings) The course literature and reading material is in line with what is expected in terms of standard scientific literature within health economics, health equality, and public health sciences. All the course leaders have relevant subject specific competence. Most of the course leaders are linked to research group environments and are active in research and have national and international collaborations.

Proposed solutions from the assessment group (i.e. how any shortcomings can be addressed).

No recommendations suggested

Quality criteria 4. Teachers have up-to-date and adequate competence as regards their subjects and teaching and learning in higher education, and the numbers of teachers are in proportion to the scope and content of study courses and program. *Att lärarna har aktuell och adekvat ämnesmässig och högskolepedagogisk kompetens samt att antalet lärare står i proportion till utbildningens omfattning och innehåll.*

Reflections, recommendations (strengths and shortcomings)

A strength is that the program has very engaged teachers and faculty supporting and helping students with different issues. The study environment is friendly and open. However, teaching faculty will benefit from a continued engagement and discussion about the implementation of pedagogical strategies and use of different digital tools in the teaching to support student learning in the program. The teachers have relevant subject specific knowledge (PhDs and/or associate professors/professors). Most of the teachers (11/16) have formal pedagogical training courses.

Proposed solutions from the assessment group (i.e. how any shortcomings can be addressed).

Launch and implement a pedagogical educational development plan, aiming at increasing the pedagogical competence of all teachers, and where available digital pedagogical support tools are specified. The use of digital approaches in blended and integrated format needs to be considered to move towards improved learning outcomes and a more personalized approach to teaching.

Quality criteria 5. Study courses and programmes are relevant to the needs of the students and society. *Att utbildningen är relevant för studenternas och samhällets behov.*

Reflections, recommendations (strengths and shortcomings)

Students have highlighted the need for increasing possibilities for networking, and more engagement from teachers and administration. At a program level and in the future development of the program there is a need to identify potential future employers and to clarify the needs and requirements of employers in terms of different competences and skills from future students.

Proposed solutions from the assessment group (i.e. how any shortcomings can be addressed).

We suggest that the program strengthens the alumni-network and invites previous students to share their working experiences with current students. Further the program should establish a reference group/sounding board of alumni, stakeholders and future employers from the Region, municipalities, and public and private sectors to incorporate current and future demands of potential employers.

Quality criteria 6. Students have influence in planning, implementing and monitoring study courses and programmes. *Att studenterna har inflytande i planering, genomförande och uppföljning av utbildningen.*

Reflections, recommendations (strengths and shortcomings)

A strength of the program is that students have an influence in the planning, implementing, and monitoring of courses. The program has established a program council where course evaluations are discussed, and students are provided feedback on the different courses.

Proposed solutions from the assessment group (i.e. how any shortcomings can be addressed).

We suggest that students and alumni participate and are involved in the planning and further development of the program vision, goals and in the marketing and recruitment of future students.

Quality criteria 7. The study and learning environment is accessible and purpose-oriented for all students. *Att en för alla studenter tillgänglig och ändamålsenlig studie- och lärmiljö föreligger.*

Reflections, recommendations (strengths and shortcomings)

The study and learning environment (physical and psychosocial) are accessible and purpose-oriented for all students. The working environment is considered safe, supportive and open for teachers and among students. The learning environment and atmosphere during the courses were by students assessed to be supportive and open. Notable is the high drop-out rate. It is recommended to involve students to clarify the reason for drop-out.

Digital learning pedagogical tools could be used more. There is a need to further develop and use digital electronic pedagogical programs, support tools and devices.

It is a need to further support students on career development opportunities. as well as strengthen the alumni network, and to invite representatives from the labor market and stakeholders to the different courses (not only the economics course).

Proposed solutions from the assessment group (i.e. how any shortcomings can be addressed).

Clarify the information about the program, expectations, and pedagogical style. All admitted students should be invited to an introduction week (before the program starts), arranged by the program. It is important that everyone is informed about what support is available.

Quality criteria 8. The study courses and programmes are continuously monitored and developed.
Att kontinuerlig uppföljning och utveckling av utbildningen genomförs.

Reflections, recommendations (strengths and shortcomings)

There is a system in place where study courses and programs are continuously monitored and developed, and for assessing courses, and to provide students with feedback on what will be modified and changed for next year.

Teachers encourage open and regular feedback from students to improve their classes and develop their courses for coming cohorts of students. However, strategic development and discussions and visions could be more emphasized in the development and monitoring process.

Proposed solutions from the assessment group (i.e. how any shortcomings can be addressed).

We recommend the program to collect information from student alumni network, but also from stakeholders and potential employers, if the current program needs to be further developed and revised to better reflect the changing needs of the labor market.

Conclusion

Are there any other development areas that we would like to highlight?

To summarize, we recommend the program leadership to initiate a process to (re)define vision, goal, and specialization of the program. Clarify what methodological knowledge and skills the students are expected to gain during the program. This should be discussed in the context of other master programs given at the university, and should include the program leadership, future employers, and alumni considering the current and future needs of the labor market. In this process it is important to consider the specific competencies of the faculty, the region, and the working environment of Gothenburg.