

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

Public Health

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/puhe

Original Research

Employability and career experiences of international graduates of MSc Public Health: a mixed methods study



C. Buunaaisie, A.M. Manyara, H. Annett, E.L. Bird, I. Bray, J. Ige, M. Jones, J. Orme, P. Pilkington, D. Evans*

Department of Health and Social Sciences, University of the West of England, Bristol, BS16 1QY, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 November 2017

Received in revised form

16 March 2018

Accepted 25 March 2018

Available online 16 May 2018

Keywords:

International

Graduate

Alumni

Public health

ABSTRACT

Objectives: This article aims to describe the public health career experiences of international graduates of a Master of Science in Public Health (MSc PH) programme and to contribute to developing the evidence base on international public health workforce capacity development.

Study design: A sequential mixed methods study was conducted between January 2017 and April 2017.

Methods: Ninety-seven international graduates of one UK university's MSc PH programme were invited to take part in an online survey followed by semistructured interviews, for respondents who consented to be interviewed. We computed the descriptive statistics of the quantitative data obtained, and qualitative data were thematically analysed.

Results: The response rate was 48.5%. Most respondents (63%) were employed by various agencies within 1 year after graduation. Others (15%) were at different stages of doctor of philosophy studies. Respondents reported enhanced roles after graduation in areas such as public health policy analysis (74%); planning, implementation and evaluation of public health interventions (74%); leadership roles (72%); and research (70%). The common perceived skills that were relevant to the respondents' present jobs were critical analysis (87%), multidisciplinary thinking (86%), demonstrating public health leadership skills (84%) and research (77%). Almost all respondents (90%) were confident in conducting research. Respondents recommended the provision of longer public health placement opportunities, elective courses on project management and advanced statistics, and 'internationalisation' of the programme's curriculum.

Conclusions: The study has revealed the relevance of higher education in public health in developing the career prospects and skills of graduates. International graduates of this MSc PH programme were satisfied with the relevance and impact of the skills they acquired during their studies. The outcomes of this study can be used for curriculum reformation. Employers' perspectives of the capabilities of these graduates, however, need further consideration.

© 2018 The Royal Society for Public Health. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 117 328 8750.

E-mail address: David9.Evans@uwe.ac.uk (D. Evans).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2018.03.032>

0033-3506/© 2018 The Royal Society for Public Health. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

In recent years, there have been calls for educational institutions to address shortages in human resources for public health across the world especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).^{1,2} Globally, several institutions have played key roles in contributing to the development of the public health workforce through postgraduate public health programmes including Master of Science in Public Health (MSc PH), thus drawing interest from students with diverse backgrounds.¹

The United Kingdom (UK) is one of the major destinations for further studies among international students, the majority of whom are from LMICs,³ and thus contributes to the global workforce development. For instance, in the 2015/2016 academic year, approximately 140,000 international students enrolled onto UK taught postgraduate programmes, representing 46% of all full-time postgraduate students.³ Seven and a half percent (7.5%) of UK students pursuing public health and other subjects 'allied to medicine' in 2015–2016 were international students.³ Concrete evidence suggested that positive learning experiences among international students in the UK were associated with many factors. These include broad understanding and improved skills in critical analysis, opportunity to interact and develop relationships with students from diverse backgrounds and improved language skills.⁴ These experiences probably continue to drive the interest among international students to seek higher education in the UK. Most international students in the UK return to their home countries after graduation,³ and it is useful to understand their perceived relevance of the educational training they acquired abroad.

Additionally, there are growing concerns in the literature regarding whether postgraduate public health programmes equip graduates with skills relevant to their jobs or countries.⁵ Public health programmes aim to empower students with critical skills that facilitate research and evidence-based practice.¹ It is, therefore, critical to question the relevance of the acquired public health skills to the graduates' careers to inform curriculum reformations.

Public health workforce development has been extensively researched in the US and Europe but relatively less explored in LMICs.⁶ Indeed, studies on the public health experiences of MSc PH graduates from LMICs who undertook full-time masters programme in developed countries, including the UK, are limited. Tracking the public health experiences of graduates is important for higher education development as it examines the impact and outcomes of the study programmes on the job market.⁷ Furthermore, the World Health Organisation (WHO) in its recent education guidelines reported that evaluation of health professionals' education is a challenge that should be improved on.⁸ It is, therefore, imperative to address these challenges through research.

Previous research examined the career experiences of public health graduates from different backgrounds. The study respondents normally included both indigenes and non-indigenes who pursued public health programmes delivered via either online,⁹ a network of institutions¹⁰ or by individual universities.¹¹ Such investigations may be limited

and biased because the overrepresentation of indigenes, in most cases, among the graduates. For instance, the UK has a clear public health career structure, and many UK-domiciled graduates have proceeded to senior public health roles, but this may not be as easy for international graduates in other countries. This study, therefore, explored the postmasters career experiences of the international MSc PH graduates of one UK university and their perceived relevance of the programme to their career development.

Methods

The setting for the research was the University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE Bristol), one of the largest higher education institutions in the UK. Over the last decade, the MSc PH programme has attracted many international students, particularly from Africa. The programme comprises nine taught modules and a research project (dissertation), with an optional competitive placement opportunity of 5 days (not necessarily consecutive) with public health services in South West England.

A sequential mixed methods study¹² was conducted between January 2017 and April 2017. Data were first obtained from an anonymous online survey and then followed up with ten in-depth telephone or face-to-face semistructured interviews. The survey was piloted with three international public health graduates residing in England and revised based on comments received ([Additional File 1](#)). It comprised 32 closed- and open-ended questions asking about demographics, educational background, current and previous work situation, the perceived strengths and challenges of the programme and recommendations for further development of the programme. The survey also included an option to consent for a follow-up interview.

Ninety-seven international MSc PH alumni who graduated between 2006 and 2016 were invited to participate in the online survey. They were emailed detailed information of the study, a consent form and a link to the survey. Two weekly email reminders were sent to graduates for 1 month to boost participation in the survey.

A set of Likert scale items were used to explore respondents' perceived career experiences, relevance of public skills to their careers and respondents' confidence in applying the skills. The Cronbach's alpha of the Likert scales were computed to measure internal consistency of the scale. Cronbach's alpha >0.7 was considered satisfactory.¹³ Mean scores, standard errors and 95% confidence intervals of the Likert scale ratings were computed in Excel 2016 (Microsoft, USA). Data from closed-ended questions were analysed to produce simple descriptive statistics. Unstructured data from open-ended questions were tabulated in Excel and thematically analysed.¹⁴

A semistructured interview protocol, developed by (C.B., A.M.M. and D.E.) and validated by the project team, was used to elicit in-depth information during the interview about respondents' career and professional developments (see [Additional File 2](#)). The questions sought to explore the attributes of the MSc programme that contributed to the

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7525443>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7525443>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)