

Reflections, Refinements and Revisions: Thirteen Years Experience of a Professional Doctorate in Public Health

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History of Professional Doctorates in the UK



- Bristol University – 1st professional doctorate in the UK in 1992
- Most professional doctorates in the areas of education, business and engineering
- In 1996 LSHTM offered the 1st UK professional doctorate in public health

Rationale for DrPH



- Need for a more 'practical' research degree
- Need for training to fit future careers in public health
- Need to develop managerial and leadership as well as research skills

DrPH Programme



Designed to provide both:

- Practical skills needed for managers and leaders in public health, and
- Understanding of and experience in research

Objectives



- Provide a multi-disciplinary professional training in the skills crucial for leadership roles in public health
- To prepare participants for the effective conduct of supervision, research and the integration of new knowledge into community and /or public health practice

Original components of the programme



- Taught component
 - At least 6 modules: 3 compulsory core modules & 3 additional modules from the MSc options
- Professional attachment (PA)
 - 3-6 month work place based project
 - 12,000 word limit analytical report
- Thesis
 - High quality research on a policy relevant topic
 - 50,000 word limit thesis
 - Integrating statement of 1,500 words

Original Time Line (full time)



Year 1:

Term 1: 3 core modules

Terms 2 & 3: 3 additional modules

Preparations for PA & thesis

Year 2:

Undertake 3-6 month PA

Prepare for thesis research and undergo research review, start data collection

Year 3:

Data collection, analysis and thesis writing

Core Modules: first term



Leadership, Management & Development (LMD): 5 week module

- ✓ to explore management and leadership theory relating to organisational behaviour;
- ✓ to consider the application of these theories in public health organisations and practice;
- ✓ to develop understanding of yourself as a leader and manager in public health

Core Modules: first term



Evidence-Based Public Health Practice (EBPHP):10 week module

- ✓ To enable students to locate, assess, synthesise, present and use research-based information to improve the public health in a range of settings

Taught component: reflections



- Length of time spent on taught element
 - Difficult to fit programme within 3 years
 - Value of 3 compulsory additional MSc modules
- Availability of staff to teach on the LMD module (on-going issue)
- Students will have little experience of organizational management theory
 - A new way of thinking

Taught component: revisions



- Remove requirement for 3 additional MSc modules
 - Additional flexibility
- Extend LMD to a 10 week course
 - Additional learning time not content
 - Change title to Leadership Management & professional development (LMPD to avoid confusion)

Professional Attachment (PA)



- 3-6 months in an institution (usually not the home institution)
- Opportunity to analyse the operation of a public health organisation
 - Prepare a study plan indicating aims and objectives and outlining relevant theories and methods to be applied
 - Produce a written report not exceeding 12,000 words

PA: Reflections



- Seen as essential and useful by staff & students but the most 'problematic'
- Confusion about nature & content of required output (what is a suitable question)
- Concerns about academic quality of PA report (2002/2003)
- Lack of experience/confidence among supervisors in this field
- Locating placements for the PA

PA: Refinements



- Redefinition of academic standards for report (2003/2004)
- Re-name the PA as the Organizational & Policy Analysis Project (OPA) (2008/2009)
 - Better reflects the more academic nature and content of the component
- Re-write the guidelines for the OPA
- Emphasise the availability of Associate Supervisors to assist in this component
- Develop a ‘panel’ of possible Associate Supervisors

Thesis



- A topic of public health importance
- Collection and analysis of original data
- A distinct contribution to knowledge
- Approx. one third the volume of a PhD thesis (1 year vs 3 years): max 50,000 words
- Accompanied by a 1,500 word integrating statement

Thesis: Reflections



- Problematic for supervisors & examiners:
 - How to differentiate from a PhD
 - Maximum of 18 months full-time
 - Needs to retain originality & scientific rigour
 - What criteria for assessment?
 - How to assess the integrating statement?

Assessment: Reflections



- At what level is each component assessed?
 - OPA & thesis components
- How to address the issue of ‘partial completion’ or ‘failure’ in the final component – no MPhil option
- What about the integrating statement?

Assessment: Refinements to date



- Remove MSc module requirement
- Revise OPA guidelines
- Revise OPA marking scheme
- Revise thesis guidelines to emphasise the research needs to be of the same depth but smaller breadth than a PhD

Proposed assessment refinements



- Consideration of submission of complete portfolio of assessed work to the examiners to set the context
- Consideration of 'diploma' options for partial completion
- Reconsider value/utility of integrating statement

Components of the DrPH: (2009/2010)



ü Taught Component

Two DrPH core modules: four assignments

ü Organizational & Policy Analysis Project

A 3-6 month work place based project

A 12,000 word limit analytical report

ü Thesis & Integrating Statement

High quality research on a policy relevant topic

50,000 word limit thesis

Integrating statement of 1,500 words

Time Line (full time)



0- 4 months: 2 core modules

5 – 9 months: Preparations for OPA & thesis

10 – 16 months: Undertake & write up OPA

17 – 20 months: Prepare for thesis research
and undergo research review

21 – 36 months: Data collection, analysis and
thesis writing

The student body



Currently have 41 student enrolled (27 P/T & 24 F/T): 11 from UK; 6 from EU; 7 from USA & Canada; 6 from Africa; 3 from West Indies; 2 Japan; 1 each from El Salvador, Bangladesh, India, Singapore, Cambodia, China.

- **Variety of backgrounds:**
 - District Health Management, Ministries of Health
NGOs.....
- **Variety of disciplines**
 - Medics, Epidemiologists, Social Scientists,
Parasitologists.....

Opportunities for graduates



- Graduates from the programme hold positions in national and international institutions:
 - Centres for Disease Control (USA)
 - WHO (Geneva)
 - National Malaria Control Programme (SA)
 - Kings College (London)

Supervisors' views



“Rigorous training and experience relevant to public health leadership – no less and in some ways more challenging than the research based PhD, but over a wider range of skills and competencies”

“DrPH involves changing the world, PhD in analysing it”

Students' views



- Chosen because practical, dynamic and strengthens links between research and practice
- Versatile, flexible and broad with focus on practice
- Increased confidence and helped with career progression
- 14/21 happy chose DrPH instead of PhD, 5/21 wrong choice, 2/21 not sure

Future Plans



- Expand and attract more UK students
- Develop collaboration/links with UK and international institutions:
 - Increase options for the OPA
 - Expand curriculum options
 - Increased advocacy for DrPH Programmes

Other Suggestions?



- We welcome your ideas for collaborations/linkages or further development of the programme.



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Further Information

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