

External Evaluation Report

Accreditation of Master of Advanced Studies in International Health, University of Basel

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1. Introduction

According to the SUK (Schweizerische Universitätskonferenz) CUS (Conférence Universitaire Suisse) guidelines for academic accreditation in Switzerland dated 16 October, 2003, - accreditation of programmes are based on an assessment of compliance with the standards detailed in the OAQ guidelines. The present report follows the structure of the accreditation procedure where step one includes a self-evaluation by the unit seeking accreditation; step two includes an expert evaluation and step three is the final decision on accreditation.

The present report is written by the panel of independent experts and is based on the self-evaluation of MAS in International Health at STI as well as the on-site visit carried out on 21-23 May, 2007.

2. Description of academic unit undergoing accreditation

The Swiss Tropical Institute (STI) was founded in 1943 as a public institution and is an affiliated institute of the University of Basel. STI receives core support from the Swiss Federal Government and the Canton of Basel-Stadt. However, the greater part of STI's funding is from competitively acquired project funds and the earnings of the Service Departments (Medical Services and Swiss Center for International Health).

The STI's mandate is to contribute to the improvement of the health of populations internationally and nationally through excellence in research, services, and teaching and training. STI is comprised of four departments: Medical Parasitology and Biology of Infection; Medical Services; Swiss Centre for International Health; and Public Health and Epidemiology.

In addition to postgraduate teaching and training (PhD and MSc) and continuing education, STI offers several short courses for health experts from Europe and countries with resource constraints. These courses are accredited by the University of Basel. With partner institutes in Europe, STI contributes to a Master of Advanced Studies in International Health (MIH), the course currently seeking accreditation from OAQ.

The Teaching and Training Unit (TTU) of STI is responsible for the operational implementation of the MIH programme. Within the Swiss Schools of Public Health+ (SSPH+), the MIH programme is one of three MPH programmes in Switzerland, maintaining close collaboration with the other programmes. While outside the scope and mandate of accreditation review, the MIH programme is also subject to regulations set up by the tropEd - Network for Education in International Health.

The TTU is comprised of three professional staff and three support staff responsible for the operational implementation of the MIH programme. The three professional staff are responsible for coordinating the MIH programme and other courses at STI; developing the curricula of these courses; teaching in the programme according to their field of expertise; tutoring Master's students; supporting other STI teaching and training aspects; and taking care of the administrative issues concerned with the unit.

Additional teaching responsibilities are shared between STI academic staff and external resource persons. Most of the STI teaching staff have teaching responsibilities at the University of Basel and/or teaching assignments at well-recognized universities outside Basel in addition to broad practical experience in the field partially demonstrated by their significant publication lists.

The overall guidance to the MIH programme is provided by a Steering Committee comprised of the three TTU professional staff and four other senior STI academic staff including the STI director. Apparently, a representative of the University of Basel, Advanced Study Centre, is also represented on the SC. As previously alluded to, the MIH programme also aims to respond to the standards set by tropEd.

3. Self-evaluation

The peer-expert team received the self-evaluation report well in advance of the on-site visit. The report (45 pages) includes the results of the self-evaluation of the “Master in Advanced Studies in International Health” (MIH). The MIH is offered by STI in collaboration with the tropEd Teaching network, The Advanced Studies Centre, University of Basel, and the Swiss School of Public Health+. The Self-evaluation report is developed by the MIH Steering Group with Dr. Axel Hoffmann as group leader and representatives from the management (Prof Dr. Marcel Tanner, Director STI), the Administration (Prof. Dr. Niklaus Weiss, STI), the Academic staff (RN, MPH Bernadette Peterhans and Dr. Peter Odermatt, STI), students (Verena Renggli) and a quality assurance expert (Dr Martin Liechti, The Advanced Study Centre).

The Self-evaluation report is organized according to the OAQ (Organ für Akkreditierung und Qualitätssicherung der Schweizerischen Hochschulen) guidelines for Academic Programmes. Attached to the Self-evaluation report is a large body of annexes (41) including Mission Statement of the STI, MIH study regulations, CVs of core teaching staff, Evaluation questionnaires, description of the core course (HCMTC), example of course certificates, students statistics as well as financial statements.

Comments on self-evaluation report:

The Expert Panel commends STI and the MIH programme secretariat on the quality and comprehensiveness of the self-evaluation report and the supporting Annexes.

The MIH programme is explicitly tied to the tropEd programme. Indeed, the initial Terms of Reference for the expert panel was to review the MIH programme with reference to the tropEd accreditation guidelines (that were provided to the expert panel). This requirement was subsequently removed from the expert panel's ToR, however, the influence of tropEd and its requirements is clearly embedded in the self-evaluation report.

With reference to tropEd, the self-evaluation report starts with the common element of training, the Health Care Management in Tropical Countries (HCMTC), which is the basis of the STI MIH programme and the tropEd network. Therefore, when working through the report, the expert panel had to differentiate between the HCMTC core course, the tropEd relationship, the MIH programme

and the requirements of STI and the University of Basel. Nevertheless, with re-reading the report, these issues then became clear.

The report was quite clear on the process and quality issues of the MIH programme as it related to STI. However, given that a fair amount of the course requirements are taken outside STI with tropEd partner institutes, it is difficult to empirically assess the quality of this external academic training. This external quality issue has to be accepted at face value and based on the known reputation of the tropEd partners. This issue is unlikely to occur in other OAQ accreditation processes as the MIH programme under accreditation is unique.

While the self-evaluation report provided a wealth of information on the MIH programme, there was a lack or limited numerical data in some areas even when directly requested in the report's section. In future reports, it might be useful to have a section with tables on requested numerical data rather than risk missing the numbers in the report.

The comments on the self-evaluation report in most part relate to the uniqueness of the MIH programme and not to the quality of the report, which as previously mentioned is of high quality. Related to the review of the self-evaluation report was the Guide to External Evaluation - Recommendations for Experts document provided to the expert panel.

In conclusion, the self-evaluation report was an invaluable tool for the expert panel to understand the proposed MIH programme seeking accreditation and raise the important questions that were then addressed by the MIH programme secretariat and staff during the subsequent site visit. The peer-evaluation team finds the Self-evaluation report well-written and very informative. The format of the report is clear and concise and the report provides a good, in-depth understanding of the MIH. The extensive number of annexes provides good documentation of the various sections in the report.

4. The on-site visit

Summary of the visit

The site-visit took place between the 21. May and 23. May (see attached programme). The peer-expert team includes the following:

Associate Professor Dr. Helle Samuelsen, ((Peer Leader))

Head of Department, Dept. of Anthropology
Centre for Health and Society,
University of Copenhagen

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Head of Department, Dept. of Epidemiology and International Public Health
University of Bielefeld

Professor Dr. Patrick van der Stuyft,
Head of Department of Public Health
Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerpen

Mr. Steven Wayling
Manager - TDR, World Health Organization
Geneva

The team members arrived on 21. May at around 6 pm. and were received at Hotel Teufelhof by two representatives of OAQ, Ameli Kruse Lerf and Dr. Karl Zbinden. The team were briefed by OAQ and the team agreed on the main themes for the interviews with the different groups of staff during the site visit.

The site-visit took place on 22. May between 8.30 am – 7 pm, where interviews with the following groups of staff and students took place (please see attached the complete list of persons met):

08.30 – 9.00	Interview with the Steering Committee
09.00 – 10.00	Interview with Directors, Head of Unit
10.15 - 11.15	Interview with representatives from the Academic Staff
11.20 – 11.45	Interview with Administrative Staff
13.30 – 13.55	Visit of facilities
14.00 – 15.30	Interview with Students/Alumni
16.00 – 16.30	Interview with course administrator
16.30 – 18.00	Internal meeting of Expert Team
18.30 – 19.00	Debriefing session

In the original programme the team was supposed also to interview persons from the professional field, but due to a very busy schedule of these professionals, this meeting was replaced by a short interview with the course administrator, Bernadette Peterhans.

The interviews with representatives of the various stakeholders of the MIH programme gave the team members an excellent opportunity to get more in-depth understanding of the programme and based on the self-evaluation report to go into details about specific aspects of the programme.

After the series of interviews, the team held a short meeting in order to prepare for the debriefing, which was given at 18.30. At the debriefing session, the Steering Committee was present as well as representatives of the Director/Head of Unit.

Organisation of the visit

The site-visit was organised by the OAQ and all the materials were sent to the experts well in advance of the actual visit. The host institution was also well prepared for the visit and had identified all the relevant key persons for the interviews.

Cooperation by unit seeking accreditation

The Swiss Tropical Institute showed excellent hospitality and was extremely cooperative during the site visit. All stakeholder groups met were very enthusiastic about the programme but also very

attentive towards suggestions and critical points brought up by the expert team. The site visit was carried out in a serious and nice atmosphere.

Problems

The expert team did not encounter any problems during the site-visit, however it might be important to point out that the team only focuses on the accreditation of the part of the MIH taking place at STI, thus the courses and the collaborations with other tropEd institutions are not included in the present review.

5. Formal assessment

Overall impression

Area 1: Implementation and teaching objectives

The 18 ECTS core course, Health Care and Management in Tropical Countries (HCMTC), is the backbone of the STI Master of Advanced Studies in International Health (MIH). The core course is divided into sub-modules and the overall coordination is carried out by one of the academic staff members. The core course has been offered during the last ten years and has over the years adopted its programme curriculum to the changing trends in the field of international health. The programme has furthermore followed the international trends in educational development by changing from the previous focus on teaching objectives to a focus on learning objectives thereby emphasizing the contemporary focus on students' competencies. In addition to the core course, the MIH also offers three to six optional modules per year. The full Masters programme can be taken within five years. The core course as well as the optional modules offered by STI all have very clear objectives focusing on both knowledge of the field of international health as well as both analytical and practical skills.

In the various discussions during the site-visit, the expert team inquired about the actual feasibility of carrying out a full Master Programme within one full study year (equivalent to 1800 study hours) with specific focus on the time frame of the thesis work. It was reported, both by teachers and students, that it is feasible to complete a full programme within the time limit but as stated by one of the teachers "it is an estimate – not a promise".

Area 2: Internal organization and quality assurance measures

As mentioned in the Self-evaluation report, all decisions concerning the study programme are the responsibility of the Task Force Teaching and Training, which is a standing committee for all issues concerning advanced studies at STI. The Task Force members are:

Christoph Hatz, Head Medical and Diagnostic Department
Axel Hoffmann, Head Teaching and Training
Hanspeter Marti, Head Diagnostic Centre

Peter Odermatt, Course Coordinator
Bernadette Peterhans, Course Coordinator
Marcel Tanner, Director, STI,
Karin Wiedenmayer, Project Leader SCIH

Major changes of the programme have to be approved by the STI Directorate and the governing Board. Likewise, major changes will have to be approved by the University of Basel and the Advanced Study Centre and by the tropEd General Assembly. As emphasized by the self-evaluation report, the pathways of decision-making process at STI are rather short, wherefore the internal organization appears to be clear and concise and not overly bureaucratic.

During the site-visit, the expert team raised questions regarding the student representation in decision-making processes related to the course programme. At present, the students are represented only through the tropEd General Assembly and not directly at STI. The management of the programme found it unproblematic to include student representation in the local management of the MIH and the students were also positive, but were not persistent on this issue, as they found themselves well represented by the staff.

With respect to quality assurance, a number of measures for securing high quality of the MIH programme are in place. The programme distinguishes between structural, process and outcome quality assurance measures, which are all well described in the self-evaluation report.

During the site-visit discussions, the team raised the question as to whether examination questions were peer reviewed before the actual examinations. At present, there is no formal process regarding peer-reviewing of exam questions at any of the MIH modules.

Area 3: Curriculum and teaching methods

The MIH Curriculum is structured according to the objectives of the Bologna declaration. The full MIH consists of a mandatory core course (18 ECTS), optional advanced courses (22 ECTS) of which at least 15 out of the 22 ECTS points have to be acquired in another tropEd partner institution (10 of them outside Switzerland) – and a thesis, which has to be defended (20 ECTS).

The core course, which is offered once yearly, includes about 30 students of which 7-8 students from developing countries are admitted on a scholarship provided by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Only students whose performances are 80% or above the maximum (equivalent to a C in the ECTS system) may be admitted into the master programme if they apply.

The Curriculum for the MIH covers the major subjects/themes and methods in the field of International Health.

As mentioned in the Self-evaluation report, the teaching and learning approach of the MIH focuses on the principle of adult mutual learning. All modules/courses are clearly described with precise indications of actual contact hours and total SIT (Student Investment Time) hours. The didactic process includes an extensive amount of group work, where students are organized in groups – also during the core course – and the seating arrangements during contact hours reflect this approach as observed by the team during the visit of facilities.

One of the most important assets of the MIH teaching programme is the strong investment in tutoring of each individual student. The tutoring is mainly carried out by the course coordinator of the core course and the head of teaching and training. Apparently, each student has a close contact with a tutor when planning his/her individual study plan for the full Master programme. The tutoring includes individual advice on which advanced optional modules to take, at which other tropEd institutions as well as the actual supervision of the thesis work.

The strong emphasis on individual tutoring is a very important component of the MIH programme in Basel. While it might be costly investment on behalf of STI (thinking about cost-effectiveness), it was clear from the interviews during the site-visit that it is a result of a very conscious prioritization of the management. From interviews with the students, it is also clear that this element of the programme is very much appreciated by them. Furthermore, the individual tutoring during the whole programme probably increases the overall coherence of the programme.

The Masters programme is very flexible in the sense that it provides the students with the opportunities to complete a full master programme over a period of five years. This flexibility attracts students, who to a large extent have to provide self-funding for the studies (which includes not only the study fees, but also travel expenses and accommodation when taking courses at other institutions). This structure makes it easier for students to work in between modules in order to save money for the course expenses. For those students on scholarships, the scholarship also includes travel expenses to-and from their home country. From an efficiency point of view, a total of 25 Master students graduating over the last 10 years, seems to be only a moderate number. However, 67 students are presently (by 31.12.06) enrolled in the programme and with the aim of graduating as many students yearly as are enrolled yearly – as expressed by the management - a balance might be reached within the next couple of years.

Area 4: Teaching staff

Based on the self-evaluation report, the annexes with CVs of core teaching staff as well as the interviews with academic staff during the site-visit, it is clear that the programme has a very qualified teaching staff. During the core course a total of 55 different teachers are involved in the teaching. Still, the core course is very much appreciated by the students for its coherence.

Many of the teachers are actively involved in research and are well-known within their research field. This is important since one of the main argument for university based courses are the close linkage between research and teaching.

One of the main challenges of the teachers is the heterogeneity of the students, both regarding their cultural background, their level and kind of formal training, as well as their working experiences. But as expressed by some of the academic staff interviewed, there is a strong spirit at STI where both teaching and research is highly prioritized by the institution.

The thesis supervision is – not surprisingly – one of the main challenges of the programme. Most of the thesis supervision is carried out by very few staff members and with the wide range of thesis topics, this might not be an easy task.

During the site-visit discussions, the team members raised the question as to whether it would be useful to develop a more conscious strategy for thesis supervision, thereby taking full advantage of the expertise of the academic staff members available at STI.

Area 5: Students

The target group of the Master of Advanced Studies in International Health is health professionals with various backgrounds (medical doctors, nurses and midwives, social scientists, health planners & managers). In order to be admitted to the core course, applicants must have a first university degree in a discipline relevant for International Health as well as a minimum of two years working experience. Each year about 12 scholarships for the core course are available for suitable candidates. In order to be admitted to the full MIH, students must show a performance of not less than 80% of the maximum score at the HCMTC/the core course. For the full Masters programme, one to two scholarships for participants from resource-constrained countries are available from STI. The Core course is very popular and receives many applications.

As of 31.12.06, a total of 96 students have been admitted to the MAS programme of which 25 have finished, four have dropped out and 67 are still in the programme (Annex 5.4). Considering that the programme has been running for almost 10 years, a total production of 25 candidates is not as such very impressive. However, as mentioned above, STI has a strong focus on quality and very clear in its prioritization and investment in the programme.

Statistics of students attending the Core Course (Annex 5.5) show that during the last five years, more females and males have attended the course. When STI considers candidates for the scholarships the following criteria are taken into consideration: The grades of the candidates, the overall performance, gender and the motivation letter written by the candidates. In addition, STI aims at securing a relevant distribution across continents. These criteria are transparent for the students but not formalised in a document.

During the on-site visit, the expert panel met with a group of students of which a few had graduated, others were in the process of taking advanced courses and a few were attending the core course. The students met were:

Ms. Verena Renggli (student representative in tropEd)
Ms. Yolanda Muller
Ms. Gabriele Krügher
Mr. Chandon Chattopadhyay
Mr. Peter Ternes
Ms. Marianne Jost
Ms. Carolina Batista dos Santos
Mr. Cyril Ilho Moyo

All students praised the programme highly. According to the students, one of the main strengths of the programme is its high degree of flexibility. The fact that it is possible to take the Masters Programme over a five years period is very much appreciated and students highlight that it allows

them to alternate between course work and employment, which they need for their income. There is also a very positive attitude towards the demand of mobility where a minimum of 15 ECTS should be taken at other tropEd institutions (10 ECTS outside Switzerland). On average, the students include 2-3 travels to other European institutions for course work during their Masters programme. The individual tutoring of students by STI course coordinators is emphasised by the students as a very strong component of the MIH programme. The students generally feel that they were given a very good orientation about the programme and that decision-making in relation to the programme and its various components are very transparent. They are, however, also positive towards an increase of their representation in decision-making processes related to the course.

A few of the students mention the course fees as a concern, however the fact, that they have the opportunities to work and save money between courses was much appreciated. For those students having scholarships, the scholarships also include travels between home-countries, Switzerland and the European institutions, where courses are taken.

Area 6: Facilities and premises

Most of the teaching takes place at STI in Basel, where one big room is provided for the core course as well as some of the advanced courses. The teaching room easily accommodates a group of 30 students and is equipped with data projector and other relevant teaching facilities. Other teaching rooms and facilities are available at STI. Apart from the teaching facility, STI has a very well equipped library with a big holding of monographs and most of the relevant journals in international health. Furthermore, there are computer facilities for students and internet access both from STI computers as well as own laptops (through WiFi). The students also have access to a self-service café within the premises where sandwiches, fruits and drinks are offered at fair prices.

In addition to the courses at STI, there is also collaboration with Ifakara (Tanzania Training Centre for International Health) in Tanzania where an optional advanced module is offered every second year on "Clinical Priorities in Tropical Countries". Also at Ifakara, a course "Rational Medical Management – A focus on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria" is offered.

The Expert panel only had access to the teaching facilities at STI, which are considered very suitable and nice.

Strengths and weaknesses

In this section, the expert panel would like to summarize the main strengths and weaknesses of the programme under accreditation. The summary reflects the main points mentioned at the debriefing meeting at the on-site visit.

As the Master of Advanced Studies in International Health (MIH) consists not only of modules taken at STI and as the programme demands student mobility to other tropEd institutions, it is important to emphasize that the expert panel has only concentrated on the accreditation of the elements of the programme carried out by STI, Basel.

The expert panel appreciate the self-evaluation report, which is found to be very informative and well-written. Only in a few cases there was a lack or limited numerical data.

The expert panel finds the MIH programme to be a very strong programme with very competent academic staff, coherence in the programme, close tutoring and supervision of students. Actually one of the strongest components of the programme is the close contact between the course coordinators and the individual students (tutoring).

The fact that the programme has only 'produced' a total of 25 Masters over a 8-10 years period, might be seen as a weakness if only looked a from cost-efficiency point of view – but as it became clear during the on-site visit and the interviews with the management, it reflects a very conscious priority of the management – and as such it should be commended that the programme does not take more students in, than it can actually manage.

It is furthermore clear, that the programme includes very well-informed students, who know what they want and are committed to make a public health impact of their work.

One of the weaker points of the programme is the rather low involvement of students in decision-making processes. While one student acts as student representative at tropEd General Assembly meetings, there are at present no student representatives at STI.

Another aspect, which could be included in the continuous process of quality assurance, is to include a process of peer-reviewing of examination questions.

Finally, it appears that most of the thesis supervision is carried out by very few people, while it might be worthwhile considering to 'exploit' the highly qualified permanent teaching staff more in relation to thesis supervision.

Recommendations

The expert panel has the following recommendations:

- To continue the MIH in the present form with its strong course coordination and intensive tutoring of students
- To establish a peer-reviewing process of the formulation of examination questions as part of the continuous process of quality assurance
- To include student representatives in the Steering Committee of the programme
- To implement a strategy for identifying thesis supervisors securing that the expertise of STI staff is fully 'exploited'

6. Recommendations on accreditation

To conclude, the expert panel would like – unanimously – to recommend that accreditation of the Master of Advanced Studies of International Health (MIH) at the Swiss Tropical Institute is granted unconditionally.