

Report on SE Region student placement seminar 27th July 2009

Reasons for having the seminar.

The CIEH has estimated that there are on average 650 students annually who complete the Environmental Health Degree/MSc but 400 fail to complete their training because they cannot find suitable student placement(s). To ensure the profession is sustainable in the South East the regions management board has made it one of its key priorities to ensure an adequate number of placements are provided in the SE, through regional government and regional bodies, local authority members, and those in the private sector.

The project started with a seminar of key stakeholders which will aim to determine the problem in the South East and set out possible solutions.

Those present were:

David Rowley	Surrey CEHOs
Paul Hobbs	SERMB
Dave Bowen	Sussex CEHOs
Sue Oliver	Sussex CEHOs
Jennifer McNeill	SE Employers
Marcus Herbert	HSE
Lisa Harvey Vince	HPA
Neil Adams	HPA
Rhydian Fairfax	Student
Annie Littleton	Sevenoaks and Dartford
David Palmer	Gosport
Julian Blackburn	FSA
Carina Strutt	EA
Sue Fewings	EA
Patricia Jefford	SERMB
Adrienne Dunne	Speaker
Graham Jukes	Speaker
Alan Page	Speaker
Julie Barratt	Speaker
Tony Lewes	Speaker
Ami Beaton	LACORS
Gillian Taylor	BERKS CEHOs
Justine Fuller	Surrey CEHOs
Nigel Haverson	SERMB
Vicki Gracie Langrick	SERMB

For up to date details of this project go to:

http://www.cieh.org/members/south_east_student_placement

The seminar was opened with a number of presentations

Graham Jukes – Setting the scene, the national problem.

The CIEH has been encouraging the increase of numbers of academic places for EH but this has not translated into an increase in placements. Because of the nature of EH, i.e. that it is a problem solving profession, CIEH believe practical training must be part of the qualification. Graham believes LG must maintain training, but there are a number of key challenges:

- LG restructures planned/ taking place combined with cutbacks mean that training budgets are the first cuts to be made
- The support structures at the centre are changing
- A new government will mean further public service cuts
- Better regulation agenda means that regulatory focus will continue
- How can the wider employment world be engaged in the training issue.

Adrienne Dunne – Health protection Agency East Midlands – Why HPA benefit from having student EHP placements

Adrienne outlined the pros and cons of a scheme which trains EHOs in the midlands. There are already a number of EHPs employed within the HPA, mostly in frontline jobs, these are linked internally to join EHPs geographically within the HPA. The first placement took place as a result of a link with the local university. The student is taken on for 3 months and can either do normal work, work on a research/dissertation project or work with HPA and its partners on a specific project.

HPA feel that having students is beneficial as the students bring

- A legal knowledge, which the medical staff at the HPA don't have
- An understanding of their place in overall public health networks
- Knowledge of the political environment

Julie Barratt – Director of CIEH Wales – The Welsh Directory of training opportunities

Julie outlined the Welsh directory of training which is an online resource available to students which lists a large number of practical training opportunities in Wales. These range from six months at a local authority to day or ½ day opportunities to see a specific activity. E.g. inspect a shellfish bed, or view a climbing wall. CIEH Wales seek out training opportunities proactively but the directory really runs itself as the student uses contact details on the website to arrange with the provider direct.

Tony Lewis – Education policy officer – CIEH – Opportunities from the new curriculum & Alan Page – Middlesex University – Operating training award in the new era

Tony stated that with numbers of placements dwindling the traditional placement methods i.e. a year with LG no longer works. It is time to find another way.

With the daisy curriculum well embedded now the types of specialist EHPs now emerging from education will need a different kind of training. It is important to remember that courses are

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designed to get people jobs, so the universities try to make sure that students have the skills to work in suitable placements. The challenge is how to get them the training they need in a way that suits them and the potential employer.

Discussion

Delegates were split into small groups and asked to first consider and outline the problem. Overall feedback included the following issues:

Problems

Reasons why LG does not undertake placements

- Lack of resources, both time and money
- Focus on regulatory duties, planning for future not a political priority.
- Training budgets are the first to be cut in hard times
- Mobile/flexible working makes training a student more difficult
- EH don't generate an income as other departments do (e.g. planners) no incentive to train more
- What are benefits to authority of having students
- Often better to train up a technical offer in post as work also gets done
- EH departments are often split between a number of directorates and they can't individually afford a student, and don't work collectively

Other problems

- Communications between Universities / CIEH / LG could be better. Both in terms of during a placement but also making sure chiefs views are heard when developing courses.
- Consider that mentoring of a student is now too onerous with enhanced paperwork.
- Lack of clarity about what training is now required
- Some organisations still want generalists
- There are no 18 years olds applying for the degree, all are career change mature students.
- SE is an expensive area to live which may discourage students.

Reasons why students don't complete the training element of the course to become an EHP.

- Lack of clear career path for profession
- Lack of promotion as a wide profession
- Lack of emphasis on more strategic roles that the degree can lead to.
- Student debts mean an unpaid placement is not an option.
- Is the curriculum + training requirement considered by student to be too onerous?

One group discussed the demand for placements in relation to their experiences. They questioned how many student were in the SE as they never have direct contacts from students asking for placements, and those offered via EHN are often only applied for by a few students, most of whom live outside the region. They asked what are the real figures?, given that there is not currently a university offering the courses in the SE.

Solutions

After discussion of the problems the groups were asked to come up with solutions to the problems. These have been grouped into two groups, those which need to be approach nationally, and those which can be addressed by the region. These are in no particular order.

Regional solutions

- Engage with GOSE on the issue
- Investigate apprenticeships (with support from SE employers)
- Promote the profession (and placements) by designing a page on the SE employers website.
- Work on supporting LG collaborations in funding/training a student. Including guidance on the legalities and logistical problems.
- Work on supporting collaborations between councils and other regional government bodies including exploring SE authorites joining the London collaboration.
- Create a regional training directory similar to the Wales project
- Consider PATH training route (similar to London)
- Instigate better communications between regional chief EHPs and universities to ensure students produced suit vacancies.
- Work with independent/industry EHPs to create a number of short term placements (as part of directory)

National solutions

- That CIEH should encourage whole year fully funded placements in LG and private sector as the gold standard.
- That EHPs need to be promoted as role models to encourage students onto courses
- That universities should offer training placements
- That all current EHPs should be offered training on what is required in a placement
- That there should be a national clearing house for placements
- Introduce EH (strategy) specialism as part of the degree
- Introduce GSCE in public health
- Introduce a work based learning rote to EHP
- Need to state loudly that there is a problem and ask for specific funding, similar to that available to Social workers, to complete the degree.

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- Primary Authority Principle, businesses that sign up with a local authority should be asked to fund a student in partnership with that authority, with appropriate training at that business.
- CIEH should recommend that each region should repeat this seminar and seek their own regional solutions.