Reviewer's report

Title: Postgraduate Education in Nutrition in South Asia: A Huge Mismatch Between Investments and Needs

Version: 2
Date: 25 November 2013
Reviewer: Barrie Margetts

Reviewer's report:

Recent reviews of nutrition policies in most countries highlight that a major gap in the effective implementation of such policies is a lack of capacity in public health nutrition. The work undertaken here is important because it highlights the lack of training opportunities in these eight countries in public health nutrition. This work is important as it provides a baseline of current availability, against which future activity can be measured. These basic data are important to share to motivate government and supporting agencies to address the learn gaps identified.

Although the team reference work from Europe on competency frameworks, I think it would be helpful to provide in this report a little more detail on the wider capacity framework and assumptions that are being made in this work. Has the team also not published some similar work in the journal Public Health Nutrition (at least for India?). Reference to the competency work undertaken under the auspices of the World Public Health Nutrition Association may also be worthwhile.

The recent paper by Shrimpton et al (as this is an open review it will be clear that I am an author on the Shrimpton paper and may be considered to be biased) highlights the wider framework within which the present study fits - and this or some other should be used to at least highlight that the availability of courses and the students that graduate from such courses is only one important part of building a system and structure that can deliver effective nutrition policies and programmes. Without clear job descriptions and proper support and related workforce planning it will not be possible to see whether graduates will have properly supported jobs to go into after graduation. India could be further explored to assess this - are the course that are provided nested within this framework?

Related to this is also a need to consider whether the content of the courses cover the competencies that have been agreed for PHN training and course content and assessment needs to go beyond knowledge to skills that are relevant for the work to be done. It is probably not reasonable in a desk review based on web searches to get this detail, but again where there are so few centres that are actually doing PHN training further in depth interviews and review of course content would be very informative, alongside a review of current job opportunities and job descriptions at state and national level in India as a case study.
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I am president of the World Public Health Nutrition Association and have written and worked on workforce development, and I am currently co-authoring a paper with Stuart Gillespie on a related topic.

I have no financial or other competing interests