



Alastair MacDonald

MSc Environmental Health (2007 – 2008)

Awards: Best Dissertation Project



Having gained a BSc (Hons) in applied chemistry, I worked for a period with SEPA, carrying out chemical analyses of river and effluent water samples. After this I worked in a catering post and this led me to consider a career in environmental health.

What attracted to me to study environmental health at the University of Strathclyde was that the teaching of the subject there is so well established (the BSc has been running since 1974) and the MSc course is REHIS accredited. Another factor was that the lecturers were very helpful in providing information when I first contacted them about the course and also at the open day I attended.

In my opinion, the MSc in Environmental Health course at Strathclyde is of a high quality. The fact that it is designed to qualify graduates for a specific profession means that it is sufficiently challenging to be worthwhile. One of the strengths of the course is the variety of subjects taught on it. People other than Strathclyde's environmental health lecturers gave many of the lectures. These included: civil engineering lecturers, lecturers from other University departments, environmental health officers (EHOs) from local authorities and lecturers at Glasgow University Veterinary School. This variety of lecturers added further to the interest of the course.

A highlight of the course was the annual MSc Environmental Health Dissertation Conference at the end of March. The students gave a short presentation on what their project was going to be about. Four external assessors were present and each asked the student a question about their presentation. Although this was a somewhat daunting experience, I found it to be very worthwhile, because communication is so important in pursuing a career in environmental health. I was very pleased to win the Department of Civil Engineering Prize for best presentation at this Conference.

My dissertation title was 'Health Inequalities in Scotland Today: the Role of Environmental Health'. I carried out a survey of people working in environmental health in Scotland on their opinions about this topic and received 97 responses from 22 local authorities. In my dissertation I argued that the environmental health profession has a very important role to play in efforts to reduce health inequalities in Scotland.

Having recently graduated, at the time of writing, I am currently looking for a trainee EHO post with a Scottish local authority. The current shortage of qualified EHOs in Scotland is one reason why the career prospects of environmental health graduates are very good. However, graduates are not restricted to following a career as an EHO; there are a wide variety of other options available, whether one chooses to become a qualified EHO prior to pursuing these or not. The fact that environmental health at Strathclyde is so well recognised and highly regarded by employers mean that this MSc is an excellent qualification to have, as well as being a highly worthwhile learning experience.

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