

Public Health for Development visit to Geneva, April 2019

Notes from presentation given by students who went on the 2019 trip, 3 May 2019

Trip has been happening for the last three or four years. This year visited the following organisations: UNFPA, UNAIDS, IOM, Global Fund, GAVI, MSF, UNHCR, ICRC, WHO and had a networking event with other alumni.

Some tips from meetings with the individual organisations:

UNAIDS: Big, professional, huge office. Talk was from HR. Tip: in cover letter make sure you match to requirements of job. Talk about something you're passionate about – don't just repeat your CV. They screen by education, experience and languages so you have to meet those requirements. Most Geneva jobs require English and French.

IOM: Presentation was from PH4D alumna doing JPO. Check whether your country supports JPO. IOM does lots of techy stuff about tracking migration. IOM recently joined UN so are expanding and are one of the few UN organisations to have P grade jobs available (earlier career jobs). Have Fellowship programmes and JPO programmes. There are opportunities outside of just public health.

UNHCR: Prefer those with NGO experience. Primarily a field based organisation so you are not so likely to be placed in Geneva. Within health they really want a clinical background. Outside health department Public Health is useful. They prefer bilingual+ candidates. Positions are not entry level.

ICRC: Public Health positions need field experience and clinical background but there are non-health opportunities. Offer an entry level trainee one year position. Spoke to generalist delegate who works in protection in detention. Big requirement for language skills. Don't need to be clinician for this work. Some positions need at least English and French.

WHO: Had a presentation from the mental health department. Everyone in that department had some kind of psychology background. In application be explicit about matching criteria. Assessment in selection process is based on the job itself – written assessment with technical questions. Moving to video based interviews in selection process. (GAVI also use video interviews.)

Global Fund: relatively young workforce, very cool office. More of a 'startup' feeling. Lots of LSHTM alumni there and lots of finance/economic positions. No 'field' positions. Advice: 'find passion in your work', 'don't be afraid of the little jobs'.

GAVI: Lots of data analysis to see how things are being implemented. Lots of R. LSHTM alumni seemed to imply they've used everything they learned from their master's in their job (more so than in some of the other organisations). Offer paid internships.

MSF: Field opportunities are primarily for clinicians, but do have epi and logistics roles too. Need field experience.

General Advice

GAVI (and others) have lots of consultancy roles – evaluations etc. A lot of the technical work is put out to consultants and that is definitely a route in – lots of people start this way.

JPO has an age limit which varies according to your home country (as does eligibility generally).

It was very interesting learning about the different cultures of the different organisations.

Everyone was very keen to help – especially alumni – so do connect with people on LinkedIn.

Some of the organisations have rosters of consultants and some use rosters compiled by other organisations (for example UNHCR also use roster of Danish Refugee Council). The WHO has a roster for level P2/P3 programme management open for applications right now [3 May]. Ditto Oxford Policy Management.

How to get on a roster: for the WHO you apply as to a vacancy but you are basically applying to the roster. Similar with MSF and Save the Children and Unicef.

WHO Africa is trying to move more women into higher positions to address gender imbalance.

'Geneva can be a very nice bubble' – definitely an interesting environment working with very interesting people but being based at headquarters can bring a risk of disconnect from the field. GAVI and Global Fund have Geneva-based positions that involve travel but still risk of disconnect. The trip was very valuable as an opportunity to see the headquarters of organisations the students had worked with in the field.

Quote from one of the people who spoke to the group 'When we are in Geneva we can forget what passion initially brought us here' (said as appreciation to the group for visiting and reminding them of that passion). It is the place for global level policy making but not for implementing.

Some other comments from the students who went:

'It felt a bit cut-throat'

'It changed my attitude towards doing an internship – I had thought I was too experienced but have changed my mind'.

'I already thought I wanted to work in the field and this confirmed that'.

Tips for finding opportunities:

There are Geneva-specific websites where positions are posted, so look for those. For Global Fund consultancies look in the procurement section of the website. For WHO internships in the field it can be better to apply direct to the relevant team/person, rather than centrally.